
Legislative Update

By Rob Nixon, Princeton Public Affairs Group. Inc.

The election of Governor and the General Assembly are rapidly approaching and with it follows the end of the legislative session. Each of these events has the potential to significantly impact the recreational boating community. The election is up to the voters and the actions of the Legislature depend on the interaction the MTA/NJ has with them.

The race for Governor is down to the wire. Governor Jon Corzine (D) dealing with the reality of a slumping economy, high property taxes and a consistent challenge from his opponents had spent much of the summer and early Fall trailing Republican challenger Chris Christie badly in the polls. However, Christie's numbers have dropped as a result of a barrage of Corzine campaign ads and the appearance of former DEP Commissioner Chris Daggett as an Independent candidate. Christie, who held double digit leads as late as early September, is now slightly ahead of the Governor or within the margin of error, in each of the last few polls released prior to Halloween.

Corzine and Christie are expected to make a strong push to finish the campaign with the momentum. Christie will continue to focus on voter discontent with the faltering economy and high property taxes in driving out key unaffiliated voters to him on Election Day in a last minute swing of New Jersey's 21 counties. Governor Corzine is hoping that last minute campaign stops by President Obama and a traditionally strong Democratic "get out the vote" operation can help push him past Christie. These conditions will also depend on how well Chris Daggett does with voters. If Daggett wins an above average number of votes (in excess of 7% or more), then that will likely cut into Christie's margins. The race for Governor will likely be very close unlike the last half dozen statewide elections.

The contest to win the majority in the General Assembly will depend on a number of factors, most importantly whether the candidates for Governor have coattails in several key Districts. Republicans set their goals on winning in Districts where Democrats hold both Assembly seats and where the economy is an issue and/or where Chris Christie is likely to do better than prior GOP candidates. These include District 1 (Cape May/Cumberland), District 14 (Mercer/Middlesex), District 19 (Middlesex), District 22 (Union), District 36 (Bergen, Essex, Passaic). Democrats currently hold a 48-32 majority. The State Senate is not up for election this year but there are two special Senate elections in District 6 and District 23 where Senator Jim Beach (D-6) and current Assemblyman Mike Doherty (R-23) are expected to hold their noncompetitive Districts.

Once the election is over the Legislature will turn to completing its work in what is commonly referred to as a "lame duck session". While the schedule for the session is not public yet, the Senate and Assembly traditionally meets briefly in mid-November and for a few dates in December before closing as constitutionally required upon the swearing on of a new Legislature in January.

The MTA/NJ's most important work in the next 6 months will take place next session in two key areas. First, with the 2011 State Budget expected to be as bad or worse than this year, the preparation of the Budget and any related spending and taxes will need the careful analysis of the Association. Second, while we are currently working with Governor Corzine's office on the remaining appointments to the Public Access Task Force, we are also preparing for a few contingencies to address this issue in 2010.

