

The Cornell Daily Sun

Christie the Bull Moose?

By: Chris Mills – April 26, 2013

Governor Chris Christie made another splash in the headlines last week when he unveiled new plans for gun control in New Jersey.

“It’s hard for me to sit here today and say, ‘If all these things got imposed we’d see an ‘X’ percentage drop in gun violence in this state.’ I don’t know,” said Christie. “Bad people are going to do bad things and so, would greater penalties deter people? You hope they do.”

Christie’s proposed measures [3] include cracking down on gun-related crime and increasing restrictions on obtaining firearms in New Jersey.

Some of the details include the banning of purchases of the Barrett .50 Caliber, enabling health professionals to require treatment for more troubled individuals and the requirement of parental consent for “R” or “AO” rated video games purchased by minors. These regulations are in the spirit of the state’s already-stringent [4] gun control measures, but could draw the ire of conservatives if Christie decides to pursue the U.S. Presidency in 2016 or beyond.

Which draws the question: Is Chris Christie shaping up to a Bull Moose candidate for the Republican Party in 2016 — a candidate who will rely on dissatisfied independents and moderates to become the party’s favored politician?

Certainly one could make that case, provided the governor is interested in making a jump to the national stage. Recently snubbed a CPAC invitation, most likely due to his praise of President Obama in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, it’s safe to bet Christie — despite his role as a top Romney surrogate — is not the current darling of the Tea Party conservatives (Paul) nor the current GOP establishment (Rubio).

The Sun’s Kyle Ezzedine recently voiced his own opinion on the Jersey Governor following the CPAC story.

“It seems Chris Christie has the pleasure of enduring constant, bipartisan criticism from conservatives who believe he’s not actually Republican and liberals who believe he’s not actually moderate,” Ezzedine writes. “He has shown voters, both locally and nationally, that he is an effective, likeable leader who aims to work for the people and not the party.”

Although it’s hard to deny the two-sided barrage on the Governor, some may find Christie’s independent streak as stemming from a self-proclaimed big ego [5] and unprincipled toeing of the line between his New Jersey constituency and broader base of Republican supporters, rather than as a champion of the people. Either way, Christie has demonstrated he can be pragmatic and politically adept — but his politically future outside New Jersey may be doomed if he cannot find a core constituency.

The Daily Caller's Christopher Bedford recently attempted to rationalize [6] Christie's supposed alienation of his party. Among the constituencies Christie has butted heads with include:

1. Fiscal conservatives: When Christie criticized Congress for not passing a Sandy relief bill that included millions in pork-barrel spending directed toward Alaska fisheries and the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.
2. House leadership: By criticizing House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) over delaying the passage of said bill.
3. Romney insiders: For giving the President bipartisan support by praising his relief efforts in advance of the 2012 election.
4. Libertarians: Giving a speech with neoconservative rhetoric [7] at a Cato Institute-sponsored event.

Despite his continued opposition to same-sex marriage, Christie doesn't seem to possess the social conservative qualities of a Mike Huckabee or Rick Santorum. What he does have is a 65% approval rating in his state, according to the latest Monmouth poll [8]. Christie's statewide approval was likely enough to keep rising star Cory Booker from challenging in 2014, but it likely won't be enough to dispel criticism from both parties in the national political arena.

So is Christie the GOP's Bull Moose candidate for 2016? If he's as interested in promoting his political career as some claim, then a rendezvous with the Republican primary may be in the Governor's near future. But Christie knows he needs to be seen as a leader if he wants to go in without a core constituency, and even then his odds could be slim. Whether the Governor can recapture some of his cult of personality and whether Hillary runs in 2016 could determine Christie's decision whether to be a maverick on the national stage — and provided neither of these conditions the Governor may be advised to stay home or toe the party line.