

STATE HOUSE NEWS- FEBRUARY 2011

A monthly update for GluckWalrath's government and public relations partners and friends.

REEFER MADNESS

This past month, the Senate continued to take the unprecedented step of invalidating Administrative regulations. At issue is the implementation of the medical marijuana law, a law inherited by the Christie Administration from Corzine.

Though not opposed to the concept of medicinal marijuana, Governor Christie had expressed reservations with some aspects of the law passed prior to his assuming office. He has attempted to address those concerns by, in the Senate's eyes, straying from the intent of the law while writing the administrative rules that will govern the dispensing of marijuana.

At issue is the potency of marijuana allowed, the types of diagnoses that can be prescribed marijuana, the ease at which the medical community may add to that list and allowance of home delivery. In short, the Senate wishes for a broad allowance for all these while the Administrative rules are stricter than anticipated.

Complicating the issue further is a compromise between the Governor and Assemblyman Reed Gusciora, the leading medical marijuana advocate in the lower house. Gusciora, eager to take half a loaf and get something going, was able to reach an accord with Christie on issues concerning the number and locations of dispensaries, among others.

Since the resolution invalidating the regulations needs to be passed by both houses, it will be interesting to see what happens if and when the resolution makes its way to the Assembly. Who knew marijuana could be the source of so much stress?

COAH WATCH

This past month, after a year's worth of work; amending and voting; scheduling and rescheduling voted; lobbying and arm twisting and compromising; S1, the very first bill introduced in the Legislature, which makes various changes to the affordable housing laws of the State, was finally, FINALLY passed by both houses of the Legislature...and vetoed by the Governor.

The Governor, who supported the original version of the bill, objected to a number of recent changes made to the legislation, including: various requirements that certain percentages of housing be affordable which will, in his eyes, encourage sprawl; the creation of unnecessary bureaucracies; and a lack of legal protections for builders from frivolous lawsuits.

STATE OF OUR STATE

On January 11th, Governor Christie gave his first State of the State address. During the speech, he laid out 3 reforms he wishes to accomplish this year:

1. **TAX REFORM:** A staple of most Republican speeches since the days of Reagan, the devil will be in the details as he seeks to cut taxes while dealing with continuing structural deficits in the state budget. More details to follow in next month's budget address.

2. **PENSION AND BENEFIT REFORM:** As the Governor stated, and most honest brokers will admit, the current system is unsustainable and heading toward bankruptcy. Opponents of the Governor quickly note his skipping of a \$3 billion payment due in last year's budget certainly didn't help the situation. Christie will look to curb benefits of public employees. Expect a fight over whether that can include, and to what extent, current employees.

3. **EDUCATION REFORM:** The Governor will push for more school choice and charter schools, the closing of bad schools, teacher merit pay and an end to teacher tenure; or basically everything his arch-enemy (the New Jersey Education Association) is against. He began this pursuit a week later by approving 23 new charter schools, increasing the total number of such schools by nearly one-third.

BUDGET CONSTRAINTS

The Republican side of the Assembly Budget Committee went through quite a makeover as two members, including the Budget Office, resigned from the committee. They have been replaced by Assemblymen Chiusano and Bucco, and O'Scanlon has been elevated to Budget Officer.

BRAVO

Congratulations to GluckWalrath attorney Antonella Colella who was appointed as Legal Counsel of the Northeast Philadelphia Chapter of the Filitalia International Organization. The organization promotes and preserves Italian heritage, language and customs worldwide through social and humanitarian events. Ms. Colella, an associate in the Firm's Litigation and Public Entity/Municipal Law groups, speaks fluent Italian.

ARRIVEDERCI

A fond farewell and good luck goes out to Cindy Perr, who will be leaving Gluck Walrath in February. Cindy is set to become the next Director of Corporate Compliance for the Somerset Medical Center. While with Gluck Walrath, Cindy was highlighted in NJBIZ, New Jersey Monthly and Burlington County Woman Magazines.