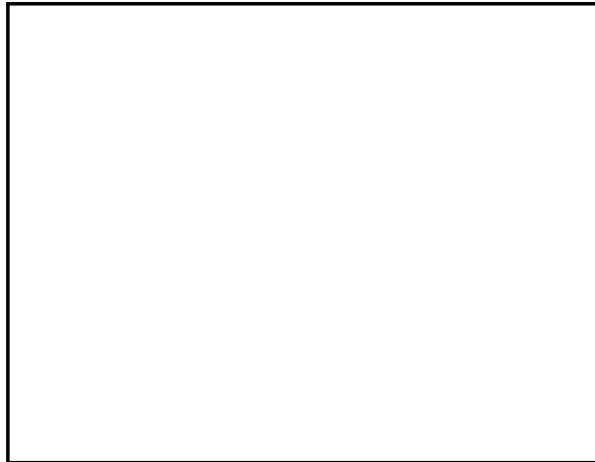


Carl Golden, a former press aide to Govs. Tom Kean and Christie Whitman, is a senior contributing analyst with the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.



GOVERNOR CHRISTIE

AP
GOVERNOR CHRISTIE

GOVERNOR Christie's second inaugural is some six weeks distant, but tiny stress fractures are beginning to appear in the impregnable foundation constructed in his first term.

All governors become lame ducks the instant their reelection is confirmed, but with increasing speculation that he'll leave office before his term expires to pursue the 2016 Republican presidential nomination, the chatter among the political classes about Christie maintaining his

unchallenged political dominance will reach higher decibel levels.

In his first term, he established himself as the state's most influential public figure, effectively crowding out other voices and exerting near total control while the Legislature stood in his shadow.

That was then, this is now.

Second gubernatorial terms produce an easing of pressure on legislators to acquiesce in a governor's agenda. The need to build a record with mid-term and end-of-term elections in mind loses intensity with the knowledge that the governor's influence over those elections is weaker because he won't be a participant.

Break with discipline

There will be greater temptation to break with discipline imposed from the governor's office because the fear of political retaliation is diminished.

volved. Continued unanimity may be more difficult to achieve in the coming session while a reluctance to stand behind the governor on all issues will surface more often.

The first hint that the solid front was a little less so occurred shortly after Christie's reelection, when he became involved in an ill-advised coup attempt to oust Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean Jr. Republican senators, resentful of what they viewed as interference in a legislative prerogative — choosing their leaders — rebelled and reelected Kean.

It led to a rare public scolding of Christie by former Gov. Tom Kean Sr., whose irritation over the entire episode reverberated through the political establishment and set observers to wondering whether the elder Kean would use his influence in national political circles to raise questions about a Christie presidential bid.

Two weeks after the leadership uproar, the administration was engulfed in another controversy when Christie unexpectedly revealed he intended to veto of the state version of

lagging about \$150 million behind budget estimates, a modest enough sum at this stage but sufficient to raise questions about the advisability of a tax cut.

The shortfall renewed debate over the state's overall economic health as critics pointed to an unemployment rate over 8 percent — above the national average and highest in the region — an increase in the number of families living in poverty and a growth rate that has recovered barely half the jobs lost in the recession.

The fiscal 2014-15 budget is scheduled to be delivered in February amid early concerns that mandated expenditures, such as the more than \$1 billion due the state pension fund, will outstrip the ability to pay and force cost cutting in other areas.

Christie has enjoyed considerable success and drawn wide recognition for his adept handling of fiscal issues — avoiding tax increases in particular — but the budget that awaits him appears to be one of the more difficult he's faced.

In his election night victory speech, Christie promised that his second term agenda would be an ambitious one and that his overwhelming win represented a mandate to do what he termed "the big things."

Getting things done

Christie governed like a force of nature in his first term and it is indisputable that he has succeeded. A 22-point victory even over a badly overmatched opponent who didn't enjoy the
