



## ***Shooting Down the "Snooki Subsidy"***

New Jersey Governor Chris Christie must have felt like the Most Wanted Man in America as his fans clamored for him to join the 2012 presidential race. A year ago, he flatly ruled it out, declaring "Short of suicide, I don't really know what I'd have to do to convince you people that I'm not running." But since then, he appeared to be warming to the idea before finally closing the door for good earlier this week.

Politicians usually work overtime to avoid offending *anyone*. And Republicans rarely meet a tax cut they don't like. So how serious could Christie really have been if he was willing to alienate the crucial "Guido" voting block - especially if it involved shooting down a tax break? That's right, last week - in his last major decision before announcing he wouldn't seek the Republican nomination - Christie actually *vetoed* a \$420,000 tax credit for producers of MTV's hit *Jersey Shore* reality show!

Film producers bring jobs, spending, and sometimes even a touch of glamour to the locations they choose. And who doesn't want to share a bit of that Hollywood spotlight? For those reasons, over half of all states now offer film tax credits to encourage in-state movie and television production. (Remember, a tax "credit" is a dollar-for-dollar cut in a taxpayer's actual tax bill, not just a deduction from that taxpayer's income.) New Jersey's program is typical, and gives production companies a credit equal to 20% of qualified expenses so long as they incur 60% of their costs in New Jersey. Fans of these programs argue that subsidized productions actually pay for themselves by creating jobs and increasing tourism. Skeptics respond that film credits just transfer existing jobs from one location to another and that they generate short-term, project-based jobs that leave specialized laborers out of work.

MTV's *Jersey Shore* premiered in late 2009 and quickly became the network's most-watched series ever. Cast members Nicole "Snooki" Polizzi, Mike "The Situation" Sorrentini, Jennifer "JWoww" Farley, and their outrageous, hard-partying housemates have become New Jersey's most famous "family" since *The Sopranos*. Snooki makes \$30,000 per episode now, commands \$10,000 for personal appearances, and even rang the bell to open the New York Stock Exchange.

The show's producers reported spending \$2.1 million in New Jersey to tape the first season. And officials in Seaside Heights, where the show was first set, agree that it's been a bonanza. That sounds like success, especially in today's tough economy. But not everyone is pleased with how *Jersey Shore* portrays its subjects. Critics object that it paints New Jerseyites and Italian-Americans as drunken, brawling louts, obsessed with their "GTL" (gym, tanning, and laundry, for those not in-the-know). Ironically, most of the cast isn't even *from* New Jersey - and not all are Italian, either.

Governor Christie himself has previously blasted the show as "negative for New Jersey" and charges that it "takes a bunch of New Yorkers and drops them at the Jersey Shore and tries to make America feel like this is the real New Jersey." So it came as little surprise when he shot down the credit. "In this difficult fiscal climate, the taxpayers of New Jersey should not be forced to subsidize such projects as 'Jersey Shore,'" he wrote in his press release vetoing the credit. "As Chief Executive, I am duty-bound to ensure that taxpayers are not footing a \$420,000 bill for a project which does nothing more than perpetuate misconceptions about the State and its citizens."

So, it looks like Garden State taxpayers won't be subsidizing Snooki's bail the next time she's arrested. What do you think? Is Governor Christie right to stand up for New Jersey pride? Or should he just lighten up, grab a "blast in a glass," and join the fun?