

Governor Christie's Full Remarks At The 2nd Annual Candlelight Vigil For Addiction

Thursday, December 7, 2017

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Governor Christie's Full Remarks At The 2nd Annual Candlelight ...

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Transcript:

Governor Christie: Thank you to all of you who are here tonight. You represent a small but important fraction of the people of our state and our country who are affected by this disease. First and most importantly, to the families here tonight who have lost loved ones to this disease you have my deepest sympathy and prayers for the loved ones you've lost and for those of you who survive to deal with the pain and the anguish of the lost that you've suffered. But I truly believe that you are here tonight because you understand that you are uniquely positioned to help prevent the next death. You are uniquely positioned to help to counsel those who are going through this disease. You are uniquely positioned to change the attitude of America towards this disease, and your presence tonight is a beginning to doing that. Second, to those people who are here tonight who are in recovery, I hope that you'll continue not only in working each and every day, to make sure that your recovery is a lifelong one, but just as importantly to understand that the gift of recovery which you have earned is a gift that you must pass on. The lights that you are holding tonight represent the light of your spirit. That light which can provide hope to the person who tonight is where you once were. At their lowest point, not believing that their life had any value, not understanding that recovery was possible for them, believing that somehow they had failed themselves, their families, their loved ones and that life in fact may not be worth living. You, you in recovery are the light that gives them hope. You in recovery are the example of how wonderful life can be. You, I believe, have a moral obligation not just to yourself and your families, but to those people who are suffering the way you once suffered to show them that there is an alternative. That their lives can be turned around, but that first they must put aside shame and put forward their request for help. We ask everyone tonight who listens to this who knows someone who is in the throes of their disease, or who is in the throes of their disease themselves, to choose help over

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helplessness, to choose hope over hopelessness, to reach their hand out to someone else to admit you are suffering from this disease and to ask for help. And my promise in return is when you ask for help, we will do everything we can to make sure help is there for you. For those who are out there who work every day on this problem we thank you for your commitment to this very simple principle. No life is disposable, no human being is beyond redemption, for anyone in our society who decides to make a moral judgement about those who are suffering from a chronic disease, then be the first to raise your hand and say you've never made a mistake, you've never made a bad judgement. Every time I go into a room and ask people that no one raises their hand, and what I say to them is, there but for the grace of God go I. We understand that the only way this problem is going to be solved is if we unite together to march in capitals all across this country, to demand that our loved ones who are suffering from this disease be treated like anyone else who has a disease in this country and get the help that they need and gets it now. Addiction is not a moral failing, addiction is a disease. It's no different than diabetes, it's no different than heart disease, it's no different than high-blood pressure, it is a chronic disease which can be treated that is contributed to by human conduct. But yet, we don't say that people who get cancer from smoking are getting what they deserve, we try to treat them and cure them. We don't say that people whose conduct is contributed to their diabetes are getting what they deserve and that we should let them die. Yet, somehow we are ashamed to come forward and ask that those who suffer from this disease deserve exactly the same treatment as those who suffer from those other diseases. That needs to end and you need to demand that your government respond to 64,000 deaths in America last year. One hundred and seventy-five of our citizens are dying every day and they don't have to. We have a 9/11 every two and half weeks in this country due to this disease. How much would we spend to stop a terrorist organization who is killing 175 Americans a day? We are killing ourselves with these drugs and we need to stand up and say enough. We need our government to step up and say, we will help to participate in ending this disease—making it a chronic treatable disease. This is no different than AIDS. No different. And we stood up and found treatments for that so that people today who suffer from that disease can live, and live happy and productive lives. Our people need the same thing. But after eight years in this job, let me give you some advice. Nobody, nobody, gets the attention from government that they need without asking for it, without demanding it. We can no longer sit on the sidelines and be ashamed, be afraid. All of you have a story to tell. And until you tell that story over and over again and as publicly as you can—this message won't get through. We have a new government here in 41 days, you need to tell your story to the new governor. You need to make sure that he understands that this isn't just the philosophy of one governor—that this is the need and the demand of the people of the State of New Jersey and that we will not stand for any less attention being paid to this problem. In fact, we need even more. But he needs to hear that from all of you. In the end, I believe that every life is an individual gift from God. I have four children and when each one of them was born I remember thinking to myself, what an amazing moment this is that a human life has come into the world with endless possibility and each one of us as we looked at our new born child believed that there was nothing in life that wasn't possible for them. That life winds up taking lots of twists and turns but it never becomes less precious. It never becomes less valuable. No matter what mistakes or misjudgments that life makes, it is still an individual gift from God. And we must protect it and cherish it no matter what condition we find it in. If we find it perfectly healthy and beautiful—we need to protect it. When it is sick we need to try to heal it. When it is wounded, we need to stand up for it and help them back to their feet. I believe that my children's life is precious. I believe the life of the 16-year-old addicted girl sitting on the floor of a prison somewhere in this state, that that life is precious. I believe that the life of the 40-year-old lawyer who's addicted to pain killers and alcohol and throwing his life away is precious. I believe the life of the 50-year-old woman who is working at the local restaurant and can't show up to work in the morning because she can't get out of bed because of her addiction, that life is precious. It is not for us to judge. It's for us to help. You're here tonight because you believe that. I know I'm preaching to the converted. You wouldn't be standing in the cold tonight if you didn't have a story to tell and if that story that's in your heart didn't compel you to be here. And I suspect that most of you are here because that story is the most personal kind. Either your own or the one of someone that you love and is today suffering or that you love and has unfortunately been lost. Let's make sure that each one of those lives has meaning to it beyond the life it led before it was lost. Let's make sure that we spend our time and our energy making folks know that that person was precious and important and valuable and loved and that their example of their life as it was lived can help to heal someone else who's suffering. This will not be fixed tomorrow or next week or even next year, but we cannot stand by idly any longer and let 175 people die a day. I will not be able to sleep at night without working on this and continue to work on it well beyond when I leave working here. I will not give in or give up and you cannot either. Your loved ones mean more than that to all of us. So, to the people here tonight, I can't thank you enough for coming here. For all the people who spoke to you before, I can't thank them enough for being willing to stand behind this microphone and tell you their story and how much they care. Love, compassion, understanding, respect for every human life can solve this problem but only if we raise our voices. I want you to answer one question for me before I go. Are you willing to stand up and speak out to help, to solve, this problem? If you're willing to do it, so am I. Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah. Make sure that we spend this holiday season celebrating the preciousness of life and doing everything we can to make sure that the lives we've lost will not have been lost in vein. If you promise to do that, I promise to do it, also. God Bless each and every one of you. We love you. Thank you.

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