

## NJ AFL-CIO claims Chris Christie cut education funding by \$1.6B while giving out \$2B in corporate tax breaks

The attack ad game for New Jersey's gubernatorial contest in November has a new player.

Enter the state AFL-CIO, which has a meme on its Facebook page that links Gov. Chris Christie to big business and paints him as an enemy of education. A meme is an idea or concept shared via social media.



The meme declares, "New Jersey's governor cut \$1.6 billion from public education while handing out \$2.1 billion in corporate tax breaks, more than the entire previous decade," with a prominent picture of a dazed-looking Christie in the middle.

The picture may not be the most flattering, but the claims in it are hard facts: New Jersey's governor did cut education by a significant amount, and his actions have resulted in tax break largesse for businesses.

Let's begin by reviewing the education funding claim.

Christie cut education funding, but not by \$1.6 billion.

The governor made two cuts to education in 2010 totaling about \$1 billion to help close significant budget gaps. The New Jersey Education Law Center, a Newark-based school advocacy group, sued, claiming the cuts violated the law for giving aid to school districts, and put at-risk and poor students at an increased disadvantage.

Ultimately, a judge agreed with the Education Law Center's challenge. The judge also found that New Jersey would have needed \$1.6 billion to fully fund education in New Jersey in accordance with the state's funding law, and ordered the state to spend an additional \$500 million on public education in poor districts the next year.

Bottom line? Christie's cuts totaled \$1 billion.

Next, let's review the claim about corporate tax breaks.

New Jersey Policy Perspective, a liberal think tank, released a report in April that the state has given \$2.1 billion in tax breaks and grants to companies during the past three years that Christie's been in office. That exceeds the \$1.2 billion in corporate tax breaks given the entire previous decade, according to figures from the state Economic Development Authority..

At the time of the report's release, Christie spokesman Michael Drewniak said the group is "simply not credible," and that figures from the EDA show that incentives have created more than 100,000 jobs since 1996.

What Drewniak didn't do, however, was question the accuracy of the numbers in the report.

It's also worth noting that a month before the report came out, Christie told a commercial real estate group that his administration was on target to deliver \$2.3 billion in business tax breaks and supports legislation reauthorizing corporate incentives.

NJPP used EDA numbers for its study, Deputy Director Jon Whiten said in an e-mail..

Neither Drewniak nor Christie spokesman Kevin Roberts responded to requests for comment.

Our ruling

A meme on the state AFL-CIO Facebook page claims, "New Jersey's governor cut \$1.6 billion from public education while handing out \$2.1 billion in corporate tax breaks, more than the entire previous decade."

Christie actually cut \$1 billion in state aid from education, not \$1.6 billion.

As for corporate tax breaks, Christie himself has said his administration is on target to deliver \$2.3 billion in benefits for business – and that's nearly double what was handed out in tax breaks in the decade before he took office.

We rate the meme's claim Mostly True.

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