

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

GOVERNOR PHIL MURPHY

ADDRESS AT THE CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS 2018 IDEAS CONFERENCE

Thank you, Winnie Stachleberg, for that introduction.

Thank you, as well, Neera Tanden, for your leadership in bringing together this conference today. Talk about a day laden with star-power – and then here's me. I'm honored to be here.

Here's what separates me from some on this program ... I'm not running for president.

Thank you, as well, to the entire team here at the Center for American Progress, and to CAP's supporters, for all you do to promote the smart, progressive, and commonsense policies our nation desperately needs. Especially in this current climate, where facts and opinions are often confused and conflated, we need real research and evidence-based policymaking to lead us forward.

Thankfully, we have the Center for American Progress doing so much of this important, and increasingly essential, work. I am so proud to have been affiliated with CAP from its very founding, and to have served as a past member of the Board of Trustees.

It's an honor to be here among so many of the leaders working hard to create a stronger and fairer future for our nation. I have had the opportunity, both here and elsewhere, to meet so many of those I am fortunate enough to share this stage with. We've discussed so many of the ideas and concepts at the center of today's discussions. There is a lot of common ground we are standing on here.

We don't claim to have all the ideas in New Jersey. In fact, we are more than happy to rip off what others are doing and mold their ideas to fit our state. So, I'm excited to be in a place where there's a lot for us to rip off.

But that's not entirely why I'm here. I'm here to share an exciting opportunity we're growing in the Garden State.

Now, nothing against our friends in Congress – especially New Jersey's great Senator, Cory Booker, who spoke with you, as well – but as we begin to reposition ourselves to prove the power of our ideas and the ability of our shared agenda to change our nation's course for the better, well, governors will never have mattered more. And, I'd like to give a special shout out to my fellow governor here today, Washington State's Jay Inslee.

States have always been, to paraphrase Justice Louis Brandeis, the laboratories of American democracy. Throughout our history, it has oftentimes been state-level action and experience that has informed and helped set national standards. Even today, from the environment to voting rights to gun safety, it is in states like New Jersey where examples for innovative, progressive, and, yes, workable, ideas are being proven.

Now, as our national politics is defined by its fits and starts, it will again be up to states to lead. I reject President Trump's thinking that for one person to do well, another must be left behind. We can both do well and do good.

Our administration believes that we grow New Jersey not from the top-down, but from the bottom up, and from the middle class out. And we know that to rebuild our middle class after the prior eight years under Governor Chris Christie, we must reinvent New Jersey.

We started our reinvention by assembling the most diverse Cabinet in New Jersey history, and one of the most diverse in the history of our nation. It is a leadership team that looks like our state, and which draws upon rich differences in life experiences. And, together we're bringing New Jersey back.

I see us as the natural home for the innovation economy. This is in New Jersey's DNA ... we were Silicon Valley before there was a Silicon Valley ... Bell Labs, Sarnoff Labs, the pharmaceutical and life sciences industries, world-class colleges and universities. And on, and on.

To get this back means incubators and new partnerships where the businesses of tomorrow will be born, and reimagining our cities to be the engines of growth and opportunity, where innovative companies will want to locate and where our millennials will want to live.

It means leaning in to capture the clean energy economy and using the winds off the Jersey Shore to make us a global leader in offshore wind generation.

It means communities connected by modern, safe, and reliable mass transit.

This is how we will create new, good-paying jobs.

And, building this economy starts in one place. To do all this will require building a workforce for the 21st century – it will require New Jersey to set a new standard for education.

So, this led us to a simple, yet thought-provoking question: Who said that education should be a right for everyone between the ages of five and 18, but not before five, or after 18?

In the state budget I proposed back in March, New Jersey is seeking to answer this question through investments to expand pre-Kindergarten programs statewide and in moving to make community college tuition-free for every resident. If we accomplish these goals, and I believe we will, New Jersey can become the first state to lock-in access to a free education for everyone from pre-K through to an associates degree.

This is not only the right thing to do socially, but also for our future economic strength.

On the one end, we are investing in the statewide expansion of pre-kindergarten programs. By the 2021-2022 academic year, we aim to have the funding in place so every school district in our state can deliver a pre-K program.

There are so many reasons for us to reach for this goal. The first, of course, is to ensure children in long-underserved communities are given the same ability to learn and grow as their peers elsewhere in our state.

Multiple studies show us that pre-K builds a strong foundation for a child's educational future. We know it helps to level the educational playing field and close the achievement gap. We know early childhood education promotes strong emotional and social growth.

And, we know it also has positive benefits that continue into adulthood – studies have shown how every dollar put into pre-K will deliver dividends many times over in the real economy throughout that child's life.

I co-chaired one of those studies right here at the Center for American Progress, leading a task force in 2004 and 2005 – along with former Secretary and Governor Janet Napolitano, and the late civil rights leaders and Professor Roger Wilkins – that worked to draw a better roadmap for education in America.

Our final report, "Getting Smarter, Becoming Fairer," looked at all aspects of our educational system, both nationwide and within individual states. One of our conclusions was stated thusly: "extending learning time from early childhood through post-secondary education is once more an imperative for our nation." The lessons of this task force have never been lost on me.

Even if expanding pre-K to every child helps us close the achievement gap and ensure more of our kids are ready for a lifetime of learning, we are only half-done. There is a growing skills gap in our labor force that we need to close.

In New Jersey, for example, even as we work to grow the innovation and STEM-based economy, the realization is that not every job will require a PhD, or even a four-year degree. It is estimated that fully half of the jobs we expect to be created by 2024 will be middle-skill jobs, yet these potential workers only make up little-more than one-third of New Jersey's current labor force. We must ensure this workforce is diverse in meeting the needs of potential employers.

This is not a New Jersey-only problem, either. The National Skills Coalition reports that the number of workers prepared to fill middle-skill positions nationwide will lag considerably behind the number of jobs that will need to be filled.

Our goal, in New Jersey, is to open the doors of opportunity wide for all residents by ensuring everyone has the skills to get one of these jobs. And, more than anywhere else, it is at our community colleges where these skills will be learned.

We are not just talking about high school graduates, either. Even those who already have spent years in the labor force are coming to the recognition that the skill-set that helped them climb into the middle class is no longer capable of keeping them in the middle class.

Our community colleges – whether in New Jersey or elsewhere – have always been where a college education can be within everyone’s reach – hence the name, “community college.” We should not allow cost to be a barrier for anyone simply looking to strengthen their hold on a good family-supporting job.

Too many of us in government have come to think of schooling as some sort of closed and static universe rather than an expanding one. We focus on test scores. We focus on dollars and cents, and how much we pay educators and administrators. While these are all critical aspects of education, we desperately need a more long-term view.

In New Jersey, we are challenging this status quo. We are no longer willing to take the answer to our question as, “Because that’s the way it’s always been done.”

We cannot accept that answer. Not with the mounting evidence that our focus on K-12, while necessary, has been insufficient in preparing our children for not only their futures, but our collective future as a state and nation.

We can no longer afford to view education merely as a cost. We must view it as an investment.

Unfortunately, we have in the White House, and in the Republican Congressional Leadership, people who do not share this view. They are people that I have described as the type who, to paraphrase Oscar Wilde, can tell you the cost of everything but, in doing so, prove they know the value of nothing.

Hopefully, come next January, they will be in the minority.

But, until we have more enlightened leadership in both Congress and the White House, it will be up to the states to show the way.

We did not ask for this challenge, but we will accept it. We must. If we are to prove to the American people that our ideas are better, stronger, and fairer, I want New Jersey to not only be the example, but to set the example.

I want New Jersey to be the place that proves that social progress cannot be achieved without economic progress, and that economic progress cannot be achieved without social progress.

In other words, we’re going to well by doing good. And it starts with education.

I thank you so much for allowing me these few moments with you. I am excited by the possibilities of the ideas being discussed here, and I welcome you all to New Jersey so we can discuss how to put them into action.

Thank you.

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