

## Christie says Atlantic County will get its share of PILOT funds

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ATLANTIC CITY — Gov. Chris Christie guaranteed Atlantic County will receive 13.5 percent of any casino payments in lieu of taxes at a joint press conference with Atlantic County Executive Dennis Levinson on Wednesday.

Christie also said people who talk about creation of an Atlantic County police force similar to Camden County's are "just trying to inflame the situation."

Levinson said a county force "is not in our future."

But there were few details on a path forward for the resort, which is running out of funds and moving to a monthly pay period to avoid a city shutdown of nonessential services this month.

Christie and Levinson have not decided what functions of city government the county should absorb, Christie said.



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County Executive Dennis Levinson (left) holds a press conference with Governor Chris Christie (right) in Atlantic City. Christie states, "I do not associate with liars," referring to Mayor Don Guardian. April 6, 2016. (The Press of Atlantic City/Viviana Pernot)

### Guardian responds to Christie's Atlantic City comments

Atlantic City runs out of cash on Friday. Check here as The Press of Atlantic City follows developments as they happen.

"I will not foist anything on the county that the county is not willing to take on," said Christie. "I'm going to be guided by the county executive and what he thinks the county can operate more effectively, efficiently and inexpensively."

Instead, the governor attacked the ethics, honesty and ability of Mayor Don Guardian and other city officials.

He called Guardian everything from a liar to "a great guy who has no idea what he is talking about."

City officials countered many of the governor's statements at their own press conference immediately after.

“Unfortunately, with the statements the governor has made, there seems to be no avenue of compromise,” Guardian said. “Despite the 52 names he called me, I’m still respecting his position as governor of New Jersey.”

Council President Marty Small pulled out an article with the salaries of Port Authority of New York and New Jersey police officers to counter the governor’s argument that city employees make too much money. One Port Authority officer made \$348,095 last year, Small said.

“I would say that’s a George Washington Bridge check,” Small added, a reference to the Bridgegate scandal.

Christie said he cannot trust Guardian because the mayor first agreed to the current takeover bill, then changed his mind.

“The mayor called me and agreed to the deal. We went over it specifically,” said Christie. “He said he wasn’t happy but knew it was something he needed to do.”

Guardian stood with him at a press conference saying he agreed to the deal “only to then renege on his promise,” said Christie. “I cannot make agreements with people who cannot keep their word.”

## **Christie blasts Atlantic City finances**

Gov. Chris Christie opened his press conference Wednesday morning at the Atlantic County office building saying he came to Atlantic City for an update from County Executive Dennis Levinson.

But Guardian said what was said at the January press conference was not what he had previously agreed to, and that the governor’s staff had told him changes would be made in the final bill, then didn’t make those changes.

The governor insisted the PILOT bill and an Atlantic City takeover bill will pass as they are currently written, even though Assembly Speaker Vincent Prieto has said he won’t move the takeover bill unless provisions are removed that would allow breaking of public-worker contracts.

Christie also did not answer questions about what a state takeover would look like, saying only that it would be “aggressive and effective.”

Wednesday’s speech marked the first time Christie has made a statement about how the PILOT funds would be shared between the city and county.

“It’s in the bill,” he said of the 13.5 percent when asked how he would guarantee the percentage to the county. But it is only in the statement portion, not in the bill itself, and that has long concerned county officials.

“Denny and I sat across from each other, and I said, ‘Denny, don’t worry about it, it’s going to happen,’” said Christie. “Unlike dealing with the mayor, Denny knows when I say it’s going to happen, it will.”

Levinson said he is open to the possibility of the county buying the Atlantic City Municipal Utilities Authority. Christie said such a deal must make sense for city and county taxpayers and represent fair value for the asset.

“We’d have to sit down with the county executive, talk about the value of the MUA, how all that would work and make sure it would work for Atlantic County,” Christie said. “Would I guarantee you that if a state takeover occurred that we would dissolve the Municipal Utilities Authority and sell it to the county? No.”

The Assembly is in session Thursday, and Prieto is expected to introduce an alternative to the state takeover. The bill will include benchmarks the city would have to meet to avoid further state involvement.

Christie, who has said he will sign only the bill that passed the state Senate, said it was too late for Prieto’s bill.

## **Atlantic City shops around City Hall worry about the future**

ATLANTIC CITY — If Friday’s threatened City Hall shutdown is a time bomb, the corner of Atlantic and Tennessee avenues will be near the heart of the blast zone.

After his press conference, Guardian left open the possibility for a lawsuit over the takeover.

“We’re looking at every provision, but we think this bill is unconstitutional,” Guardian said.

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