

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

GOVERNOR PHIL MURPHY

BUILDING A STRONGER AND FAIRER NEW JERSEY: AN ADDRESS BY GOVERNOR MURPHY MARKING 100 DAYS IN OFFICE

Good morning, and thank you all for being here.

Today, I'm wearing my track shoes for a very specific reason.

Last fall, we had a healthy debate about how to move New Jersey forward. And the election sent a clear message – be bold, not timid.

People across New Jersey demanded a change in direction, a change in attitude, and a change in priorities. We listened, and more importantly, we are acting.

So, let's be clear. The future does not wait. And problems don't fix themselves.

Today, we are 100 days closer to a stronger, fairer New Jersey.

Today, the Garden State is on the move. The changes we have made are already having an impact on peoples' lives.

We're fixing problems – from revamping a broken mass transit system, to beginning the task of fully funding our public schools both to create opportunity and to control property taxes, to protecting our environment and our economy, to finally getting our finances in order and putting New Jersey on a path to honestly meeting our obligations.

But more than that we're creating a whole new vision for this state – a New Jersey that is both stronger and fairer. A New Jersey where opportunity is abundant and available for all those willing to do the work.

If there are some who wish to criticize us for moving too fast, well, put on your running shoes and join us.

We have so much to do that we need to move even faster, and I invite everyone to be part of the solution.

Today, in New Jersey, something big, something exciting is happening.

What we have done in the past 100 days has set the table for what we can do over the course of the next 1,365 days.

So, it's very fitting that we find ourselves here.

First, this wonderful city, New Brunswick, is growing into the home for innovation. This city represents the promise that we can find in every one of our cities across this state, and which we aim to help realize.

Second, Rutgers University is where so many of the next generation of New Jerseyans are learning, and leading. And, so much of what we are doing is to ensure a New Jersey where they can stay, earn a good living, raise a family, and be proud to call home.

To understand our new journey, we have to remember where it was we started.

On January 16, we inherited a state that was not just pointed in the wrong direction, but was falling behind. Incomes were declining. Job growth was near the bottom in the country. The economy was cooked to work only for those at the top. Schools were underfunded. Mass transit was a mess.

And, as a result, the value that generations of residents and businesses found in New Jersey had eroded. Most continued to pay more and get less. Worse, many families were actually earning less. They questioned whether our best days were in our rear-view mirror.

They are not. They are ahead of us.

One hundred days ago, we began a journey to reverse this decline and to look confidently once again at the road laid out before us, not longingly at the past.

Yes, stark challenges remain. We cannot and will not be able to reverse the decline of the past eight years in just three short months. But that is why we started aggressive and why we will stay aggressive.

It's why we've made rejuvenating our economy job number one, to create jobs and lift wages for working men and women in the state. From standing firm for a higher, livable minimum wage, to reimagining a public education system built for the 21st century, to passing earned sick leave, we are empowering people who work hard and we are building a new economy from the middle out and the bottom up.

On our first day, in our first official action, we made a strong statement for wage equality, and on our ninety-ninth day, we made equal pay for equal work the law for the entire state. We should all take pride because that bill gives New Jersey the strongest equal pay protections in America. We are finally starting to lead the nation in the right things.

It is why we installed qualified and competent leadership at NJTRANSIT, and have begun the work of investing in our key transportation assets to make up for the prior administration's negligence and near-total defunding. In this state – of all states – we need a reliable, safe and modern mass transit system to keep our commuters and our economy moving.

It is why we have embraced the greatness of our diversity, beginning with our Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver, and by naming a Cabinet and leadership team that looks like our state, and which draws upon rich differences in life experiences.

We have made history, with the most women appointed to the Cabinet in our state's history, with our nation's first-ever Sikh-American attorney general – Gurbir Grewal – and New Jersey's first-ever Muslim-American commissioner – Dr. Shereef Elnahal – and our first-ever African-American adjutant general – Brigadier General Jemal Beale.

We are not just making up for past inaction and past vetoes; we are now setting the bar for other states.

Last week, I signed into law Automatic Voter Registration, making us just the 12th state to ensure every citizen is registered to vote, and only the 4th to allow government agencies other than the Motor Vehicle Commission to assist in the effort. It is just the first of what I hope will be multiple new laws to open up our democracy. And in that, we will lead the way.

We are showing that New Jersey will listen and act, as we did in the wake of the tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, and as young people from across the state and nation took to the streets to demand commonsense gun safety laws.

We began by forging a new partnership, States for Gun Safety, with like-minded neighbors and allies – New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Delaware, Massachusetts, and Puerto Rico – to undertake the comprehensive regional approaches we need to combat gun violence in the absence of federal action.

Working with the Legislature, we are seeing a sweeping package of commonsense gun safety measures moving toward my desk – from closing loopholes in our background check system, to lowering magazine capacity and outlawing “cop killer” bullets, to “red flag” legislation that will keep guns out of the hands of those who pose a threat to themselves or others. And, make no mistake, I will sign them.

Through executive action we are opening up the flow of information so communities can see the impact of gun violence in their own backyards, including the types of weapons used in a crime, and where they came from. Roughly 80 percent of the guns used to commit crimes in New Jersey come from out-of-state, and if we have to “name and shame” those states whose lax laws are hurting our communities, we will.

And, we announced our state pension funds' divestment of holdings in companies that produce automatic and semi-automatic guns for civilian use.

We are acting not just in the name of Parkland, but of every community and family in New Jersey touched by gun violence, and the many more who just want to be safe.

We are also planting the seeds for the innovation economy to grow again in New Jersey.

Three weeks ago, the world's leading offshore wind companies chose to hold their annual business forum right here, in New Jersey. A year ago, that would have been unthinkable. Even though we are one of the most-advantageously positioned states for the offshore wind industry, we had neither windmills, nor, it seemed, the will.

But, in our first month in office, we took action to begin the process of creating the offshore wind marketplace originally envisioned in 2010, but which was left to gather dust while other states began to pass us by. Our hopes of being the first state to have an operational wind farm powering our communities were dashed, but our goal of being a world leader in offshore wind production and component manufacturing is again alive.

One of the world's leading offshore wind energy companies – Orsted – has announced their intention to open an office in Atlantic City, beginning the process of creating a 1,000-megawatt windfarm off our coast that can power more than 600,000 homes and businesses. And, in doing so, they will be creating up to 1,000 new, union construction jobs and good-paying permanent ones, too.

We took these actions, and welcome these businesses, not just because of the jobs and economic opportunities they can create today, as vital to our growth as they are, but because of what they say about how we want to grow. For too long, Trenton failed to act decisively in the efforts to combat global climate change. We were being sold a false premise that you can have responsible environmental and energy policies or jobs, but not both.

Already, our efforts are taking off. Executives are once again optimistic about our economic future. As we are with so many things, we are turning around the New Jersey narrative.

Today, Newark is a finalist for Amazon's HQ2, which would be a wholly transformative project for our entire state – and no one is laughing at our prospects.

You see, with Washington in turmoil and in seemingly unending political convulsions, it is invariably falling upon the states to act. Right now, governors have never mattered more. And, on the issues where Washington fails to work for the betterment of our people and our communities, this administration, and New Jersey, is showing leadership.

When President Trump and Congressional Republicans are working at odds with our future and our values – whether it be on funding the Gateway Tunnel, or hurting our Dreamers, or passage of a tax plan that victimizes our middle class – we are fighting back.

We are standing for the health and reproductive rights of every New Jersey woman, restoring funding for Planned Parenthood and expanding access to family planning services under Medicaid.

We are expanding access to medical marijuana to thousands of New Jerseyans who want nothing more than to restore their quality of life, and who have been failed by other treatments, or who wish to not fall into reliance upon opioids, and we are working toward legalization to end mass incarceration, predominantly of young people of color, that costs us as a society.

We are restarting the process of reviewing our criminal sentencing guidelines and moving to a more just justice system.

We are standing for the rights of our Dreamers to continue to live, learn, and work in the only home many of them have ever known.

And, we are focused on combatting climate change.

We start by doing everything we can to block drilling off the Jersey Shore. Not now, not ever.

We are planning to join our neighboring states in permanently banning fracking within the Delaware River Watershed. It's why we are rejoining the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, and why we joined the US Climate Alliance committed to upholding the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Together, our actions have changed New Jersey's attitude, and we are turning our home state from a place of political stagnation to one of economic opportunity.

We are no longer accepting the way things are as the way they should be. We are continuing to push against an entrenched and cynical status quo with an agenda full of optimism and opportunity.

It is why we proposed a budget that doesn't just reflect dollars and cents, but more importantly, the values and commonsense of our residents. We cannot profess to believe in fairness unless we, ourselves, ensure fairness.

Years of underinvestment in our core assets and our people had eroded the value that New Jersey families had long been provided.

To keep us moving in the right direction, we need to ensure that we bring along our entire New Jersey family. It is why we are fighting for true tax fairness, so that the middle class and working families, our college students, our seniors, and our small businesses are no longer left shouldering the majority of the burden.

We had been told, for far too long, that if we just protect the very wealthy and the biggest corporations, somehow, someday, things would work out for the average family. But, we know trickle-down economics doesn't work. It doesn't create jobs. It doesn't lift wages. It does nothing but create more comfort for those at the top and at the expense of our shared future.

We cannot keep budgeting just for today, to tide us through another cycle and fiscal year, knowing that we'll be right back here next year. The decisions we made in our first 100 days have set us on a course for greater future financial stability – for the state and our residents.

It is this simple – we cannot rise unless we invest in our state.

For our taxpayers, it means making good on the promise of top-tier public schools, world-class colleges and universities, modern infrastructure and working mass transit, and fiscally responsible government – assets crucial to economic opportunity and an ever-improving quality of life.

This is what attracted families and businesses to New Jersey. And, restoring this promise is how we will, again.

Over the past 100 days, we have heard countless voices no longer willing to see their schools underfunded, or willing to endure commutes made more expensive and more unreliable.

New Jerseyans want to get value again from their investment in our state. They want us to be stronger and fairer.

We know the people of New Jersey are with us. We know they support ensuring that millionaires pay their fair share. And, we know they understand that investing in our state will take new revenues.

Yes, the millionaires tax is the right thing to do so we can invest directly in our middle-class and working families, and in our students. Yes, closing loopholes that help only the biggest companies and the billionaire hedge fund managers is the right thing to do to ensure tax fairness for our small businesses. And, yes, undoing the costly gimmicks of the past and resetting the sales tax at 7 percent is the right thing to do.

These are simply not ends unto themselves, but rather these are tools – the right tools – with which we can build a stronger and more resilient state.

Without this, we would be unable to put ourselves on the path to fully funding our public schools and expanding pre-K over the next four years. Without this we would not be putting a higher education within reach of more people, with new Tuition Aid Grants, and the ability of all residents to attend community college tuition-free.

Without this we would not be nearly tripling support for NJTRANSIT and protecting commuters from a fare hike.

Without this investment, we would not be able to invest in the workforce development programs we need for a stronger, more competitive future.

Without this investment, those who simply aspire to the middle class – as I did growing up in a working poor family – would see their dreams continue to flame out.

Without this investment, our middle-class would continue to pay more, and see less.

In the overall arc of our administration, 100 days is just a starting point. But we have been aggressive in restoring New Jersey's stature and in turning around our direction.

But, most of all, we have embraced the optimism of the moment.

A new administration signals a new beginning -- and we are embracing this opportunity. We embraced it in our first week, in marching alongside tens of thousands of New Jerseyans at the second annual Women's March, and we embraced it again last month when we joined thousands of young people marching for their lives.

In 100 days we have signaled that the days of put-downs and an incessant focus on perceived slights and shortcomings are over. We will no longer feed the national narrative that disparages us and gives short shrift to our people and our prospects.

In 100 days we have sought to lift up our forgotten communities and reset our statewide conversation from what government won't do, or can't do, to what we can do together by working in our shared best interests.

We cannot change everything in 100 days, but we certainly have changed our prospects.

The people of New Jersey did not elect us to simply muddle through another four years, lurching from crisis to crisis. They have asked us to be bold, to be visionary, to think big and act big.

They want us to charge ahead. We have, we are, and we will continue to do so. This is our moment. This is our chance to forever change the course of our state for the better.

I cannot tackle these challenges by myself. I need you with me. I need your ideas, I need you helping us carry out our message of optimism and opportunity. I need you to talk to your friends and neighbors. We do not succeed unless we all succeed.

Historians may argue about the importance of the first 100 days of any new administration. But, while they do, we will continue working. We will only judge ourselves by our own progress.

In 100 days we have laid a new foundation for governing -- a firmer footing that is restoring the value of New Jersey while protecting our New Jersey values.

We are dedicated to a simple, obvious truth: economic progress can't be made without social progress and social progress can't be achieved with economic progress.

And, upon this foundation – and together – we will build that stronger, fairer, and more just New Jersey.

Thank you so very much for being here. And, thank you for your continued partnership on this journey.

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