

# N.J. governor defends remarks on civil rights

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TRENTON, N.J. (RNS) Even though a famous civil rights leader came to Trenton to scold him, Gov. Chris Christie unapologetically defended his recent controversial remarks on civil rights, calling one his New Jersey critics "numbnuts."

Agitated and at times caustic, the governor went after openly gay Assemblyman Reed Gusciora, who had hammered Christie for saying that in the 1950s and 60s activists "would have been happy to have a referendum on civil rights rather than fighting and dying in the streets of the South."

Christie was trying to compare his call for a statewide referendum on gay marriage to the civil rights struggle.

"What I said was I'm sure that civil rights advocates would have liked to have this as another option but it was not available to them," Christie said on Monday (Jan. 30). "Yet you have numbnuts like Reed Gusciora who put out a statement comparing me to George Wallace and Lester Maddox."

Christie praised legendary civil rights activist Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., who held his own Trenton press conference to condemn the governor's remarks, adding that civil rights never would have won on statewide ballots in the South.

"When it came to the question of interracial marriage, (Martin Luther King) would

say races don't fall in love and get married, individuals fall in love and get married. If two men want to fall in love and get married, if two women -- it's their business. It's not the role of the federal government or state government to intervene."

Gusciora said if Christie didn't like the comparison to two notoriously racist governors, "then he should change his position on marriage equality and sign the bill into law."