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Webber goes for Reagan-Christie linkage

By **MAX PIZARRO**, PolitickerNJ.com Reporter

MOUNTAIN LAKES – Chris Christie’s two-day bus tour comes to an end in his home county of Morris, and if there are any hard feelings from past primary campaigns, they’re heavily layered over with food and drink and some early and undeniable GOP adrenaline in the banquet hall here at the Zeris Inn.

“Phenomenal,” deadpans Steve Lonegan campaign spokesman Rick Shaftan when told of the overflow crowd come to pay homage to the local boy made good.

“I hope there were 1,000 people there – and plenty of booze,” adds the anti-GOP establishment Shaftan. “Meanwhile, we were out there pounding on doors and organizing.”



Although no one reports seeing Morris County Freeholder John Murphy among Christie’s Republican ranks – the man who unseated Christie in their bitter 1997 contest – the place is jammed with recognizable faces, including state Sen. Anthony Bucco (R-Morris), Assembly Minority Leader Alex DeCroce (R-Parsippany), state Sen. Joseph Pennacchio (R-Morris), Assemblyman Jay Webber (R-Morris Plains), Freeholder Director Gene Feyl, Freeholder Jack Schrier, Freeholder Margaret Nordstrom, Freeholder Doug Cabana, Clerk Jane Bramhall and others.

“Honest to God, Chris Christie’s fixed some messes,” says Nordstrom. “Who among us thought we would see the day when Sharpe James went to the slammer?”

The line receives sustained applause.

“I am not proud to be from New Jersey,” cries Roxbury Councilman Tim Smith. “I want to be proud again. I want to feel that again. That’s why I’m supporting Chris Christie.”

The testimonials stretch past a half an hour, with elected officials one-by-one emerging from an indoor tent and trotting up onstage above outstretched arms waving “Christie: Strong Leadership Now” signs.

“I was down in Trenton today,” says Webber when it’s his turn to speak. He’s in his first term in the Assembly and already has a reputation as a hardnosed up and comer.

“There’s no other way to say it, we’re broke,” he tells the crowd.

The early campaign narrative here with Christie is that he may not go to an exhaustive level of detail on issues but he’s tough, aggressive and unafraid to say “no,” and as such better suited for the job of governor than Jon Corzine, whom the campaign dismisses as an overwrought nice guy.

Kind of like Jimmy Carter.

That’s essentially the storyline Webber ramrods as he outlines the current jobs and economic crisis and then invokes the national malaise of 1980.

“Along came a man named Ronald Reagan,” he says.

There are some shouts in the crowd.

“He walked past the cynics and skeptics with a plan for America,” adds Webber.

Thus primed, the crowd hears the assemblyman yell, “Are you ready for a Republican governor in Trenton?” and roars in return.

Moments later, at his ninth and final podium appearance in two days, Christie’s onstage and further stirring the troops.