

# The Record

## Young conservative picked to lead N.J. GOP

### Christie's choice to be aggressive

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Republican gubernatorial candidate Chris Christie on Thursday named a conservative Morris County assemblyman as state party chairman, seeking to galvanize a New Jersey GOP that has lost every statewide race since 1997 and is fresh from a competitive primary.

The selection of 37-year-old Jay Webber should also signal to young voters that they're welcome in the Republican fold, Christie said.

"I want to see a generational change in our party," said Christie, who mentioned his own tumultuous start in politics as a young Morris County freeholder in the 1990s.

"I want young people to believe that they don't have to wait 20 years before they get the opportunity to run for council somewhere," he said. "It's not the way I started my career, and I don't think that's the way it has to be."

Webber, a Morris Plains attorney elected to the Assembly in 2007, will face a formal vote by the Republican State Committee next week.

The gubernatorial nominee of each party traditionally selects the state chairman. Governor Corzine is keeping Assemblyman Joseph Cryan, D-Union.

"I intend to go aggressively across the state and reach out to every Republican, young and old, to get involved in this effort," Webber said.

Christie and Webber brushed off talk of labels during a State House news conference Thursday, though Webber described himself as "one of the more conservative members in the Assembly, maybe in the Legislature."

Webber's past GOP primary campaigns have been marked by debate over his staunch opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage.

Webber would replace Tom Wilson, who has held the post since 2004 and ran the party's last successful statewide campaign when Christie Whitman was reelected governor in 1997.

Webber said his immediate priorities will be fund raising. Corzine is a multimillionaire who spends heavily on his own campaigns and voter outreach.

Registered Democrats outnumber registered Republicans in New Jersey by about 700,000 people, but unaffiliated voters outpace both.