

Gubernatorial candidate Barbara Buono — undone by her own party?

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Our detailed summary of each gubernatorial candidate's position on the issues, from taxes to gun control

State Sen. Barbara Buono's lack of campaign cash and near-zero support from New Jersey's powerful Democratic political bosses has doomed her bid to unseat Republican Gov. Chris Christie in Tuesday's election, political analysts say.

Polling shows Christie is still enjoying a surge of popularity tied to the state's rebound from superstorm Sandy. If he wins his second four-year term by a landslide, that's expected to add momentum to a 2016 presidential campaign — if Christie goes that route.

Even Buono's best efforts to turn Christie's presidential ambition to her advantage have fallen flat. In a TV commercial, Buono says she's "the only one actually running for governor."

Christie effectively sidestepped that offensive when the two debated.

"I can walk and chew gum at the same time. I can do this job and also deal with my future," he said.

Ross Baker, a Rutgers University political science professor, said Buono's campaign never gained traction despite South Jersey Democratic leader and Philadelphia Inquirer co-owner George Norcross saying in January he was throwing his support to Buono. The Inquirer endorsed Christie last month. Norcross has said he remains removed from the editorial operations of the paper.

It became obvious Norcross wasn't fully invested in Buono's campaign when he joined Christie at the Statehouse for a June announcement on a new cancer treatment center and praised the governor for caring "much about the city of Camden, something near and dear to my heart, for the last decade."

The party's other power brokers also shied away from Buono, opting not to disrupt relationships they had cultivated with the governor. The signals sent out by the shunning caused normally reliable Democratic donors to close their wallets.

Democratic President Barack Obama, who came to New Jersey to stump for former Gov. Jon Corzine against Christie in 2009, also declined to campaign for Buono.

"You can't run for governor in New Jersey as a Democrat without the genuine, enthusiastic support of the party leaders, and Barbara Buono never received that or the money that

comes with that,” Baker said. “There was some token support from the bosses that got them off the hook with the party rank and file, but there was never real support, which comes in the forms of time and money.”

Through last week, Christie had raised on his own, and through public funding, \$13.2 million. Buono has raised just \$2.8 million. The governor still has \$4 million in cash on hand — even after airing 10 television commercials — to Buono’s \$277,000, according to election reports.

Polling by Rutgers, Monmouth University, Stockton College and other schools shows Christie with leads of 19 or more percentage points.

“Even if all of the undecideds break for Sen. Buono, Gov. Christie still leads by landslide proportions,” said Daniel Douglas, director of Stockton’s Hughes Center for Public Policy.

Baker said Buono’s problems are partially self-inflicted because she and her campaign team never produced consistent messages and stumbled on simple details.

Buono is the first candidate for governor since 1997 to miss a deadline to submit a maximum 500-word sample ballot campaign statement. The sample ballots that were mailed to every registered voter in the state have statements from Christie and six small-party and unaffiliated candidates, but there’s nothing from Buono.

“There have been problems with her campaign. I don’t think her ad efforts were particularly hard-hitting,” Baker said. “Certainly she retains the chance to achieve a moral victory. What that would entail is open to interpretation, but if she can perform considerably better than what most polls are indicating, that would be a plus. I think Democrats, along with the teachers’ union and other special-interest groups, have hoped Buono could take Christie down a notch or two, so we’ll see if that’s still possible.”

The last blowout victory in a New Jersey gubernatorial election occurred in 1985, when Republican Tom Kean beat Essex County Executive Peter Shapiro 69.6 percent to 29.3 percent. Kean was the top vote-getter in all 21 counties.

CHRISTIE AND BUONO ON THE ISSUES

Immigration

Christie: In the past month, the governor shifted his position to new support of allowing immigrants without documentation to pay discounted in-state tuition rates at New Jersey’s colleges.

Buono: A longtime supporter of so-called tuition equality who says Christie flipped positions to win Hispanic votes. “Be careful, this governor has a history of saying one thing and doing another,” she said.

Economic development

Christie: Claims he has cut taxes on small businesses and eliminated “hundreds of confusing rules and regulations that put an onerous and unnecessary burden” companies. But the state’s jobless rate of 8.5 percent is 1.2 percent higher than the national average.

Buono: Critical of Christie's provision of \$2.1 billion in tax breaks to such corporations as

Abortion

Christie: Says he's "pro-life. I believe in exceptions for rape, incest, and the life of the mother. That's my position, take it or leave it."

Buono: Endorsed by Emily's List, a political group that supports candidates who back abortion rights. Buono in a fundraising email wrote: "New Jersey is a blue state. It shouldn't be led by a man who is vehemently anti-choice."

Gun control

Christie: Was criticized by Democrats for vetoing bills banning .50-caliber Barrett rifles and expanding background checks and safety training.

Buono: In favor of restricting sale of ammunition to in-person transactions and reducing the maximum capacity of ammunition magazines from 15 to 10 bullets.

The environment

Christie: His budgets redirected \$1 billion from an account that was supposed to be used for clean energy projects. Christie has yet to deliver on a 2009 campaign promise to establish a stable source of funding for open-space preservation.

Buono: Says it was a mistake under Christie to withdraw New Jersey from a regional effort to curb greenhouse gas emissions. Buono is endorsed by the New Jersey Environmental Federation, which backed Christie in the 2009 election.

Property tax relief

Christie: Says the state can take steps toward funding essential services without relying so much on property taxes by revamping civil service rules, which he says would promote consolidation and shared services, and ending payouts for unused sick time.

Buono: In favor of a so-called millionaire's tax — it would increase from 8.97 percent to 10.75 percent the tax rate on incomes in excess of \$1 million, raising an estimated \$800 million for the state treasury — and says she believes those at the highest income levels "should pay their fair share and fund middle-class property tax relief."

THEY SAID IT. Quotes from the candidates

Buono on Christie: "Governor, you have to man up. You've been in office for four years. It's time to own your record and defend your record."

Buono on Buono: "My daughter, who is openly gay, is not a political agenda."

Buono on New Jersey's direction: "Look at the state our state is in. It's not about me. It's about the state of New Jersey. It's about the people. We have high unemployment, the

middle class is hurting, the working poor's numbers are increasing. Circumstance dictates my choice to run."

Christie on Christie: "Using direct and blunt language is something I've done my whole life and it's the way my mother raised me."

Christie on Buono: "Believe me, everybody, if you give her the opportunity to have this position, taxes will increase again and again and again and again."

Christie on New Jersey's direction: "The New Jersey comeback has begun and the fact is that it's not over. It's not over, and it's going to continue to get better if we continue to stay the course."

Sources: NJ Press Media interviews and statements from gubernatorial debates.