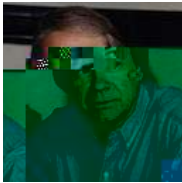




OPINION: CHRISTIE AND THE STATE'S HIGH COURT -- WHEN WORLD'S COLLIDE

CARL GOLDEN | JULY 16, 2013

The governor's frequent attacks on Court rulings could alienate public trust.



The nation's political landscape is littered with the remnants of clashes between chief executives -- joined on occasion by the legislative branch -- and the judiciary.

The history is long and rich, epitomizing the tensions inherent in the Constitution between a political class seeking to advance a partisan ideological agenda and an unbiased judiciary

responsible for determining whether the agenda is permissible. Collisions, ill will, and bruised egos are inevitable.

One hundred eighty-one years ago, for example, President Andrew Jackson responded to a Supreme Court ruling he didn't like by suggesting that since the court made the decision it should take it upon itself to enforce it.

President Eisenhower grouched that his selection of Earl Warren as Chief Justice was the worst mistake he'd ever made. Two years ago President Obama, in his nationally televised State of the Union address, scolded members of the Court for their ruling in a campaign finance case.

For more than 40 years, the Court has been vilified for finding a woman's right to an abortion in the Constitution, and there is a hardcore group that continues to deny the legitimacy of the George W. Bush presidency because of the ruling that ended the recount of the 2000 election.

The Court's most recent rulings, upholding Obamacare, striking down the Defense of Marriage Act, and overturning a key component of the Voting Rights Act provided ample opportunity for outrage from left and right alike.

In New Jersey, a series of state Supreme Court rulings over four decades ordering increased state aid to at-risk school districts has driven governors and legislators to distraction, and none has been restrained in voicing their displeasure.

Former Gov. Tom Kean once suggested that the state Supreme Court opinion requiring municipalities to provide for low-income housing -- the so-called Mount Laurel decision -- bordered on socialism.

Until the administration of Gov. Chris Christie, however, official reaction never extended beyond complaining and expressing disagreement with the court.

From his refusal in 2010 to nominate Associate Justice John Wallace to a tenured term to his latest rhetorical bludgeoning of Chief Justice Stuart Rabner, Christie has made it clear that each decision with which he differs intensifies his desire to remake the court to more closely reflect his political philosophy.

He's taken his case to his town hall gatherings, telling audiences that they are paying higher property taxes because of the Court's rulings in education-funding cases and a change in the court's composition is essential to bring taxes under control.

