



Westfield rally protests Gov. Christie's stand on Regional Greenhouse Gas initiative, RGGI

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Barbara Rybolt / Independent Press
By

WESTFIELD — While Gov. Chris Christie was holding a town meeting in Westfield today, Feb. 8, environmentalists held a rally of their own in support of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative.



Recently Christie announced he would pull New Jersey out of the program, and when the Legislature passed a bill to keep the state in the program, the governor vetoed it.

Undeterred by that setback, representatives from state and local environmental groups came to the rally — their numbers might have been small, not quite 30 people attended — but through their affiliations they represented thousands of residents.

The rally was designed to encourage District 21 representatives, state Sen. Tom Kean Jr., Assemblywoman Nancy Munoz and Assemblyman Jon Bramnick, to buck their fellow Republican, Gov. Christie, and support RGGI, pronounced "reggie."

Enlarge

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Marian Glenn a member of the Summit Environmental Commission and Maurice Devroye

Rally to Stop the Clean Air Rollback gallery (41 photos)

Ten states in the mid-Atlantic and Northeastern United States worked together to forge the RGGI agreement, which provides a mechanism for cutting greenhouse gas emissions from power plants. Jeff Tittel, the director of the New Jersey Sierra Club, said this initiative has already removed 84 million tons of greenhouse gases from the air. Not only has it helped clean up the air, it's needed to help increase the demand for clean energy and to create green jobs in the state, he said.

Nelson Dittman, chairman of the **Cranford** Environmental Commission, said, "I think the governor is pro-developer and anti-environment ... He makes decisions that help the developers and hurt the environment."

Matt Polsky of Fairleigh Dickinson University's Institute for Sustainable Enterprise and a Cranford resident, said while he was standing and waiting for the rally to begin he saw two vans pass by, one with Aramark on its side,

the other with UPS. Both of those companies are "trying to do business in new ways to protect the environment," he said, and "What RGGI does is help companies be more environmentally responsible. That's why we need RGGI back."

Mary Reilly, chairman of the Cranford Green Committee, told the crowd, "Taking money out of RGGI for financial issues is like taking money out of your child's health care to pay credit-card bills. It doesn't solve the problem, but it leaves your child's health in peril. Furthermore, when your child does get sick, it's going to cost a lot more to pay for his or her care."

Kerry Margaret Butch, executive director of the League of Women Voters of New Jersey, said, "Greenhouse gas reduction cannot be achieved in isolation. Air pollution doesn't respect geographic boundaries." The league supports keeping the state in RGGI.

Many people spoke, but the person whom no one expected to speak was Assemblyman Bramnick, who happened by the site of the rally while on his way to pick up his lunch after attending the town hall meeting with the governor. Someone spotted him walking down North Street and three women, including Reilly and Marian Glenn of the Summit Environmental Commission, invited him to the rally.

He popped in very briefly, said a few hellos, then continued down the road. They went after him again, but came back empty-handed. Moments later someone saw Bramnick returning to North Street, and Reilly and Glenn dashed to the intersection. Reilly crossed the street, talked to Bramnick, and this time he came all the way up to the rally and spoke informally to the people there.

Asked to talk about RGGI, he said, "I'm happy to sit down and talk to you," but not now. "I'm happy to do it. It's a factual discussion — out here at this time, I probably need a half an hour to an hour at least to begin the discussion," which did not fit in his schedule.

He continued to chat, then headed back to his office, but not before shaking hands with some of those at the rally and agreeing to meet with them at an unspecified date and time.

He left to a round of applause from the group, which generally seemed to be happy he stopped by. Hoping to continue on a positive note, the Cranford group and Dan DeRosa, the field organizer with Environment New Jersey and some others walked the three long blocks from Elm and North streets, at the train station to Kean's office, where they dropped off petitions urging legislators to keep the state in RGGI.

Kean wasn't there, but Reilly said, "We were so happy to be inside that we stood there for a while, defrosting."

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