

Christie takes questions at Franklin town hall meeting

By SUSAN DOUCET / Monitor staff



Gov. Chris Christie speaks in Franklin in July 2015. Photo by Susan Doucet

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie told those who came to his town hall meeting in Franklin that if they wanted to ask questions, there was no need to write them down – just don't shout them out.

But Elizabeth Zink wrote down the question she wanted to ask the governor anyway. Elizabeth, 5, was slightly nervous to ask the Republican presidential candidate a question in front of the crowd at the Franklin VFW hall.

The question was one no other New Hampshire presidential primary voters asked the candidate Thursday night, or likely many other nights: "How will you take care of people?"

"The most important job of any leader is to remember that you serve the people who put you there," Christie told the future voter. "That's the way you take care of people, is to be honest with them, to work hard for them, and to remember that the younger people in this country are the future of not only our country but also the rest of the world."

Elizabeth's question came in the midst of Christie's 12th New Hampshire town hall while campaigning for president under the slogan "Telling it like it is."

The question-and-answer session alone lasted longer than an hour, with Christie responding to wide-ranging inquiries on the Iran deal, the Affordable Care Act and health care costs, a dependency culture in the United States, care for veterans, immigration, national security, higher education costs and student debt, and more.

State Rep. Werner Horn, a veteran of the U.S. Army, expressed concern about the state of the country's armed forces, and wanted to know what Christie's strategy would be on aiding the military.

"Talk to smart people who know more than you do," Christie said. "No president is going to know everything about every subject that's going to come across his or her desk. It's impossible."

The reduction in the size of the military doesn't make sense, Christie said. "The only way to keep the peace in the world is to be strong," he said.

Franklin resident Keenan Blum raised his hand Thursday night to ask Christie a different question about the military. Blum – who said this was the first time he asked a presidential candidate a question – wanted to know if the governor is concerned about some of the military and government's use of power, such as bio warfare or the NSA's activity, which Edward Snowden exposed.

"Does that make him a traitor or does that make him a hero, and what would you do to protect us in the future so that doesn't occur anymore?" Blum asked.

Snowden, Christie said, is a traitor.

"I don't have any tolerance for this," he said. "What Edward Snowden did was to make this country more weaker and vulnerable."

Following the two-hour long event, neither Franklin resident said whether Christie earned their vote. But it became clear one woman would be a long shot to vote for the Republican candidate in the primary election next year.

The woman, who did not offer her name, challenged Christie on his stances on Social Security, taxes and care for the middle class.

"Why are you asking middle-class people to work longer?" she asked the governor, interrupting Christie as he explained his thoughts on tax rates and the age at which a person should be able to receive Social Security.

Christie said he favors increasing the Social Security and retirement age by two years, phasing it in over 25 years.

“Everybody says, ‘Raise taxes on somebody else,’ ” Christie said. “If you want to advocate for a tax increase, we can have an honest disagreement about that.”

“I suspect, that given what you’ve said, I’m probably a long shot to earn your vote,” he said. “But that’s okay. I’m glad you showed up anyway. . . I’m sure in this group of folks . . . you’ll find somebody you do agree with, and when you do, I hope you support them vigorously.”

Christie was introduced Thursday night by Franklin Mayor Ken Merrifield and Merrimack County Sheriff Scott Hilliard, the latter of whom has endorsed Christie for president. Merrifield said he will not make a decision on who to endorse until the fall.

A long list of endorsements or not, Christie said he thought he stacks up strongly against the other Republican candidates. The last question of the evening came from a man who wanted Christie’s take on “The Donald.”

“I think in his heart he’s a really good person,” he said. “Now, I’m running for president, and so is he. I think I’d be a better president than Donald Trump. . . . I know he says he tells it like it is too. And I tell it like it is from the point of actually having done these jobs.”

Christie said he has been friends with Trump for 13 years, but right now, his friend is a competitor for the office of president of the United States.

“I don’t think he’s the best guy for president,” Christie said. “I think you’re looking at the best guy for president.”

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