

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

GOVERNOR PHIL MURPHY

GOVERNOR MURPHY DELIVERS REMARKS AT THE LEAGUE DELEGATES LUNCHEON OF THE NEW JERSEY STATE LEAGUE OF MUNICIPALITIES ANNUAL CONFERENCE

November 15, 2018

Good afternoon!

Thank you, Mayor Jim Cassella, for that introduction. And, thank you, as well, for your leadership on behalf of your fellow mayors and elected local officials as president of the League of Municipalities over the past year.

Thank you, as well, to your fellow officers.

I also must thank the League and its staff – starting with Executive Director Michael Darcy – for all its work to ensure the voices of our diverse roster of cities, towns, township, boroughs, and villages are heard. This includes Assistant Executive Director Mike Cerra, who usually tries to hide from the spotlight, but who deserves to be in it.

To all municipal leaders here, rest assured, you have a great team advocating for you in Trenton, and I appreciate the opportunity to work with them to improve our state.

Just as I appreciate the opportunity to work with everyone up on this dais and everyone in this room. The most important thing for us to always remain mindful of is that while we may be Democrats or Republicans outside of this room, inside of it there should be no partisan distinction.

In that regard, I also wish to recognize the distinguished members on the dais from both sides of the aisle.

We elected officials all serve at the pleasure of the people. And, while we may have different ideas, we all have the same goal – to create stronger, safer, more vibrant communities across New Jersey.

As a point of personal privilege, and as a parishioner of St. James in Red Bank, I want to give a shout out to my Monsignor, Phil Lowery.

A year ago, I came before you as governor-elect and spoke of the need for us to begin, in earnest, to build a foundation upon which would rest a stronger and fairer state.

I come back proud of the accomplishments we have made over the past year to do just that. We are not spiking any footballs, but so far, so good.

I come back here confident that we are moving New Jersey in the right direction and with the right focus, and that the people of New Jersey agree with this new direction.

I come back just as optimistic about the year ahead.

And, I am proud that we are doing so with a new tone for our state. We will not reflect the hyper-partisanship that has eroded our national dialogue. The name calling is in our past.

Yes, I have been certain and unequivocal in my words throughout this year. But, I have steadfastly refused to mirror the spectacle we see daily in Washington, and which we have seen on our TV screens for the past few years.

I believe that we can accomplish more by having open and honest discussions – honest to goodness conversation – rather than simply lobbing missives at each other.

No less than one of my heroes, John F. Kennedy, captured this challenge in his speech accepting the Democratic nomination for president in 1960...

"I think the American people expect more from us than cries of indignation and attack" he said. "The times are too grave, the challenge too urgent, and the stakes too high to permit the customary passions of political debate."

No one doubts the challenges we face as a state. There are many still to conquer. But, I do believe that the people who elected us want us to be open and honest about those challenges, and how we would go about meeting them. They want us to stop looking for scapegoats and boogeymen. They want us to speak to them as adults.

I am proud that, for the last year, we have. This change in tone started on Day One of our administration. And, it was the tone which I brought to nearly one-dozen mayors meetings we hosted in the opening months of this year – small sessions we held in places like Chester, Wayne, Newark, Chesilhurst, West Long Branch, and Mount Laurel, among others, for me to listen to you, and for you to get to know me. In total, more than 250 mayors attended, from communities large and small, and red and blue. I thank you for coming out to be part of the discussion.

We all know that when it comes to the efficient delivery of essential services, and to standing up for our community values, party takes a back seat to partnership.

This has been the tone we have set. It is a tone you have collectively reciprocated. And, through doing so, we have been able to accomplish much more than many expected.

We restored funding for Planned Parenthood and women's health. We enacted reforms to strengthen and protect our health insurance marketplace. Because of these, our residents are not only seeing greater access to health care, but premiums on the individual market are down by nearly 10 percent.

We enacted the nation's strongest equal pay law, and instituted paid sick leave for all workers. This means that our residents will find greater economic security, so they will be able to do more for themselves and for their families.

We put in place one of the country's most forward-thinking automatic voter registration laws. And, the new provision for vote-by-mail resulted in more than 400,000 mail-in ballots, contributing to the record midterm turnout we saw last week. More of our residents are participating in our democratic process and that is a very good thing.

We instituted commonsense gun safety laws to help protect our communities from the scourge of gun violence and to give law enforcement greater tools by which to go after traffickers.

We have taken a wide-ranging approach to our need to move away from climate change-exacerbating fossil fuels. We are moving forward on a new Energy Master Plan that will move us to our goal of a 100 percent clean-energy economy by 2050. We have seen the beginnings of our efforts to bring offshore wind to New Jersey, with the BPU's first offshore-wind solicitation, and with two of the world's leading developers coming to New Jersey – Orsted right here in Atlantic City, and EnergieBW in Hudson County.

And, we put in place a tough law to protect the Jersey Shore from the danger of oil and gas exploration and drilling.

What we've done is making us a national model for sound, fact-based, pro-growth, and proudly progressive and forward-leaning policymaking. But, we didn't do these things for the sake of sending a political message to the nation.

We did them because we know they are the right thing for all of our residents, and for each of our communities.

But we have taken other steps, purely New Jersey-centric steps, to improve, in other ways, both life for our residents and of our communities.

Six weeks ago, I proudly put forward an economic plan that changes, entirely, the economic direction of our state and allows all of our communities to become places where new businesses can grow and flourish. We have a new focus to become a world leader in innovation and technology, reclaiming the space that Hamilton, Edison, and Bell

Labs, among so many others, carved out.

Economic growth, above all, is the ticket to our better future. And, a plan for economic growth is not optional. The economy we inherited in January enjoyed the following national rankings in the previous decade ... job growth, we were 42nd in the nation ... poverty rate, 47th ... wage growth, 49th.

I got elected to fix our economy and that is how I spend most of my time as governor.

So, among other steps, we designated 169 Opportunity Zones across 75 municipalities, at least one in every county. These zones, areas with great unrealized promise, are where we will focus new private business investments to create new jobs. And, we know that the benefits will not just stay in these communities, but will radiate outward into neighboring municipalities, raising entire regions and creating broad prosperity.

Our economic plan also proposes the creation of a new statewide historic preservation tax credit, so we can better knit together our past and our future. Practically every one of our downtowns has a historic building that is crying out for a new purpose, and together, we can do this.

And, we are creating new financing tools to convert our Brownfields and other underutilized properties into new ratables, where we can create new places for businesses, or for sorely needed affordable housing opportunities for our working families.

We know that spurring new job growth and smart development is not just good for our economy, it's also our best point of attack against the property tax menace.

But, certainly, it is not our only point of attack.

We worked in collaboration with our public employee union partners to enact much-needed reforms to the way we provide health care. Through these reforms, we will save taxpayers roughly half-a-billion dollars over the next two years. But, moreover, we are reducing the upward pressure on what is one of the most pressing cost drivers of property taxes.

This was a smart move for everyone. Our public workers, from municipal employees to educators, will maintain the high-quality care they deserve and at a savings to our working families, and our communities will realize savings that they can pass along to property taxpayers.

We also made a long-overdue commitment to properly funding our public schools, starting ourselves on a ramp-up for fully satisfying our school funding formula, and – through the work of Senate President Steve Sweeney – we also reformed that formula to better meet the realities of New Jersey in 2018.

We had to do this. School taxes make up the lion's share of the property tax burden in the overwhelming majority of our communities. Properly funding our schools is what is needed to alleviate that weight from the shoulders of our working and middle-class families, and our seniors.

And, through our budget, we restored the direct property tax relief these families deserve and need. I would like to thank Speaker Craig Coughlin for his efforts to ensure we did so.

Now, we need to keep that momentum going. We need to look, once again, at the potential for smart shared service agreements to further benefit our communities and taxpayers.

I listened to you on shared services. And, I asked two individuals – one a Democrat, one a Republican – who know these issues first-hand to take the lead for our administration. Former Summit Mayor Jordan Glatt and former Harding Mayor Nicholas Platt agreed to serve as our “co-czars” in the effort to further promote shared services.

They have spent the past six months traveling across the state, meeting with many of you and your colleagues. And, later this month, we will institute our first shared services symposium to move from conversations to action. I thank Mayors Glatt and Platt for their hard work and commitment.

I have said many times before that there is a time and a place for top-down decision-making. The same goes with shared services. You know your communities best. You know where sharing services can make sense, and where it may not. And, where they do, our administration is committed to getting more of you to say, “yes” to your

neighbors.

This spirit of collaboration is how we move forward on these sticky issues. And, if you want an example of how that spirit can work, I ask you to look no further than this city we are in right now – Atlantic City.

I was critical of the state takeover of Atlantic City in 2016. I do not believe in the state coming in and big-footing local control. But, I also accepted that Atlantic City needed help from the state. So, we created a new model for partnership. Instead of the state putting its foot on Atlantic City's neck, we picked the city up so we could stand together as partners. Instead of dictating, Shelia Oliver and I asked Jim Johnson to come in, take a deep dive, and create the path forward so the city can stand again on its own feet.

As a result, we have a new plan for returning Atlantic City to full local control. Already, the city's bond rating has been upgraded, and its future prognosis is looking brighter by the day.

That's the leadership we wish to bring to these tough issues, especially when it comes to property taxes. I want to work together with you, not to roll in over top of you. And, I ask you to join me, and Mayors Glatt and Platt, in this process.

Now, the year is not quite over yet, and there is still much left for us to do.

We have begun the long process of overhauling NJ TRANSIT and restoring it to respectability and reliability – starting with a dramatic increase in state operating assistance in this year's budget. I know many of you have heard the same complaints I have from your commuting residents. And, yes, there have certainly been some impediments thrown on the tracks over the past year. But, with new leadership, a new customer-minded focus and path forward, and a commitment for restored state assistance, I am confident we will get there. In fact, I promise you we will.

I also remain committed to putting us responsibly on a path to a \$15 an hour minimum wage. Doing so will mean so much to the hundreds of thousands of working families who – despite clocking 40-hour weeks at their jobs – still can't earn enough to stay afloat. Raising the wage will mean more money in their pockets to spend downtown, which will help keep our local economies strong.

We have also taken an entirely new approach to the opioid epidemic that has ravaged our state. We are putting in place new strategies, based on statistical research and careful data analysis, to focus our efforts and combat this at its roots. We are not yet close to declaring victory, but every day, we inch a little bit closer.

Any notion that tackling this epidemic has become a lesser priority is completely and utterly wrong-headed. Solving this is a daily, evidence-based grind.

And, I remain equally committed to sensible legislation to legalize adult use marijuana, and to continue to expand our medical marijuana program, which can also be an important tool to fighting our opioid epidemic.

I know that some of you have already taken steps in your communities to prevent such sales once I sign a legalization bill into law – and, make no mistake, assuming the Legislature gets it to me, I will.

Our current prohibition has utterly failed. We have branded countless thousands of our fellow residents – mostly residents of color – as criminals for low-level possession crimes, impeding their ability to get jobs or an education. These crimes have crowded our jails, while leaving the bad guys in place on the street corner.

Legalization is the right thing to do, for safer communities, for protecting our kids, for erasing the stain that is keeping so many of our fellow New Jerseyans from a better future. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of New Jerseyans agree. We should listen to them. I am ready to work alongside the Legislature, and each of you, to get this done.

Please remember, if you remain skeptical – we are not inventing marijuana. What we are doing is restoring social justice, putting the bad guys out of business, protecting our kids, and regulating and taxing the industry as we should.

We can get a lot done by listening to each other more.

As I prepare to close 2018, I look forward to continuing our progress in 2019. And, that progress will come, in no

small part, to our continued partnership in the issues that are so important to our state, and to your communities.

I am also looking forward to having new voices in Washington fighting alongside those that have been advocating for our state. We need Washington to step up and provide its share of funding for Gateway, and for other critical transportation and infrastructure projects. I am ever hopeful that our new House delegation will take on this fight, and with Senators Menendez and Booker, help bring home our fair share.

I am also hopeful that our delegation will continue to raise the need for Washington to restore the full State and Local Tax deduction for our families. This is nothing less than a matter of fairness. We acted as best we could on the state level, and we will continue to take on what we believe are unfair and unconstitutional rules to deliver tax relief for our residents, and I hope you will join us in this.

This has been a transformational year for New Jersey. And, yet, we have so much more work to do together.

But, there is no denying we have put our state on an entirely new path. We have pointed ourselves in a new direction – one that makes our future brighter, more prosperous, safer, and fairer for everyone.

We are undoing, bit by bit, the poor decisions of the past that were made in the name of political ambition, and are replacing them with sound policies educated by listening and a desire to simply do the right thing. A moneyball mindset plus good intentions – instead of endless political shenanigans – lead to sustained economic growth.

That mindset is something I promised you when I was here last year. I am proud that it has been a promise kept.

One of the things that makes New Jersey special is that we are a state of 565 unique municipalities. It may not make governing easy. And, throughout the year I have been reminded that we will never have perfect agreement on anything.

That's to be expected.

But, if we take the time to listen to each other, and reach across borders as we reach across the aisle, we can do great things as one New Jersey.

I thank you for all you do for your communities, and for our state.

And, I look forward to working alongside you in the year to come!

Thank you. May God bless you, and may God continue to bless the Great State of New Jersey and the United States of America.

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