

Lieutenant Governor-elect Dr. Dale Caldwell's Inauguration Remarks As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Chief Justice Rabner and the distinguished Justices of our Supreme Court;

Senate President Scutari and Speaker Coughlin;

Majority Leaders Ruiz and Greenwald;

Minority Leaders Bucco and DiMaio;

Our legislative partners;

Thank you to Governor Murphy and Lieutenant Governor Way for your dedication to the state of New Jersey these last 8 years, and to the late Lieutenant Governor Shelia Oliver who was a mentor to me for many years;

Former governors Christie, Corzine, McGreevey, DiFrancesco, Whitman, Kean and former Lt. Governor Guadagno

Members of our Congressional Delegation;

And, most importantly, to Governor-elect, and soon to be Governor, Mikie Sherrill, thank you for asking me to join you on this incredible journey, thank you for your trust, your partnership, and your commitment to this great state.

To my daughter Ashley and my family, thank you for your unwavering love and support.

And to the people of New Jersey – thank you for placing your confidence in us.

It is an incredible honor to stand here today. Becoming Lieutenant Governor was not something I ever imagined growing up. In fact, there was a time in our country's history when such a moment would not have been possible.

Today is a reminder of what progress looks like. It is a reminder of what resilience, hope, and courage can achieve. And it is a reminder that our work of fulfilling the promise to We the People is never finished. It's a sacred promise to the families, the workers, the students, the seniors, the dreamers, and the doers who make this state what it is.

Yesterday, we honored Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose life continues to challenge each of us to push forward for justice and to fight to make that eternal promise a reality.

My father marched with Dr. King – and carried his message in his heart throughout his life. My father taught me that faith must be active, not passive. He taught me that justice is not an idea – it is a responsibility. And he taught me that service is not optional. Especially for those who have been blessed with opportunity.

My mother, Grace Estelle Dungee Caldwell, gave me the strength of her love, the wisdom of her faith, and the belief that education and compassion can transform lives.

Their values shaped the path that brought me here. It was faith that called me into ministry, and today I am humbled to serve as the first pastor to hold the office of Lieutenant Governor in New Jersey.

It was justice that led me to serve on the school board and eventually to lead a college – because I believe education is the key to opportunity and the foundation of a fair society.

It was service that inspired me to help small businesses and community organizations – the churches, the nonprofits, the family-run shops – the people who keep neighborhoods strong and who make our communities come alive.

My parents taught me that we must support those who too often go unseen or unheard. They taught me to champion small organizations, small businesses, and hardworking families who carry the weight of our communities on their backs.

Proverbs 31:8–9 tells us to: “speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves ... defend the rights of the poor and needy.” This verse is more than Scripture to me – it is a promise I make to you today.



It will be my guiding principle as your Lieutenant Governor. It is because of these convictions that I was excited to join Governor Sherrill in leading this state. I have seen firsthand her dedication, her discipline, and her unwavering commitment to the people of New Jersey. I have seen how she has dedicated her life to upholding the Constitution. I know we share a belief that every resident – every child, every family – deserves a real chance to thrive. Together, we will work tirelessly to serve this state with integrity, accountability, and compassion.

We step into leadership at a time of deep national division and growing anxiety. We have witnessed attacks on rights, freedoms, dignity, and truth. We have seen vulnerable communities targeted and democratic institutions threatened.

That is why I am deeply honored to serve not only as Lieutenant Governor but also as Secretary of State with the immense responsibility for safeguarding our elections and protecting the right to vote. The right to vote is the cornerstone of democracy. It gives every person a voice in shaping their future.

Dr. King reminded us that without the right to vote, “we cannot live as democratic citizens... we can only submit to the edict of others.” We will not allow that to happen in New Jersey.

Our administration will defend voting rights, protect the integrity of our elections, and ensure that every eligible New Jerseyan can participate freely, safely, and confidently.

But our work cannot stop at protecting democratic rights.

We must also restore trust in the institutions of our democracy that serve the public. For too many people, government feels like an obstacle rather than a partner. For many families, the systems designed to support them feel slow, confusing, or indifferent.

That’s why the first thing we did after winning this election was listen. And the message was clear: the status quo is not working.

That is why our administration is focused on lowering costs, strengthening small businesses, and expanding opportunity for every resident. Because that is what responsive leadership looks like.

But beyond policy, we must also strengthen the social fabric of our state. At a time when Washington is intent on tearing us apart, here in New Jersey, we must rebuild the trust between neighbors. In the church, we say: “Love your neighbor as yourself,” and in my church, we add: “We love you – and there is nothing you can do about it.” Loving your neighbor means respecting their dignity. It means valuing their humanity. It means creating a state where everyone belongs regardless of who they voted for or whether they voted at all. As your Lieutenant Governor, I promise to work for you, to fight for you, and to help you pursue your dreams.

It’s worth noting that both our State Constitution and the U.S. Constitution begin with the powerful promise and powerful words of “we the people.” The promise that all of us deserve to live the life we dream of and turning that promise into a reality will be the guiding principle of our administration. From Trenton, we can show the people of New Jersey – and the rest of country – what good, effective, and responsive government looks like.

New Jersey is uniquely positioned to lead the nation forward. We are one of the most diverse states in America. We have world-class talent, innovation, creativity, and determination. We are home to families who work hard, dream boldly, and refuse to give up.

I believe with all my heart that our best days are ahead of us. And I believe that together, with a strong sense of faith, justice, and service we can build a New Jersey where every resident has the chance to flourish.

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your Lieutenant Governor. Thank you for trusting me as your Secretary of State. And thank you for believing in a future that is brighter and more hopeful for all.

May God bless you.

May God bless the great state of New Jersey.

And may God bless the United States of America.

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TRANSITION 2026



Governor-elect Mikie Sherrill

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