

## **GOLDEN: Buono's defeat never in doubt**

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If there were such a thing as a mercy rule in politics, it would have been invoked this past election day to spare Democratic gubernatorial candidate Barbara Buono further pain and embarrassment.

Despite the outcome never having been in any doubt, Gov. Chris Christie's 22-point margin of victory put a humane end to the most non-competitive campaign since the record-setting plurality rolled up by Tom Kean in 1985.

Lacking both focus and direction, the Buono campaign often became bogged down in extraneous issues while largely ignoring Christie's vulnerabilities — property tax control, job creation and economic growth.

When more than a third of poll respondents admitted their unfamiliarity with Buono was so great they hadn't formed an opinion of her, no further evidence of her campaign's failure to devise and deliver a compelling message was necessary.

She was overmatched, underfunded and out-strategized. Her campaign never settled on a theme and often seemed to simply react to whatever appeared in the newspapers on any given day.

Challenging Christie was a daunting task in any ne in