

# Observer-Tribune: Recorder Community Newspapers

## NJ Highlands Coalition: Gov. Christie's claim is wrong

**BOB THOMAS** Staff Writer Recorder Community Newspapers | [1 comment](#)

Posted: Friday, March 18, 2011 12:34 pm | Updated: 1:29 pm, Fri Mar 18, 2011.

The New Jersey Highlands Coalition has taken New Jersey Governor Chris Christie to task for 'misinformed statements' they said he made during a recent town meeting.

The Coalition has taken the unusual step of voicing their views in a YouTube video which uses Christie's own comments in a March 9 appearance in Hopatcong.

Set to the music of Frank Zappa, the video uses superimposed graphic statements to make several points, including a rejection of Christie's claim that the Highlands Act of 2004 said, "the people whose property rights are impacted will be compensated."

"The Highlands (Act) was based on a lie!" Christie said. "It's now almost eight years and there's no money for that."

Coalition Executive Director Julia Somers said YouTube was chosen because it's appropriate and convenient. The umbrella non-profit group represents numerous environmental groups ranging from the Sierra Club to the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions.

"We were responding directly to his (Christie's) comment that the Highlands is based upon a lie," said Somers. "He is either misinformed or re-interpreting the original Act and we felt it had to be responded to."

The video was produced by Elliot Ruga, a Harding Township resident who garnered two EMMY Awards during a previous career with NBC television. He is policy analyst and campaign coordinator the the Coalition.

"We have had no response from the Governor," Ruga said on Friday, March 18. The video was posted on YouTube late Wednesday.

"I have had a few people say 'great job' or 'the New Jersey Highlands Coalition is cool.'" he said. A request by the Observer-Tribune for comment from the Governor's office had not been returned Friday afternoon.

Another of the points made in the Coalition video may not be accurate itself, according to Highlands Council interim chairman Jack Schrier, of Mendham Township.

In the video text, the coalition said, "Both the appellate and Supreme Courts have upheld that there is no legal claim for compensation as a result of the Highlands Act."

Schrier said the original decision made by Superior Court in Morris County and then sustained by the state courts, ruled that landowners who opposed the Highlands Act as 'a taking' of their property values hadn't exhausted the options for redress contained in the Act.

"They did not say there was no legal claim," Schrier said.

Somers said a three-minute YouTube video may not be the best way to discuss complicated issues but was appropriate in the context of the Governor's use of the media.

"He's got the bully pulpit and he uses it all the time," she said. "So in this case, YouTube was an effective way for us to respond."

Somers said she believed that Christie's original statement wasn't a slip of the tongue.

"He knew exactly what he was saying and he had people sympathetic and supportive around him when he said it," said Somers.

"It's his performance," she said. "It's virtually the same as previously in Hackettstown and slightly modified each time depending on where he is."

Somers confirmed that there has been no response yet to her office from the Governor's office regarding the YouTube video.

Posted in News on *Friday, March 18, 2011 12:34 pm. Updated: 1:29 pm.*

**1 comment:**

- **Thomas Lotito posted at 11:36 am on Sun, Mar 20, 2011.**



Posts: 2

I interviewed Julia Somers on Centenary College's Sunday morning radio show Contours, 91.9. FM in 2006. I asked Julia Somers about compensation for land owners. At that point Ms. Somers had no idea how landowners would be compensated for their losses. Ms Somers insisted that the landowner would be compensated, but wasn't sure where the money would come from. Ms. Somers also acknowledged that Green Acres funds was not designated for the Highlands Act. Fast forward to today, there is no money to compensate land owners affected by Highlands legislation. Gov. Christie's comments are correct.