

Webber intriguing pick for GOP chairman

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When we first met Jay Webber in 2003, he was mounting a primary challenge to state Sen. Robert Martin, R-Morris Plains, in the 26th Legislative District. The GOP establishment stuck with Martin, and Webber was defeated, but not before impressing many political observers with his maturity and intelligence. As often happens, Webber's loss gave him enough stature in the party to win a contested primary for the state Assembly in 2007.

Now after only a year and a half in Trenton, Webber, a lawyer from Morris Plains, has been recommended by gubernatorial candidate Chris Christie to chair the New Jersey Republican Party. The state GOP surely needs new leadership, given the fact it controls no aspect of state government. And Webber was an outspoken Christie supporter in the just-concluded primary campaign.

Still, Webber is ideologically right wing, much more so than Christie. Is having a right-winger at the helm the best way to attract new people to the state Republican fold? Maybe not. What Webber does have going for him is his youth — he's 37 — and a penchant for taking on the opposition. When he arrived in the Assembly, some fellow Republicans were startled to see freshman Webber sharply question Gov. Jon S. Corzine during his visit to the party's caucus. That may be what the party needs.