

Activist has spirited exchange with Christie

By **ROB JENNINGS**
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An anti-war activist who recently presented a "peace site" dedication to the Sparta United Methodist Church had a spirited exchange with Gov. Chris Christie at a town hall Tuesday.

New Jersey Peace Action Director **Madelyn Hoffman**, of Roxbury, said she and four colleagues attended Christie's town hall in Cedar Grove, where they passed out hundreds of fliers critical of U.S. defense spending.



HOFFMAN

Hoffman, whose group supports reducing the federal defense budget by 25 percent, said she went to the town hall meeting intending to ask Christie about ways to bolster health care for needy children and veterans, among other issues. Christie typically takes questions only after finishing his presentation, and usually there are many more people raising their

hands than are selected. However, Hoffman said she sensed an opening after the governor, during his opening remarks, briefly bantered with a man who shouted out a critical comment about former Gov. Jon Corzine. The unidentified man's question presumably was sparked by the ongoing investigation into bankrupt MF Global Holdings, whose chairman was Corzine.

"The fellow right next to me said Corzine should be in jail. There was a little back-and-forth," Hoffman said by telephone in recounting her version of what transpired at the town hall.

"When Christie started talking about cutting taxes, I said, 'What about reinstating the wealth tax?'" Hoffman said, referring to the so-called "millionaire's tax" twice vetoed by Christie.

Hoffman said that Christie responded by saying the question period had not yet begun.

She said she shot back: "You didn't say that about the guy talking about Corzine."

Christie, though, apparently had no intention of ducking the question.

When he concluded his prepared remarks, he sought out

Hoffman for the second question, even though she didn't raise her hand.

"I didn't think there was any way he'd call on me," Hoffman said.

Hoffman said she asked the governor about New Jersey Peace Action's proposal to cut defense spending by 25 percent. She again mentioned raising taxes on the wealthy, a measure that Democrats are attempting to bring back a third time.

The governor, as she recounted it, was diplomatic but not supportive.

Christie said that, while any proposed cuts in government spending should be considered, that he could not commit to such a steep cut in defense spending.

He also, according to Hoffman, reiterated his opposition to raising taxes on anyone, including the wealthy.

Hoffman is a high-profile activist in northern New Jersey.

Her Bloomfield-based New Jersey Peace Action, which was founded in 1957 to oppose nuclear weapons, opposed the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and supports shutting down the U.S.-run prison at Guantanamo Bay and ending

all "U.S.-sanctioned torture."

The later issue contributed to her group, on June 3, designating the Sparta United Methodist Church as a "peace site."

The church is perhaps best known to passing drivers for prominently displaying a banner reading "Torture is a Moral Issue" during Torture Awareness Month every June. Members of the congregation opposed the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and recently sent a letter to President Obama opposing possible military action against Iran. Hoffman presented the "peace site" designation during a Sunday service.

While Christie has held more than 80 town halls, including several much closer to her home, Hoffman said Tuesday's forum was the first she had attended.

"We were hoping to pass out literature which put forward our point of view about where money could be located and how it could be spent," Hoffman said.

Instead of just passing out fliers, she had a much-noted exchange with the governor.

"I think we got much more than we were looking for. We really got a chance to at least raise the question," Hoffman said.

Ex-Rutgers student in webcam case released from jail

NORTH BRUNSWICK (AP) — A former Rutgers University student who was convicted of bias for using a webcam to see his roommate and another man kissing was released from jail Tuesday after serving 20 days of a 30-day sentence.

Dharun Ravi, 20, reported to the Middlesex County jail on May 31, though he could have remained free while his case is appealed. His lawyer, Steven Altman, picked him up around 8:30 a.m. Ravi, who was clean-shaven when he entered jail, had a beard when he left.

He did not stop to speak with the media before he rode off in Altman's car.

A judge sentenced him to 30 days in jail — far less than the 10-year prison sentence he could have given him. He still faces three years of probation, plus more than \$11,000 in fines and assessments, 300 hours of community service, and counseling.

Like other county jail inmates, Ravi automatically was given five days off for good behavior and five for working.

Federal immigration authorities said Monday that Ravi will not be deported to his native India. He lived there until he was 5 years old and remains a citizen, though he is in the United States legally.

Tenure

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School Education Association President Deb Anderson said that some teachers who have a "bad startup year" are more likely to be cut sooner under the current three-year time crunch in which a teacher would earn tenure. The extra year under the new bills would allow more breathing room for a new teacher to be mentored and develop.

"You don't allow them to grow because you're in a hurry to get rid of them," Anderson said.

On the other hand, she said, "You could end up with a poor teacher because you're not paying attention and the three years go by so quickly, (he or she) slip(s) through the cracks."

Constantino and other Sussex County administrators agreed that it is good to have a more effective teacher evaluation system to help determine tenure.

"None of us are looking to rid ourselves of tenured staff," Constantino said. "There are things, though, that we want to see people continuously

improve on, and that is true of any job."

However, the feasibility of the evaluation system can be daunting if the bills pass.

Green Superintendent John Nittolo said that the tri-district consortium of Green, Andover and Newton has already revamped the teacher evaluation process and has been using the new four-tier evaluation system for this year.

"We knew something was coming, and we knew something we had in place was not working," Nittolo said, adding that the new evaluation system gives teachers better feedback.

Nittolo performed about 60 to 70 teacher observations under the new evaluation system the districts implemented this year, but these new bills would raise that to about 200 teacher evaluations over a school year.

"What I have found is that we have two administrators, and part of these bills talk about non-tenured people being observed five times and tenured people four times," he said. "It will be very difficult, since we are told to cut administrators and get razor thin on that line."

He said he agrees that teacher evaluations are neces-

sary for professional growth, but 200 observations will be a big task for smaller districts.

Also, Nittolo said it is unfortunate that 50 percent of the evaluations would be based on state test scores.

"The 50/50 split is what people have a hard time with," Nittolo said. "That is a hang-up for a lot of people."

Constantino agreed that the reliance on test scores will be difficult.

"Certainly we want to evaluate teachers effectively and scientifically," he said. "But ... it is just not sound to tie any one teacher's skills or abilities or efforts to the performance of his or her students."

Maranzano said teachers won't be evaluated equally through standardized testing. Anderson said, when she taught home economics, no standard test existed for her courses. She and Maranzano questioned how teachers of subjects such as home economics, fine arts and drama would be evaluated since no standardized test is given.

Nittolo and Constantino agreed that dealing with subjects like music, art and physical education can be challenging if the bill passes since these are not classes that are nor-

mally tested by the state.

"The really (difficult) part of this is with special education," Constantino said. "Those students by definition do not fit into a growth model. How do you hold those teachers accountable?"

Anderson said she is in favor of monitoring teaching better, but not through standardized testing. Anderson also supported extending tenure acquisition to four years.

"It gives a teacher a better chance at improving," she said.

The bill would also allow districts to bring tenure charges against a teacher in a quicker and less laborious way.

While this bill does touch on many of the things districts, politicians and statewide organizations were looking for in tenure reform, it does not address seniority. Currently, the main factor in determining which teachers are laid off is seniority rather than job performance.

"While there is a difference between a 15-year teacher and

a first-year teacher, it doesn't mean it is better," Nittolo said. "When it comes down to who we have to get rid of, it is difficult to choose people just based on how long they have been in the system."

Christie often talks about wanting to change seniority, but he told the Associated Press on Monday that he can accept compromise.

"We have been supportive of Senator Ruiz's efforts on tenure reform and will await the final bill," his spokesman, Michael Drewniak, said in a statement.

This ongoing issue of tenure reform is far from being resolved, though. The Senate and Assembly bills do differ slightly, such as the Senate bill would require tenure charges to be filed against a teacher who has poor rating two years in a row. An Assembly bill allows for charges at any point, but is not required until three consecutive ineffective ratings. These differences will have to be worked out and a final affir-

mative vote from both legislative bodies will be needed.

Assemblyman Gary Chiusano, R-24th Dist., explained his reasons for supporting changes in tenure.

"There are schools that are failing, and they're failing the students. Is it the students' fault? Is it the fault of the parents? Is it because some teachers aren't up to the job? Is it that some administrators aren't up to the job," Chiusano said rhetorically, adding that in his view, "all of the above" is the correct answer.

"I don't believe that a teacher should be rated (just) based on student test scores. That's not the solution. However, every other industry in the world has ways and methods to evaluate performance. Schools are no different. Maybe we can look at more regular reviews," he said.

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Herald staff writers Lyndsay Cateyana Bouchal and Rob Jennings contributed to this story.

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