



CAMDEN CITY NEWS

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Christie's Camden Tax Breaks Reward Political Insiders



The Associated Press

During Chris Christie's first term as governor, he made tax incentives a cornerstone of a promised "New Jersey Comeback" that would lure new businesses to the state. With New Jersey's job growth still poor at the beginning of his second term last year, the governor doubled down.

New Jersey's Economic Development Authority has handed out more than \$2 billion in tax breaks since 2014, more than the total amount issued during the decade before Christie took office.

The aid has gone disproportionately to businesses in Camden, a city of 77,000 that ranks among the nation's most impoverished. Development projects in the city received \$630 million in future tax breaks last year. Because of those grants, Christie said in his State of the State address, Camden is "seeing a new tomorrow."

As Christie considers a Republican presidential campaign, the prospect of a renaissance for heavily Democratic Camden would offer a useful counterpoint to New Jersey's lackluster economic performance. But a closer look at the grants — which will amount to nearly four times Camden's annual budget — indicates they may do less for the city than advertised and more for Christie's political alliances.

Most of the jobs coming to Camden are filled by existing employees who currently work just a few miles away. One tax break exceeded the value of the company that received it. Another went to a developer who owes New Jersey millions of dollars in long-unpaid loans. And nearly all the recipients boast notable political connections — either through an affiliation with a prominent southern New Jersey power broker, Democrat George Norcross, or through donations to Christie and the **Republican Governors Association** during his tenure overseeing it.

New Jersey's Camden incentives raise questions about his administration's stewardship of New Jersey's finances — and whether Christie's claims of revitalizing Camden will resonate with Republican voters opposed to corporate welfare. For conservatives, incentives buck the free market and could undermine New Jersey's prospects for legitimate tax reform.

"Giving huge subsidies to companies moving from the suburbs of Camden to the city is just off-the-charts crazy territory," said Michael Doherty, a Republican state senator. "If you're a high-profile individual, you can get the EDA to make decisions to your benefit."

Christie spokesman Kevin Roberts said in an email that critics of the tax breaks "offer no alternative plans for creating jobs, growing the economy or renewing our urban centers."

Driving the 4 miles from Subaru's current U.S. headquarters in Cherry Hill to its new home in nearby Camden takes eight minutes. Tax credits granted by the state of New Jersey will make that trip worth nearly \$118 million for the company.

Subaru's short trip is not an exception: Most of New Jersey's incentives for Camden have gone to projects shifting existing employees from nearby locations. Holtec International Inc., a manufacturer of nuclear reactor components, is receiving \$260 million for relocating 160 nearby jobs and adding 235 more. Cooper University Hospital will receive \$40 million, mostly for returning 353 employees that it previously moved to the suburbs. The **Philadelphia 76ers** will receive \$82 million for bringing 250 jobs across the Delaware River, just a few thousand feet from the Pennsylvania state line.

Menendez, others tout boost to cleanup of Camden site

Camden and state officials said Monday that they hoped an infusion of federal funds for environmental cleanup would begin the transformation of the abandoned former Camden Laboratories site into housing, businesses, and other development.

Camden Mayor Dana L. Redd was joined by Rep. Donald Norcross (D., N.J.) and U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez (D., N.J.) in making the announcement at the Davis Street site.

Last week, the city received \$200,000 from the Environmental Protection Agency to use toward the revitalization of the Mount Ephraim Avenue corridor. The Camden Redevelopment Agency will develop a plan for the site, across from Brimm Medical Arts High School, and Redd said additional funding will come from other state and federal agencies.

Depending on the extent of ground contamination, Menendez said, it could take five to 10 years for the project to be complete.

"It will be costly, and it will be time-consuming, but it can be done," he said.

Menendez declined to comment on recent reports that federal authorities are planning to indict him for corruption.

"I've said several times that I've always acted totally legally in everything I've done in my public life," he said. "Beyond that, I don't have much to say."

All SB Lanes of I-676 Reopen Following Accident in Camden

CAMDEN, N.J., (CBS) – An accident involving three vehicles snarled traffic on I-676 southbound during the evening rush hour in Camden, New Jersey.

The accident was reported shortly after 5:30 p.m. Monday on I-676 southbound, south of Exit 3 – Morgan Boulevard.

New Jersey State Police say two tractor trailers and a pickup truck were involved in the accident.

According to State Police, one person was taken to Cooper University Hospital with non-life threatening injuries.

State Police say all lanes were reopened to traffic around 7:30 p.m.

Wear green on the Battleship and get half-off a tour



| South Jersey Times

CAMDEN -- Show off our St. Patty's Day pride by wearing green on the **Battleship New Jersey** and you'll get half-off a tour.

To celebrate St. Patrick's Day, Tuesday, March 17, the Battleship will open for walk-up tours for the day. Guests wearing green can get 50 percent off a "Fire Power" self-guided tour. The ship will open at 9:30 a.m. with the last tour of the day at 3 p.m.

The tour includes learning about the massive 16-inch gun turret, the bridge, the Combat Engagement Center, the tomahawk missile launch pads and seeing how the crew lived aboard the ship.

Located on the Delaware River, along the Camden Waterfront across from the City of Philadelphia, the Battleship is open for walk-up tours Saturdays and Sundays from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. in March.

The award-winning Overnight Encampment program offers dinner and breakfast, a tour, a ride in the flight simulator and the chance to sleep in the bunks where the crew of the USS New Jersey once slept. To reserve a bunk, call 866-877-6262 ext. 203.

RABBLE ROUSER: Help residents move out of Camden



Camden has seen better days.

Once again it is Camden that takes center stage. Every week there is another heartbreaking story in the Courier-Post. We all know them, the public schools, the corruption and now the demolitions. Does anyone expect any problem in Camden to be solved logically and at a reasonable cost? Well, cost really doesn't matter since the state can always find taxpayer money to send to Camden.

I used to feel sorry for the residents of Camden but not so much anymore. They keep voting for the same party, so why should they expect any improvement in their lives? I guess 60 years of the same government still has not taught the voters any lessons.

I have to confess to a bit of a cynical thought. To solve Camden's problems, it makes some sense to get people out of Camden. This would be a purely voluntary program. The Red Cross or the Salvation Army would be perfect at running the program.

Yes, plan for a partial evacuation of the city. I realize this is not for everyone. But we all know there are much better places to live. The state of New Jersey could participate by using the money to demolish houses for this purpose. Let the houses fall down by themselves as has been the current practice.

The first thing to do would be to identify 20 or 30 cities where the unemployment rates are very low and employers really need people to fill job vacancies. Contact the employers and explain the purpose of the program. Their job announcements would be published on a website for Camden residents who would like to volunteer to leave Camden.

If this is a family leaving, the money to transport them and pay for two or three months' rent would come out of the school budget since their children would not be attending school in Camden any longer. This could be done via contract with the residents, meaning they would promise not to move back to Camden for 10 years.

If you think this is ridiculous and people cannot be moved in this way, you are mistaken. In 2014, President Barack Obama did something very similar. He arranged for 60,000 to 70,000 children from Central America to board a train, travel north through Mexico for about a seven-day journey, without their parents, and allowed them to cross our southern border. Then he arranged transportation for them and sent them to cities all across the United States where they are now attending school. He heeded the plight of the neglected children of Central America, and they will have better lives because of this.

So why not do it for Camden? The schools are bad; the government is bad, even a straightforward task like demolition cannot be handled efficiently. So why not help those who want to get out and make a better life for themselves?

The writer lives in Tabernacle

In public meetings, Camden schools chief touts achievements, looks ahead



In Superintendent Paymon Rouhanifard's first 18 months at the helm of Camden's state-run school district, his administration restarted the Safe Corridors program to help kids walk to school, added teacher-support systems such as one-on-one coaching, ushered in new technology, and increased pre-K enrollment to 96 percent.

Rouhanifard has often said the greatest challenges lie ahead: improving school curriculum, test scores, and graduation rates and better preparing the city's students for jobs and higher education. In the coming months, the district will start making what Rouhanifard described as hard choices about the future of the city's lowest-performing schools.

In a series of meetings across Camden neighborhoods last week, Rouhanifard indicated there were no plans to close district schools, despite a surge of public charter schools that opened last year. Instead, he said, forging more partnerships with charters such as Mastery and KIPP could lead to the revitalization and preservation of the city's historic school buildings.

"Where we are struggling, we should be OK with asking for help," he told a roomful of parents and students in East Camden last Wednesday night. "In Camden, families want neighborhood schools. And we should not have to sacrifice that."

His remarks drew applause from the more than 50 people in attendance, many of whom were parents of charter school students and who offered rapturous praise.

"Until now, I had no hope," said Sharell Sharp, a Camden native who grew up in the city's Whitman Park neighborhood and mother of a fifth-grade daughter at a Mastery school. "Mastery has given me hope. . . . I think this could be the best thing in our city right now."

Rouhanifard has drawn criticism from some advocates and teachers in the community who fear the public funding diverted to the city's expanding charter network will eat away at an already needy district. David Sciarra, executive director of the Education Law Center in Newark, said last week he believed Rouhanifard's focus on renaissance schools was distracting him from tackling the rest of the district's problems.

"What he should be doing is devoting his time and energy to fulfilling his responsibility to the students," he said. "There are plenty of people out there cheerleading for and marketing these renaissance schools - I just don't see anyone sticking up for the district schools. And in order for things to improve, parents need to know that the district schools are just as promising as the new schools."

In an interview, Rouhanifard reiterated that the district had no plan to phase out traditional public schools but said Camden's buildings were aging and inefficient. Half were built before 1928, and some are so poorly insulated the district had to dismiss students early in winter when the temperature in the halls dropped to 55 degrees. One three-story elementary school has just one bathroom, and many schools must import water because fountains are not safe for use. In many schools, the curriculum is dramatically lacking in rigor, he has said - so much so that even students who excel in Camden end up woefully behind their peers in college.

"There's a clear desire for dramatic change from the parents of district kids," he said. "Letting a school struggle is not an option. . . . And we are faced with a real sense of urgency. We should not wait any longer."

Renaissance schools guarantee placement to every student in each neighborhood, including special education and non-English-speaking students, and are required to provide new or

significantly renovated facilities. In the city's Lanning Square neighborhood, the KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy is expected to open a new building in the fall, and Mastery recently announced plans to build a facility in Cramer Hill.

Rouhanifard, who has often met with parents and community members since Gov. Christie appointed him to oversee the 15,000-student district, said even if enrollments at the city's traditional public schools drop, he would consider closing a school only if a high-quality alternative was available in the neighborhood.

"Every family in Camden wants a great neighborhood school," he said. "And every family in Camden deserves that."

Two Camden schools won't be able to be charters

The state Department of Education has denied requests from two Camden magnet schools that applied to be converted into charters.

In letters sent to the schools last week, Education Commissioner David Hespe wrote that the proposals from Creative Arts Morgan Village Academy and MetEast High School, which filed the petitions last year, did not provide enough evidence that the schools could work as effective charters.

In the letter to MetEast, Hespe said that the school's proposal relied heavily on developing community partnerships and creating an internship program for students, but that the application did not show that school leaders had secured that community support. The letter to Creative Arts stated that the proposal "was poorly written and did not demonstrate the founders have the organizational capacity to convert from a functioning public school."

The schools are the only two in Camden's state-run district to voluntarily consider changing into charter schools. School district spokesman Brendan Lowe said the schools applied for charter status independently.

"We respect the NJ DOE's decision, just as we respect our principals' desire to increase their autonomy," Lowe said Monday. "We will continue to work with all of our school leaders to make sure they are best positioned to help their students and staff be successful."

School administrators could appeal the decision through the state Supreme Court.

Only one other school in the state has asked for charter status, in Newark, but that bid was also denied last year.

Charters are publicly funded but privately run. Last year, the principals at Creative and MetEast said they had hoped the charter conversion could increase their autonomy and help them better serve students as the district undergoes staff reductions and other major changes. Both said they planned to run the schools independently, not bring in outside operators.

More than 90 percent of the teachers at MetEast favored the conversion, the administrators said then, as did nearly 90 percent at Creative Arts.

South Camden Theatre Company to Host IT'S OK TO LAUGH! Comedy Event

March 16

South Camden Theatre Company, a nonprofit professional theatre company located in Camden, New Jersey presents "It's OK to Laugh!" a one night stand-up comedy fundraising event starring comedians [Joe Conklin](#) and Steve Trevelise and is hosted by Ray Croce Sr. Five

additional comedians round out the event including Seamus Millar, Rachel Fogletto, Alisa Stein, Darryl Charels and Cecily Alexandria.

Both [Joe Conklin](#) and Steve Trevelise have been staples in local Philadelphia and New Jersey radio for decades and regularly appear both on stage and behind the microphone throughout the region. The fundraising event supports South Camden Theatre Company and features several hours of comedy and includes refreshments. Seating is limited and only 100 tickets are available.

"It's OK to Laugh!" is presented by South Camden Theatre Company for one night only on Friday April 3 at 8 p.m. at the Waterfront South Theatre located at 400 Jasper Street in Camden, New Jersey. Tickets are available for purchase for \$40 online at <http://www.southcamdentheatre.org>, by calling [1-866-811-4111](tel:1-866-811-4111) or at the door. For more information about South Camden Theatre Company, please visit www.southcamdentheatre.org. Follow the company on Twitter at @SCTC1 and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/SouthCamdenTheatreCompany.

The South Camden Theatre Company is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit professional theatre company dedicated to helping revitalize the City of Camden, New Jersey by producing meaningful, professional theater in the City's Waterfront South District. Founded by a playwright. The South Camden Theatre Company stages seldom-seen, classic plays and original works as the resident theatre company at Waterfront South Theatre. South Camden Theatre Company is a proud member of The New Jersey Theatre Alliance, South Jersey Cultural Alliance, and the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance. For more information on South Camden Theatre Company and Waterfront South Theatre, visit www.southcamdentheatre.org.

Basketball: Camden falls in Group 2 state final



They had the lead in the fourth quarter of the state championship game, again.

They missed some key free throws and rushed a couple of shots from the floor, again.

They lost to Newark Tech in the Group 2 championship game, again.

"Last year it was there and they stole it," Camden coach John Valore said. "This year it was there and they stole it."

History repeated itself in frustrating fashion for the Camden High School boys' basketball team on Sunday in a 57-51 loss to Newark Tech in the Group 2 title game in the Rutgers Athletic Center.

For the second year in a row, Camden move to the brink of capturing the fabled program's 12th state title -- and first since 2000.

For the second year in a row, Camden entered the fourth quarter with a lead over Newark Tech.

For the second year in a row, the North Jersey team controlled the game's final eight minutes and sent Camden's players, coaches and enthusiastic fans back down the New Jersey Turnpike with a disappointing loss.

"I can't believe it happened," Camden senior Rasool Hinson said after the final game of his career.

The loss was Camden's third in three years in the state finals. Camden also lost in the Group 3 finals in 2013, although the Panthers didn't have the lead late in that loss to Newark Eastside.

"Three years in a row -- that's real tough," said senior Wil McCants, one of four Camden players who were regulars in all three games. "I thought this year we had it."

Senior guard Mustafa Lawrence scored 15 of his 28 in the fourth quarter for Newark Tech (15-13), which won its third straight Group 2 state title.

Hinson scored 17 with eight rebounds for Camden (25-7).

The Panthers shot just 17-for-31 from the foul line and just 4-for-20 from three-point range.

Newark Tech, by comparison, was 14-for-16 from the foul line in the second half, including 10-for-11 in the fourth quarter.

"We started the year 10-for-21 (from the line in a loss to Eastern) and we ended it 17-for-31," Valore said. "It's been the same story in every one of our seven losses this year."

Camden also was hampered by foul trouble in a game in which 48 fouls were called. Camden juniors Brad Hawkins and Jamal Holloway spent large stretches of the game on the bench.

"It was hard to watch," said Holloway, the team's leading scorer and rebounder who was limited to 19 minutes by foul trouble.

Hawkins, the team's second-leading scorer and most explosive offensive player, was on the floor for just 22 minutes and fouled out with 4:35 remaining in the game.

"It was tough but I got myself in that situation," Hawkins said.

Camden got good work from reserves Tory Whiting (6 points) and Dustin Singleton (four points, four rebounds) to stay in contention with its top scorers on the bench.

Holloway made one of two free throws to tie the score at 50-50 with 2:06 left.

After a Lawrence bucket, Hinson made one of two free throws to pull Camden within 52-51 at the 0:56 mark.

Newark Tech senior forward Jordan Zagadou made two free throws at 0:48. Camden missed a three-pointer and Lawrence shook loose for a breakaway layup at 0:32 before Zagadou closed the scoring with another free throw at 0:17.

Newark Tech outscored Camden 19-8 in the fourth quarter in 2014. It was 22-10 this year.

"It was last year once again, no question about it," Valore said.

Camden 12 15 14 10 -- 51

Newark Tech 17 8 10 22 -- 57

C: Brad Hawkins 6, Jamal Holloway 7, Rasool Hinson 17, Will McCants 4, Myles Thompson 7, Tory Whiting 6, Dustin Singleton 4.

NT: Jordan Zagadou 18, Mustafa Lawrence 28, Jalah Wemusa 2, C.J. Webb 7, Jurod Page 2.

Believe in Camden Educators' Fair

Join us Saturday, March 21 at this collaborative event that highlights the premier educational partners doing fantastic work within the City of Camden, NJ, a national hotbed for education reform. Learn about opportunities to teach, lead, and support Camden's students in various non-instructional roles with some of the highest performing public, Renaissance, and charter schools in our city.

OB

none

Weather: Camden, NJ

48

Today

High **66** | Low **29** °F

20% Chance of Precip.

JET