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Chris Christie urges politicians to treat Americans 'like adults' by telling truth

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New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie (R) on Friday implored political leaders in Washington and across the country to tell the American people the truth about the depth of the nation's fiscal problems and "treat them like adults."

In a speech Friday night at the libertarian Cato Institute's black-tie gala in Washington, Christie recounted tales of slashing government spending during his first three years in office. In Trenton, he argued, there are lessons for the country.

"You've got to tell your citizens the truth," Christie said. "Tell them the truth about the depth of the challenge. Tell them the truth about the difficulty of the solutions. Treat them like adults. In the difficult times America is in now, this is the only way to govern, and when we fail to do this we pay the price as a country many times over."

In his nearly 40-minute speech, Christie did not mention the current presidential campaign or offer any words of support for the presumptive Republican nominee, Mitt Romney, whom he endorsed last fall. Christie also avoided stoking speculation that Romney might consider him as a vice presidential running mate.

Instead, Christie spoke about making often unpopular decisions to reign in spending at a time of spiraling deficits in Washington and in state capitals.

"Don't tell me the American people are not ready to hear the truth," Christie said. "They know our government's out of control, they know our debt and our deficits are out of control. And don't confuse them liking the solution with accepting it. They don't have to like it, but they know in their heart they have to accept it. And the only thing the American people care more about than today is tomorrow."

Christie received a rock star's welcome as he walked on stage to Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA" in the Washington Hilton's cavernous ballroom. The governor drew bursts of applause and even some boos — when he referenced his Democratic predecessor, Jon Corzine — from the dinner crowd of more than 1,000 who gathered for the awarding of the institute's Milton Friedman Prize for Advancing Liberty.

Christie boasted of turning Trenton “upside down” by “radically” changing the way the state government operates. In New Jersey, he said, he is “not looking to be loved.”

“I think politicians get themselves in trouble when they’re looking to be loved,” Christie said. “I get plenty of love at home. I’m not bragging; I just do. I’ve got a great wife and four great children, and I’m not looking for the people of New Jersey to love me.

“When you’re looking for love in this job, that’s when deficits get run up,” he continued. “When you’re looking for love in this job, it’s because you can’t say no to anything because someone somewhere won’t love you if you do.”