



STATE OF NEW JERSEY  
GOVERNOR PHIL MURPHY



## Michael Noriega Delivers Remarks at New Jersey Supreme Court Nomination Announcement

05/15/2023

### Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Governor Murphy, thank you.

It is with great humility and a deep sense of responsibility that I stand before you today honored to accept the nomination for the position of Associate Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court.

On behalf of myself and my entire family, thank you for inviting me on this unbelievable journey. There are no words that can fully capture the tremendous privilege I feel in being nominated. I am humbled to find myself, once again, called upon to serve this great state and its people.

Our Supreme Court has received national recognition for its intellectual rigor and forward-thinking decisions. The opportunity to join its ranks is an incredible vote of confidence in the legal career I have built over the last two decades. I promise to do everything in my power to make your choice a meaningful one.

I could not proceed without first also thanking Governor Murphy's staff, in particular Chief Counsel Parimal Garg, for his professionalism and support. I say to you two things: I regret that we will likely have little interaction if I am fortunate enough to be confirmed...and also, sorry about the Knicks!

Any reservations I had about proceeding down a judicial path were resolved when I met the Governor's staff. They care deeply about selecting the right candidate above all else. It has been my privilege to work with them to reach this moment.

To the Governor's Judicial Advisory panel, led by former Chief Justice Zazzali, I say thank you. For those who are unaware, this panel is primarily composed of former Chief Justices and Associate Justices of the Supreme Court, whose love of the Court runs so deep that they continue to participate in the selection of its future members to ensure consistency of its great legacy. I hope to one day be in the same position, to continue to maintain the excellence of Our Court.

A personal thank you to Justice Barry Albin, whose seat I would ascend to if confirmed. I met him last week at an event where he received an award given to members of the bar who exemplify professionalism, dedication and passion for the law – an accolade few deserve more. I can only hope to meet the bar set by Justice Albin.

I also want to thank the members of the State Bar's Judicial and Prosecutorial Appointments Committee, the Senate Judiciary Committee, led by Chairman Stack, Senate President Scutari, and all of the members of the Senate that will give their time and attention in honor of their constitutional obligation to provide advice and consent.

To Senator Bramnick, thank you for your steadfast support and I am especially grateful to you for inviting me to be a member of your law firm over these past nine years. The decision changed my life and I would not be who I am today had I not met you.

To my family, friends, and colleagues that are present today or watching remotely: understand that your love and support is why I am here today. Many of you have been with me since childhood and I thank you each for being on this journey with me.

To my amazing wife Melissa, with whom I will celebrate 20 years of joyful marriage next week, I could not imagine life without you. Everything we have built is because of your strength. Thank you also for the greatest gift, our four beautiful daughters. The five of you are my life and everything I do is for all of you. Thank you, Emma, Abby, Becca, Katie and Melissa. You are my five best friends and I love you all more than you will ever know. To Amelia, my amazing mother-in-law, thank you for being such a wonderful friend and confidant.

I wanted to be a judge from the beginning of my legal career. I even investigated an LLM program while at Seton Hall – not really understanding how one becomes a judge and assuming it was a separate track in law school. My father and I also often discussed the prospect of being a judge.

I returned from Rutgers University to live at home during law school. My older brother Carlos moved out and my younger brother Joe took over his room on the far end of the house, leaving the smaller room that adjoined mine empty. I converted that room into an office. I proudly placed a Seton Hall sticker with a gold set of scales of justice on the wall. My dad jokingly, perhaps presciently, began to call that room the "courtroom" and he took to calling me "Judge." Being that the business he and my mother owned and operated was right downstairs, he would come up after a long day and always stop in the "courtroom" and excitedly ask what I was studying. We would often debate the legal issues in cases I was reading. We once spent three hours discussing adverse possession.

The night before he collapsed, a week before he passed away, I called my parents just to check in. I spoke to my mom before she handed the phone to my dad and he would later end the call as he always did, "I love you, hijito – bye, Judge."

He was the best man I have ever known. My father, Carlos Noriega, together with my wonderful mother, Tery Noriega, who is here with us today, made the great sacrifice of leaving their lives in Peru – careers as doctors, their extended family, and everything they knew behind – in the hopes of a better life in the United States for them and their future children. Thank you, Mom, for everything.

And here I stand with the possibility of achieving the highest honor of a legal career. I have loved being a lawyer; I started in the Public Defender's office on September 8, 2003, and that was the day I walked into a courtroom for the first time as an attorney. I was handed sixteen files, stepped into a holding cell, and made my first appearance on the record. I argued my first case before the court – after a ten-minute conversation with the client – who told me that he violated probation because his grandmother died. I also lost my first legal argument that day. The judge correctly pointed out that client's same grandmother had died on two other occasions and he was not accepting that excuse. My client was led away in handcuffs, but not before seeing my crestfallen face and patting me on the back saying, "It's ok, at least you tried."

I hope that I have done more than try in this career. I pray and hope that I have had a sincere positive impact on our legal system and the lives of the people that I have represented over these past 20 years. But now, my commitment is to all of the people of New Jersey, as I bring to bear my knowledge and experience to help shoulder this enormous responsibility I am honored to undertake.

And it is with that in mind that I accept this nomination, with humility and pride. Today I vow to work harder than I have ever worked and to honor my parents' sacrifice by leaving my mark and upholding our family's tradition of respect for the laws of this wonderful country, pride in its opportunity and devotion to its history.

I would like to again thank you, Governor, for this opportunity and I look forward to working with the members of the Senate for their consideration of my nomination.

Thank you.

### Governor Phil Murphy

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Office of Governor PO Box 001  
Trenton, NJ 08625  
609-292-6000