

CWA RELEASES VIDEO ON HOW CHRISTIE'S ILLEGAL FAILURE TO FUND PENSION PUTS NEW JERSEYANS AT FINANCIAL RISK

Christie Blows Equivalent of Avg. Year's Pension on One Hotel Stay in the Middle East

(TRENTON, NJ) – On the morning of Governor Chris Christie's Budget Address – and a day after a superior court judge struck down Christie's plan to cut contributions to the public pension system - the Communications Workers of America (CWA) released a video highlighting how the governor's failure to fund the pension puts hundreds of thousands of New Jerseyans at financial risk. Christie doesn't understand what it's like in the real world, as he wastes the equivalent of an average full-year's pension on one weekend of luxury travel in the Middle East.

You can view the video at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=woRTU5oz_CA

If Christie gets his way, he'll have skipped more pension payments than any governor in New Jersey history - even as he repeatedly claimed he "fixed" the pension system. Christie's preferred course of action puts the system on a road to bankruptcy in 10-12 years. Christie has skipped approximately \$14.9 billion in required pension payments during his time in office. And while Democrats in the New Jersey legislature sent him a budget last June that would have made the full legally-required payment without harming any middle-class family, Christie vetoed out the revenue – along with \$1.6 billion in pension payments.

That is why CWA took him to court, and won. In a scathing ruling yesterday, Superior Court Judge Mary Jacobson ruled that Christie broke his own "pension reform" law and violated the contractual rights of public employee unions in the process.

"Yesterday was a good day for the tens of thousands of pensioners - social workers, child protective services workers, nurses, environmentalists, unemployment clerks, roads workers, research scientists, teachers and others - who made their pension payments during a lifetime of service," said Hetty Rosenstein, CWA NJ State Director. "It's unconscionable that these hard-earned pensions are in peril, and we can't let that happen. It's not only a legal requirement for Governor Christie to make the pension payments, it's also a moral requirement. Will another three hundred thousand seniors live in poverty simply because Christie cares more about what plays to right-wing audiences in Iowa than doing right by New Jerseyans?"

Civilian state employees work their entire careers in service to the public and chip in 7.5% of their pay for a pension at retirement. At the end of their careers, they're due a pension of an average of \$26,000 a year. Christie broke the very law he signed and refused to make the payments to pay the State's portion of that pension plan. Even worse, he argued to the Court that the State should never have to make those payments. If those payments aren't made soon, the pension plan will go broke and hundreds of thousands of active and retired public workers may lose their retirement security.

"Governor Christie has made a lot of promises about our pension system, and he hasn't kept them," said Grace Bethea, who worked for New Jersey Network for 37 years. "We were promised we'd get healthcare and a decent pension when we retired. And when it was time for me to retire, I deferred a portion of my pension for my daughters. I'm concerned that when its time for my loved ones to collect that money, it simply won't be there."

Earlier this month, the New York Times ran a front-page story with the headline "Chris Christie Shows Fondness For Luxury Benefits When Others Foot The Bill." It detailed how "Christie's first-class tastes have become well-known" and that "Throughout his career in public service, Mr. Christie has indulged a taste that runs more toward Champagne at the Four Seasons." It gave a specific example of how Christie's family stayed in rooms in hotels in the Middle East that "cost about \$30,000". This is more than the average pension – which comes in at \$26,000. The average pension is approximately \$26,000 after a career of public service – that is less than the \$30,000 Governor Christie blows on one night in a hotel room in the Middle East.

"I'm barely meeting ends," said Dennis Siegel, who worked as a psychologist for the Department of Corrections and Department of Human Services for 27 years. "I don't have the luxury of staying in five star hotels or flying in a private jet. My pension is \$33,000 a year - that's a weekend for Chris Christie in the Middle East."

Workers have done their part and are paying more. Christie needs to do his part, by following the very law he touted and signed in 2011. Chapter 78 was passed with the promise of "saving the pension." It included strong language guaranteeing payments would be made to the pension plan in 1/7th increments. In doing so, it increased pension contributions by 25% for state workers, eliminating the Cost-Of-Living Adjustment and reducing the value of the pension plan by 30% going forward. Additionally, Chapter 78 raised the cost of and eliminated collective bargaining for healthcare. It significantly lowered the standard of living for active CWA members and even more so for future

retirees. All this came to fruition, and the State should be expected to live up to the law and its commitments by funding the pension.

The New Jersey civilian pension plan is now one of America's most modest public sector plans. The state ranks 95th in pension generosity among the country's 100 largest plans. New Jersey's pension system is worth \$80 billion and covers approximately 770,000 current and retired employees.