

# NJBIA

## AT ISSUE *By Frank Robinson, First Vice President*

### State ELC Dinner Features Governor Chris Christie

**Fostering an informed business community that is engaged in the governmental and political process** is a vital part of NJBIA's mission. That's why the Association formed the Employer Legislative Committees (ELC) 52 years ago, providing an important forum for local businesses to meet informally with state and local officials who represent them.

Since then, the ELCs have become a vital institution, as evidenced by the 2011 State ELC dinner in June. More than 500 business leaders were in attendance. The state's largest insurance company, New Jersey Manufacturers Insurance Group, was our gracious sponsor. And our keynote speaker, Governor Chris Christie, chose that venue to announce an agreement on arguably the biggest and most controversial issue facing the state this year—public-employee pension and health benefits reform. He then received a standing ovation for this tremendous accomplishment.

But the ELCs are about more than one big event held every two years. Individual county ELCs meet monthly at 18 locations across the state, bringing local businesses together with state legislators, members of the Governor's cabinet and senior staff, members of Congress and other interesting local public officials.

They usually meet over breakfast or lunch, deliberately cultivating an informal atmosphere that encourages candid discussions. And there are no membership dues or fees. Anyone is welcome to come to as many or as few meetings as they want. They only have to pay for their meal.

Christie himself has been an active participant in the ELCs. This was the third time that the Governor had appeared at the biennial ELC dinner. In 2007, the ELCs gave then-US Attorney Christie its Public Service Award for being the first (and only) public official to travel to all 18 ELC county meetings to meet with local businesspeople. Christie was also a keynote speaker at the June 2009 dinner, shortly after he was elected the Republican gubernatorial nominee.

At this year's ELC dinner, the Governor was introduced by NJM President Bernie Flynn, and then he delivered a rousing address highlighting his commitment

to make New Jersey a better place to do business by returning the state to sound fiscal policies, eliminating red-tape, and lowering taxes. The Governor said his goal is to make New Jersey a more affordable place in which to live and to do business.



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The ELCs are a unique institution; there's nothing like them anywhere in the country. What makes them so effective, however, is that while they are an affiliate of NJBIA, they are run locally. Each ELC has a county chair and vice chair that organizes the meetings and schedules the speakers, a commitment that takes a lot of time and effort.

Kevin O'Connor, director of external affairs for United Water Company, chairs the Bergen and Hudson ELCs and has served as the state ELC chair for the past two years. As part of the ELC Dinner ceremony in June, he introduced all of the county ELC chairs and thanked them for their work. Himself a great example of the dedication of all ELC chairs, Kevin made it a point to attend at least one meeting at all 18 county ELCs.

The importance of having people like O'Connor participate in the ELCs cannot be overstated. Communication between business and government doesn't just happen. It takes people who are willing to work at it. In the ELCs, NJBIA provides the forum, but it's the dedicated men and women who run them that have made the ELCs such a success. **NJB**