

Governor Phil Murphy

# The Stronger and Fairer New Jersey We Built Together

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***The Stronger and Fairer New Jersey We Built Together***

**2026 State of the State Address**

**Tuesday, January 13, 2026**

*Remarks As Prepared For Delivery*

Lieutenant Governor Way.

Senate President Scutari. Assembly Speaker Coughlin.

Majority Leaders Ruiz and Greenwald. Minority Leaders Bucco and DiMaio. Members of the 222nd Legislature, with special thanks to the rockin' bipartisan escort committee that walked me into this chamber.

Chief Justice Rabner and Justices of the Supreme Court.

Members of the Cabinet. Senior staff.

Former Governors DiFrancesco, McGreevey, and Corzine.

At a moment like this, I know we all miss former Governor — and the longest-serving lawmaker in New Jersey history — Dick Codey, who we lost over the weekend.

Whether as an elected leader, a youth basketball coach, or even a funeral director: Dick was always there for us. He was there for me back when it was cold, dark, and lonely. And, he would have been here today. Dick's wife, Mary Jo, and their son, Kevin, are with us this afternoon. To them, and to the entire Codey family: We are sending you our deepest condolences and love. God bless you all.

First Lady Tammy Murphy and our four children, Josh, Emma, Charlie, and Sam.

Distinguished faith leaders, veterans, our brothers and sisters in labor, friends.

And my fellow New Jerseyans.

  
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I come before you today with two words: Thank you.

Thank you for entrusting me with the sacred responsibility of serving as Governor.

Thank you for welcoming me into your homes, your workplaces, your schools, and your houses of worship.

Thank you for always telling me the truth and for being authentic.

And if I may summon the spirit of my dear friend and another one of my predecessors, Governor Brendan Byrne, thank you for occasionally waving to me with all five fingers.

But thank you, most of all, for joining me in this journey to ensure we leave our children a state that is better than we found it.

Eight years ago this month, we began our partnership.

And in just under eight, short days: it will come to a close.

So, during these final hours, it fills me with pride and joy to say:

Together, we have built a New Jersey that is stronger AND fairer than ever before.

We were who we said we'd be — and we did what we said we'd do.

Now, I know these are words that many of you have heard before.

But, there is a reason I have been relentless in realizing my vision for a “stronger and fairer” New Jersey since Day One — and really, since I launched my first campaign back in 2016, a full decade ago.

This isn't simply a slogan.

It is my North Star. One that has guided me since my childhood, throughout my career, and at every stage of our journey together.

It is the same vision that inspired me to step into the arena — as a candidate — for the first time in my entire life.

Why?

Well, let us remember where our journey began.

Back in January 2018, New Jersey was a state in dire need of a turnaround.

We were a state that had been failed by previous generations of leaders. We were a state where the people — especially our working families — had lost faith in Trenton. And we were a state whose limitless potential was not being seized.

In short: When I entered office, the needs of the people were being pushed aside.

And in each one of our state's families who were being neglected and overlooked, I saw my own family.

I saw my parents who – like many – struggled to stay afloat financially.

My dad did the best he could to put food on the table. And my mom was a secretary by day, and an overextended caregiver by night. To this day: I have no idea how they managed.

Now, obviously – in the decades since: a whole lot has changed.

In my life, I have had the privilege of traveling across the globe as a banker. I've served as the top diplomat to one of our nation's most important allies. And, of course, I've been blessed with the greatest privilege of all: Serving as Governor to the nine-and-a-half million New Jerseyans who call our great state home.

But no matter how high I have climbed in my career, I am still – more than anything – defined by my childhood, and the parents who raised me.

In my heart of hearts, I am – more than anything – that kid with a goofy grin who grew up in a family that was middle class on a good day.

As a child, my siblings and I lived in a house that was too small. So small, in fact, that I slept in my parents' bedroom until I was nine.

By age 13, it was my turn to help put food on the table. If you can believe it: Phil Murphy the investment banker got his start as Phil Murphy the dishwasher. And by the way, I still do the dishes.

The point is, we did not have much. But we had each other.

And despite our circumstances, my family dared to dream of – and work toward – a better future.

Ours was a home of hope. Hope grounded not just in love and support for each other. But in our unshakeable faith.

Faith that was best embodied by the two portraits that hung next to our kitchen table: The Pope and John F. Kennedy. The two of them were our special guests for dinner every night. Because my parents revered the man they considered closest to God, and they also liked the Pope.

For my siblings and me, the heroes of our generation – JFK, RFK Sr., MLK Jr. – were a constant source of inspiration.

They instilled in us an unwavering belief that, when times were hard, our government would have our back. But, just as importantly, they also inspired us to take ownership over our own destinies.

As then-Senator John F. Kennedy exhorted, during a speech at Loyola College in 1957:

"Let us not despair but act. Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer but the right answer. Let us not seek to fix the blame for the past, let us accept our own responsibility for the future."

That sentiment is at the heart of who I am — a practical optimist.

Because it is not good enough to believe in a brighter future, you also have to step up and build that future.

And, as a fella who grew up during the Civil Rights Movement, I have always believed in something else, as well: We only win when we ALL win.

Because all too often, our political decision-making is reduced to a binary choice.

All too often, we are told it is this lane, or that lane. Faster growth, or greater equality. The Republican way, or the Democratic way.

But the reality is, we need not accept these false choices.

We need not accept the fiction that a winner here means a loser there.

I never have. And I never will.

Because our charge is making sure everybody makes it past the finish line, and to build a better future for every family — from the bottom up and the middle out.

This is all to say: my own life story — as well as the ideals that are deeply rooted in my soul — prove one thing plain and simple:

The best governing principle is not this or that.

It's not stronger or fairer.

It's stronger AND fairer.

And there is nothing and nobody who could ever convince me otherwise.

And that is what gave me the courage, as Governor, to go against the naysayers, the skeptics, and the status quo.

It's what inspired me, over these past eight years, to be who I said I'd be — and do what I said I'd do.

Together, we broke free from the narrow constraints of the past — and charged forward — unbridled and unburdened.

We pledged to fight for every New Jerseyan who shares my family's story.

And when they told us what couldn't be done — we said: Just watch.

At every turn, we have stayed true to our vision for a stronger and fairer New Jersey. And in so doing, we proved them wrong.

When they told us raising the minimum wage would kill jobs and crash the economy, what did we do?

We passed a law nearly doubling the minimum wage — AND built the fastest-growing economy in the entire Northeast. All at the same time.

When they told us we had to choose between fighting for workers or supporting small business owners, what did we do?

We created more good-paying jobs than New Jersey has ever seen — AND helped more new small businesses open their doors than ever before.

When they told us that asking the wealthy to pay their fair share would drive them away, what did we do?

We enacted a new millionaire's tax — AND, by the way, we have more millionaires today in New Jersey than ever before and more families are calling New Jersey home than ever before.

When they told us that reforming a broken criminal justice system would jeopardize public safety, what did we do?

We reduced our state's prison population to its lowest levels in decades — AND brought homicides and shootings down to record lows at the same time.

When they told us that we'd have to decide between supporting our children or easing the property tax burden, what did we do?

We increased funding for our K-12 schools to their highest levels in history — AND delivered more property tax relief than any Administration in history. And a big thanks goes to the leadership of Senate President Scutari and Speaker Coughlin!

When they told us that it would be impossible to rebuild trust in Trenton's fiscal leadership without making devastating budget cuts, what did we do?

We restored funding for those long-neglected priorities — pensions, public education, public transit, women's health care — AND secured NINE consecutive credit rating upgrades in just three years after a generation of downgrades.

And while this list may be long, the lesson — my friends — is this:

Building a stronger and fairer state is not only possible.

It is absolutely essential. And it is our greatest responsibility, as leaders.

And we achieved all of this — together — because we were the Administration that governed by the principle of "and" — not "or."

We proved that — when we live by our Jersey values — our state government can serve the needs of working people, first and foremost.

And it is thanks to everything we have accomplished over these past eight years that, today, we are a state brimming with opportunity for all.

Today in New Jersey, there is a generation of working parents who are finally earning a living wage and enjoying stronger benefits, like paid family leave, so they can afford to take their kids down the Shore for a well-deserved vacation. Or, simply: save money for a dignified retirement.

Today in New Jersey, there are grandparents who can finally afford to retire here at home, instead of moving elsewhere, so they can stay close to their kids and their grandkids, and form memories that will last a lifetime.

Today in New Jersey, our children in cities like Camden, Trenton, and Newark are finally receiving the resources and support they need to learn, so they no longer have to settle for under-funded classrooms, or inadequate child care.

Now, as I say all of this, I must also acknowledge that, of course: we have not solved all of our problems.

The sad fact is, our families are still being squeezed by an affordability crisis that has swept across every community in the nation.

But, here in New Jersey – we, together, have made it easier for our families to bear that burden.

By increasing property tax relief. By lowering the costs of essentials like health care, housing, and higher education. By creating new economic opportunities, in the industries of the future, for workers and entrepreneurs all across our state. And by remaining the quintessential organized labor state.

So, when people ask me to define my legacy – our legacy – yes, it is all of these things. But it is also much simpler.

New Jersey IS stronger and fairer. That is the legacy.

And though it may seem, at this late stage in our journey, that everything we have accomplished was destined to be done, let us remember: None of the progress we have made was inevitable.

And it certainly wasn't easy.

Over the course of this journey, we faced challenges that nobody could have ever predicted.

But, we never shrunk from confronting them.

And, even more importantly: We always upheld our Jersey values in overcoming them.

Chief among those challenges: The coronavirus pandemic – the worst public health crisis of our lifetimes.

As we all remember, back in the Spring of 2020, New Jersey was ground zero for COVID-19.

In fact, I still remember the day March 4, 2020. I was undergoing surgery to remove a cancerous tumor from my kidney. And when I woke up after the operation, the world had changed.

I opened my phone to a message that New Jersey had confirmed its first case of COVID-19.

Over the subsequent years, we followed the science at every turn. We made hard, but necessary, decisions. And we turned down the noise of disinformation, and instead, amplified the voices of the doctors and public health

professionals who were trained to lead us through this unprecedented crisis.

We leaned on the wisdom of our colleagues – like the former Commissioner of Health, Judy Persichilli, who still needs no introduction.

Judy's own grandmother was a victim of the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic. And back during the early days of COVID, when she joined me for our daily press briefings – by the way we did over 250 of them – Judy always reminded us that the steps we were asking folks to take – like staying home or masking up – are the very same steps that could have saved her grandmother's life.

Ultimately, we lost more than 35,000 New Jerseyans to COVID – a number that, to this day, is impossible to comprehend. A number that is compounded by the thousands upon thousands of family members, friends, and loved ones who are still grieving.

To those same New Jerseyans, I say today: We grieve with you.

Though the pandemic may, thankfully, be behind us – the memory of the New Jerseyans we lost will live on forever.

And this afternoon, I also want to express my eternal gratitude to all of the first responders – the EMTs, the nurses, the doctors, the police officers, the firefighters, and everyone who worked around-the-clock to help save lives during the pandemic, like the retired Superintendent of the New Jersey State Police, Pat Callahan.

Pat was supposed to be here with us today. But tragically, we lost his wife, Linda, over the weekend. We are sending our sincerest condolences and prayers to Pat and the entire Callahan family.

For many New Jersey heroes like Pat, public service is a family tradition. His father was a Major with the New Jersey State Police. The principles of "Honor, Duty, and Fidelity" run deep in his blood.

And whenever New Jersey needed Pat, his fellow State Troopers, as well as our valiant New Jersey National Guardsmen, and every first responder: they answered the call. Not just during the pandemic, but in the wake of devastating natural disasters like floods and wildfires.

They showed up. They saved lives. And they embodied the very meaning of Jersey Strong.

So, to Pat, to all of our law enforcement officers, first-responders, veterans, and medical professionals, I say: Thank you.

Over these past eight years, the people of New Jersey not only stepped up when crises like COVID hit our communities. We also stepped up to confront national crises – like the shameful efforts to undermine American democracy.

I will always remember January 6, 2021. And not just because it was a day when a literal mob stormed and assaulted the citadel of our nation's democracy.

It was also a day when we lost an American hero – and one of New Jersey's very own: United States Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick.

Just last week, a few days after the fifth anniversary of the January 6 insurrection, I had the honor of traveling to South River — Officer Sicknick's hometown. And there, the New Jersey State Police Honor Guard laid down a wreath at a plaque commemorating his sacrifice.

And today, we are also joined by Officer Sicknick's brother, Ken Sicknick. Ken, on behalf of all of New Jersey, allow me to say: Thank you — and God bless you, your family, and especially your brother's memory.

But more than merely honoring heroes like Officer Sicknick with our words, we have also honored them with our actions.

Thanks to the leadership of Lieutenant Governor and Secretary of State Tahesha Way, New Jersey's democracy is stronger, and more secure, than ever before.

We have set the national standard for protecting the integrity of our democratic process. From expanding early in-person voting, to restoring voting rights to more than 80,000 people on probation or parole, to establishing automatic voter registration, we have helped a record number of eligible voters turn out to cast their ballots.

In fact, just this past November, we saw more voters turn out in a gubernatorial election than ever before.

And this is far from the only national challenge we have taken on as one New Jersey.

When I was elected — and re-elected — I pledged to never back down when and if our New Jersey values were under attack.

And on this front, as on every front: We did what we said we'd do — because we were who we said we'd be.

When the U.S. Supreme Court launched an unprecedented assault on our constitutional rights — namely, abortion rights — we, in New Jersey, fought back.

In fact, months before the Court issued its dreadful Dobbs decision, we took action and codified the right to abortion.

And in the years since then — at a time when extremist politicians have put a target on the backs of women — we have firmly established New Jersey as a safe haven for reproductive freedom. We have made contraception available to women without a prescription — even women who are not from New Jersey — and we restored funding for Planned Parenthood and family planning services — which, I might add, were defunded under the previous Administration.

And the sad reality is: The Dobbs decision is just one example of how this Supreme Court majority has eroded trust in our federal judiciary — and our system of government, more broadly.

But every time this Court has issued a dangerous, misguided ruling — on gun safety or the environment, for instance — we, in New Jersey, have illuminated a better path forward.

I have had the privilege of appointing five Justices to our State Supreme Court: Justices Fabiana Pierre-Louis, Rachel Wainer Apter, Douglas Fasciale, Michael Noriega, and John Hoffman. Together, they represent a diversity of life experiences and viewpoints. And they are members of both political parties.

I know the five of them will continue to serve honorably alongside Chief Justice Stuart Rabner and Justice Anne Patterson for years to come.

And why have I been committed to maintaining a balanced judiciary in New Jersey?

Because it is the best way to restore public confidence in the Rule of Law.

And during our time together, we have seen attacks on the Rule of Law, not just in America, but around the world, in the form of armed conflicts that have hit close to home here in New Jersey.

But in the face of unspeakable violence and tragedy — particularly in Ukraine and the Middle East — we have come together, once again — as one New Jersey — to reject hate and embrace our greatest strength of all: our diversity.

So, from a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic, to an assault on our nation's democracy and on our fundamental freedoms, to devastating armed conflicts across the globe, we have seen it all.

And at the same time, we have also seen three different presidencies in just eight years.

Think about this for a moment: I have served as Governor during a Trump Administration, a Biden Administration, and now, a second Trump Administration.

But no matter who was in the White House — our Administration's priority has always been finding common ground.

Over the years, I have worked with both President Biden and President Trump to save lives from COVID-19, and to secure long overdue investments in our infrastructure — like the Portal North Bridge.

And, at the same time, when President Trump has tried to attack our communities and our families, we have always fought back. We have taken them to court. And more often than not: We have won.

We have waged these fights because our fundamental rights are never up for debate in New Jersey.

And to all of our immigrant families, allow me to say the following: I can only imagine how harrowing the past year has been. But rest assured: New Jersey is your home. We have always supported you. And we always will.

And beyond the big, global challenges that have come our way these past eight years, I would also like to take this opportunity to reflect on the hard personal losses we have suffered.

Losses that are still felt deeply, today — like that of Louisa Carman, a brilliant young member of our team in the Governor's Office who died in a tragic car crash two years ago this month.

But Louisa's legacy endures. Not just in the hearts of our colleagues, but in a transformative piece of legislation: The Louisa Carman Medical Debt Relief Act.

In under two years, this law has helped eliminate over a billion dollars in medical debt for almost 800,000 New Jerseyans. And that financial relief is more than a clean slate. It means that thousands of our neighbors have finally been freed from a crushing financial weight only because they sought critical, if not life-saving, health care.

And we have also carried forward the legacies of the members of our Cabinet who, sadly, are no longer with us.

New Jersey legends like the former President of the Board of Public Utilities: Joe Fiordaliso.

Joe was instrumental in setting New Jersey on course to a cleaner, more sustainable future. A future where we meet our responsibility to combat climate change while also creating new sources of affordable, reliable energy that lower costs in the long-term.

And I'd like to thank Joe's wife, Marilyn, and their son, Joe Jr., for being with us today to honor his incredible legacy.

And of course, we also continue to mourn the loss of my former partner in government, a New Jersey icon, and a person I admired and loved: Lieutenant Governor Sheila Y. Oliver.

As Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs, Sheila fought for our state's forgotten families every single day – in cities like Paterson, Elizabeth, Atlantic City, and beyond. And her commitment to creating a more just and inclusive future is central to our Administration's vision for New Jersey.

And today, Sheila's legacy is being carried forward, not only through historic policies to expand affordable housing, or to combat racial injustice in all its forms.

It is also being carried forward through the Sheila Y. Oliver Foundation, led by her niece Renee – who is with us today – and the other members of the Oliver family. This Foundation is dedicated to a noble mission, one that Sheila advanced throughout her entire life: mentoring and empowering a new generation of leaders to build a more just and equitable state.

So, across the board, from the big, global crises to the deep, personal losses, this much is clear:

We have emerged from every challenge ever more determined to build a stronger and fairer New Jersey.

No matter what obstacles we faced, we were who we said we'd be – and did what we said we'd do.

And when I say "we" – I mean it.

Because leading our state's government has always been a team sport. And everything we have accomplished was made possible by the thousands upon thousands of public servants whose work is so often over-looked and under-appreciated.

They deserve all the credit in the world.

Because, while I may be the front man of the Murphy Administration, this afternoon – for one last time – I want us to give a big round of applause to all of the members of the band who have been holding it down these past eight years.

Let's hear it for all of the dedicated public sector workers who helped more New Jerseyans than ever before sign up for affordable health care coverage. Or helped put us on track to provide free, universal pre-K in every corner of New Jersey. Or helped nearly double the amount of property tax relief we have delivered to our state's homeowners and renters during our time in office.

To all of these heroic public servants — and especially all of my Chiefs and front office colleagues, both past and present — I say “thank you” from the bottom of my heart.

And, as a point of personal privilege: I must also take this opportunity to give a big, ol’ Jersey shout out to the person I’d be nothing without. The woman who I love more today than ever before. The visionary behind our success in transforming the maternal and infant health landscape, with efforts like Family Connects NJ — the most robust nurse home visitation program for new mothers and babies in the entire nation.

Let’s hear it for the fighting First Lady, and the gal of my dreams: Tammy Snyder Murphy!

When I was elected, I promised that Tam and I would be a team. And true to that promise: she has been the inspiration behind some of our greatest accomplishments.

And with her help, along with all of the public servants who have been with us since Day One, we have succeeded together — and we have soared together.

Through it all, Tammy and I have always been able to count on the boundless support and love of our four children. I would never pass up an opportunity to embarrass them on the biggest possible stage, so, to Josh, Emma, Charlie, and Sam: Thank you for your endurance, your resilience, your passion, and your love.

And it is thanks to every New Jerseyan who has worked day and night — here in the State House, and in communities up and down our state — that, in 2026, New Jersey is not just stronger and fairer.

We are far more prepared and better-positioned to own the future.

Look no further than all of the new start-ups that have sprung up from Hoboken to Hopewell, or the cutting-edge research hubs coming to life, from Newark to New Brunswick.

Wherever you look, this much is without dispute: New Jersey is ready to compete — and win — in the economies of tomorrow.

Because, together: we have revived our reputation as a global home of innovation.

Under the leadership of the former CEO of the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, Tim Sullivan — and all of his tremendous colleagues — we have launched 12 Strategic Innovation Centers that are changing the game for our economy. And with each one of these ventures, New Jersey’s brightest minds — entrepreneurs, academics, researchers — are coming together to pioneer breakthroughs in the life sciences, fintech, aerospace — and beyond.

And, the way I see it: The steps we have taken to super-charge our state’s innovation economy will be our salvation.

Because though the entrepreneurial seeds we are planting may not bloom today, or tomorrow, in the years to come, they will blossom. In the form of the next Prudential, Johnson & Johnson, or Campbell’s.

And once that time comes — there will be endless fruit for the plucking. In the form of new growth, new tax revenue, and of course: new, good-paying jobs in the industries of the future.

And when we talk about building the New Jersey of tomorrow, I must also mention one industry that is rising up at a

truly cinematic pace: Our film and television production industry.

In Fort Monmouth, Netflix has already broken ground on a state-of-the-art, 500,000-square-foot film production facility that will put thousands of New Jerseyans to work for years to come.

In the great Brick City, Lionsgate is building New Jersey's first purpose-built film and television production complex.

And in Bayonne, we are constructing the largest ground-up movie studio in all of North America: 1888 Studios. And the folks at Paramount Skydance have already signed up for a long-term lease.

That's right: Netflix. Lionsgate. Paramount. These are the biggest names in the business. And they are all putting down roots in the Garden State.

So, Hollywood — you better watch your back. Because the state that gave us Tony Soprano is hot on your heels.

Over the years, I've declared that New Jersey is ready for our close-up.

But now? It's time to shout "Action!" and get the cameras rolling.

And New Jersey is also paving the path forward for another realm with massive potential: generative Artificial Intelligence.

Now, I get it: At this point, we are all tired of hearing about the hype around AI. And many are — rightfully — concerned about its impact on the job market, or even on our ability to discern fact from fiction.

But, I mention AI today because I firmly believe that — within the next few years — it will fundamentally change how we navigate our daily lives. I don't think we yet understand the depth of change in store for all of us.

So, as a state, we have two choices: step aside, watch, and wait — or step up and shape AI's future on our terms.

That is exactly why, two years ago, I stood at this very podium and announced the launch of New Jersey's AI Moonshot.

I pledged to set our state on a course to a brighter future. One in which AI helps unite and empower our people — instead of dividing and displacing us.

I promised to invest in our students, workers, and innovators — so they can work together to unlock new, AI-powered breakthroughs that change lives — all around the world — for the better.

Back then, I said that the future of AI has yet to be written — and we, in New Jersey, can be its author.

So, I think it's time for a status report. Because over the past two years, we have proudly established New Jersey as a leader in AI. And we have done so while also upholding our New Jersey values.

We partnered with two of the most respected organizations in the world — Princeton University and Microsoft — to launch the New Jersey AI Hub, alongside New Jersey's very own AI hyperscaler, Coreweave. The hub is where our state's innovators and intellectuals are coming together to unlock new discoveries and breakthroughs.

In partnership with the New Jersey Office of Innovation — now known as the New Jersey Innovation Authority — we have trained our public sector workers to use secure AI platforms, so our government can be more effective and more responsive in serving our constituents.

With the “NJ AI Assistant,” for instance, we have helped homeowners and renters access their ANCHOR benefits — by increasing the number of successfully resolved calls by 50 percent.

Our Administration has even used AI to shore up our safety net. It has helped us identify and feed 100,000 food-insecure children who may have otherwise gone hungry.

That is real, meaningful AI-powered progress.

And, at the same time, New Jersey has also led the nation in addressing the risks presented by AI as well as other emerging technologies.

Last April, I signed a law establishing new civil and criminal penalties for “Deepfakes” — which are a danger to our children as well as our democracy. And this law is, honestly, a starting point.

As a state that is shaping the future of the innovation economy, we also have a responsibility to lead the way in protecting our children from threats to their health and well-being.

In that spirit, last week, I had the chance to visit Ramsey High School in Bergen County, where I signed legislation establishing a bell-to-bell ban on cell phones in K-12 schools.

Ask just about any parent or educator in a school district that has already taken this step. They will tell you: The results speak for themselves. Kids are more focused. Less anxious. And they are socializing and laughing with each other — not through a screen — but in the hallways and classrooms.

The law is common sense. And frankly, as someone who advocated for youth mental health as the Chair of the National Governors Association, I think we should go even further.

Last month, lawmakers in Australia did something remarkable. They began enforcing a law that bans anyone under the age of 16 from accessing social media. Period.

Now, of course: a policy like this raises no shortage of questions. Questions about enforcement, and even the limits of government. But, in my view: It’s the kind of big swing we need to take in New Jersey and as a country.

And I am incredibly grateful that Governor-Elect Mikie Sherrill has also identified children’s online safety as a major priority for her incoming Administration. But more on Mikie in a moment.

The bottom line is: We have seen the impact smartphones and social media have had on young New Jerseyans. As a parent, I’ve seen it first-hand. It’s time to step up and protect our kids. We owe it to them, as well as future generations.

So, from building out entirely new industries, like AI and fintech, to enacting nation-leading laws to mitigate the risks of new tools and technologies, the future of our state is taking shape in a big way.

By virtually every metric: Our economy is on the move. We have cultivated the most talented workforce on the planet. And our innovation ecosystem is second-to-none.

So, at a time when New Jersey is ascendant, there is only one thing that can stand in our way.

And that is ourselves.

We cannot repeat the mistakes of the past. Mistakes made by both parties.

That is why, when I entered office in 2018, I promised to turn things around as Governor.

And today, it gives me great pride to say: We have lived up to that promise.

We made the full payment into our state's pension system FIVE years in a row — and for the first time in a generation.

We made long-neglected, but desperately-needed, investments in our state's future. From fully funding New Jersey's school funding formula for the first time in history to rebuilding our roads, railways, tunnels, and bridges.

And even though we inherited a paltry \$409 million surplus, our Administration is leaving the next Governor a surplus that is more than 15 times greater — at nearly \$7 billion.

And even better, in the process of leading this turnaround, we also secured NINE credit rating upgrades in just three years.

Let's put that in context: Before I entered office, the last time New Jersey received a credit rating upgrade was in 2005. And the last time before that? The same year the world was introduced to a galaxy far, far away and disco mania was sweeping the nation: 1977.

But, my point here is not to pat ourselves on the back.

It is to offer a word of caution.

It took eight years of diligent, disciplined leadership to get our fiscal house in order — and to build a state that is trusted again.

But folks, if we lose our focus: All of the progress we made could be wiped away.

This isn't about me. And it isn't about you.

It's about New Jersey.

So, to my colleagues to my left, I say this: Fiscal responsibility is not an option — it is an obligation. The need to spend within our means, while also paying our long overdue bills, has never been more urgent.

And to my colleagues to my right, I say this: Fiscal responsibility also means paying up where it counts. Some things, it turns out, are worth paying for. Please: Remember to invest in the priorities that make New Jersey great. Public

education. Health care. Mass transit. Our innovation economy.

We cannot cut corners when it comes to building New Jersey's future. And investing in these priorities today will save us a whole lot of money tomorrow.

Making these decisions is never easy. And of course, there are many risks that lie ahead. Many that we cannot fully predict.

But that is the burden we bear as leaders. Because when it comes to governing — there is no finish line. There is no moment where you can stop and declare "Mission Accomplished."

As always, the mission goes on. The work continues.

And there is no better example, perhaps, than NJ TRANSIT. Fixing NJ TRANSIT has yet to kill me. But, it is an undertaking that will outlast my time as Governor.

As our state's commuters will be quick to tell you: the agency is not perfect. But it is also lightyears ahead of where it was. From improving reliability to replacing every single outdated bus and rail car in NJ TRANSIT's fleet by 2031, we have set in motion a renaissance for the nation's third-largest public transit system.

So, it is no longer a question of "if" we will fix NJ TRANSIT — it is simply a matter of when these improvements will all come online.

And, on NJ TRANSIT, along with every aspect of our state, the fact is: I have never been more optimistic about New Jersey's future than I am today.

Not just because it is my nature.

But because our state is in good hands.

At a time of great uncertainty, we have a superhero waiting in the wings.

Our great Governor-Elect, and the pride of Montclair: Mikie Sherrill, along with her right-hand man, the outstanding Lieutenant Governor-Elect: Dale Caldwell.

Mikie has done it all. Like a true Naval aviator, she has navigated the chaos in Congress with grit and grace. She has inspired millions of New Jerseyans. And Mikie and Dale are going to be amazing.

This job is not easy. But it is the journey of a lifetime.

Because to lead our state is to love it.

And as we prepare for the changing of the guard, here in the State House, the reality is: This transition comes at an auspicious moment for New Jersey.

With the dawn of 2026, we mark the beginning of one of the most iconic chapters in our state's history.

A chapter in which our New Jersey pride will be on full display, with the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution and the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

These will be two of the most defining events of the century. Period.

And each of them will play out right here in the Garden State — in front of the entire world.

But, beyond the spectacle and the excitement, there is something deeply meaningful about these two marquee moments unfolding at the same time.

Because together, they are a bridge between New Jersey's PAST and our FUTURE.

With the commemoration of America's 250th birthday, we will have an opportunity to show the world that New Jersey was the Crossroads of the American Revolution.

We will make sure our children never forget how George Washington turned the tide right here in Trenton.

Or how more Revolutionary battles took place in our backyard than in any other state.

Or the heroism of women like Mary Hays and the scores of Black New Jerseyans who fought alongside her at the Battle of Monmouth. They played an essential role in securing America's independence, at the expense of their own.

We will put a spotlight on all of these stories and more. Because — as President Ronald Reagan said in his own farewell Address — “If we forget what we did, we won't know who we are.”

But just as importantly, with the 2026 FIFA World Cup, we will also put a spotlight on who we are — as New Jerseyans — 250 years later.

Because the World Cup is not just the biggest sporting event on the planet. It is not just an engine that will power more than \$4 billion in economic activity. Or bring in over two million visitors to our region. Or create more than 30,000 jobs.

The World Cup is, more than anything, an epic opportunity to show the world that New Jersey is the destination for dreamers and changemakers from across the globe. And that is a reputation we wear as a badge of honor.

And when the first match kicks off at MetLife Stadium on June 13 — communities up-and-down New Jersey will be overflowing with pride and joy.

Of course, we will all be counting down the minutes until we can cheer on Team USA, wherever and whenever they take the pitch.

But a similar swell of pride will be shared by all of the families who will see their ancestral stories represented at the World Cup.

A swell of pride that will be felt by all the folks gathering at tailgates in the Ironbound, to chant in support of Teams Portugal, Brazil, or Ecuador.

Or in all the cars rolling through downtown Elizabeth – honking with glee every time Colombia or Haiti scores a goal.

Or in all the families lining up – in the heart of the Meadowlands – to cheer on teams from across the globe who will be playing in New Jersey: Germany, France, Norway, Senegal, Morocco, Panama, England, and Brazil – all of it culminating in the biggest match of all, in East Rutherford, New Jersey: The FIFA World Cup Final on July 19!

In every one of these moments, the beautiful tapestry of New Jersey will be brighter and more vivid than ever before. Especially when we all come together to show our support for our favorite team of all: Team USA.

So later this summer – as we celebrate America’s 250th birthday and the world’s biggest sporting event, all at once – we are going to send one unequivocal message – loud and clear:

New Jersey is where the American Dream was born – and it is where the American Dream lives on.

It lives on in every diner – from the Chit Chat Diner in Hackensack, to the Deepwater Diner in Carneys Point.

It lives on in every house of worship.

It lives on in every student at Ramapo, Rutgers, or Rowan – especially those who, like me, are proud first-generation college students.

And the American Dream lives on in every worker rebuilding the boardwalk of Atlantic City or forging our future with the Gateway Tunnel, one shift at a time.

But no matter who you are, how you identify, or the way you pray – if you’re here in New Jersey, if you’re part of this big, boisterous family, you are writing the future of the American story.

And if anyone ever tells you otherwise, well.

You stand up straight.

You get in their face.

And you tell ‘em:

WE’RE FROM JERSEY BABY!!!

Thank you all so much. May God bless you and your families.

And may God continue to bless the great State of New Jersey and the United States of America.

**Governor Phil Murphy**

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