



[Speech](#)

[STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS • JANUARY 10 • 2006](#)

**Governor Richard J. Codey
State of the State
Tuesday, January 10, 2006**

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Mr. Speaker ...

Madam Chief Justice ...

Justices of the Supreme Court ...

Members of the Legislature ...

Members of the Cabinet ...

Senator Lautenberg, soon to be Senator Menendez ...

Congressmen Pallone, Andrews, and Ferguson ...

Former Governors Florio, DiFrancesco, and Bennett ...

United States Attorney Christie

Honored guests ...

and fellow New Jerseyans ...

To Speaker Roberts, Congratulations.

You have worked long and hard for the people of the state of New Jersey and your election as Speaker has been well earned.

Joe, the sons of funeral directors seem to do very well in New Jersey government.

Speaker Roberts, working together, we will help Governor Corzine deliver a better New Jersey for our constituents.

To Former Speaker Sires ... you have always been a man of your word, a decent and compassionate public official dedicated to your constituents.

Thank you for your service as Speaker ... for your friendship ... and your partnership.

To Majority Leaders Kenny and Watson-Coleman ...

Whatever the issue, you have always been voices of integrity and compassion ... and our public policy is better for your service.

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To Minority Leaders Lance and DeCroce ...

In an age of too much partisanship, you have shown that individuals who care about our State can cooperate when they agree ... and act with dignity when they do not.

You have set a new standard of bipartisan cooperation and made a big difference for the people of the state of New Jersey.

To my senior staff ...

Pete and Eric, Diane and Karen, Larry and Maureen, Kelley and Joe, Paul and Verice, AJ and Yollette, Car-men and PJ ... when I took this office -- I was scared to death.

I didn't know what to expect from myself or from the job ...

... let alone from the vast majority of citizens who never heard of Dick Codey ...

I could not have survived without your patience, your guidance, and most importantly, your friendship.

I would also like to acknowledge the presence of my brothers and sisters who are here today.

They have all become successful ... even with the burden of growing up with me.

To my Cabinet ... I did not know many of you fourteen months ago

But I have learned that you are a credit to your field and your work has made New Jersey a better place.

To my family ...

When I took this job, my greatest fear was the impact it would have on you and the life we have built together.

I tried to minimize that disruption ... but I know at best ... I partially succeeded.

But you never complained and you made me proud at every turn.

To my sons Kevin and Chris ...

I have held many titles ... Assemblyman, Senator, Senate President, Coach, and now Governor -- but the one I still cherish the most is Dad.

Of all that I have accomplished, nothing has given me more pride and more joy than watching you two grow up.

To my wife Mary Jo ...

At times, I may have been a headache ... but I have never been a bore.

You have stood by me -- warts and all -- through the highs and lows of a lifetime.

You have been an inspiration to so many people ... so many people you will never meet.

The words 'class' and 'courage' are tossed around pretty casually these days ...

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but my wife truly embodies both.

Mary Jo, the world needs more people like you.

And I am so glad New Jersey has gotten to know the woman I love so much.

Well, it's been one hell of a year.

Where else but New Jersey could this have happened!

Did I think about being Governor? Sure, I did.

Did I think it would happen the way it did? Of course not.

Since the election, many people have asked me how do I feel now that the end is near.

It's simple. I'm sad that it's over ... but I'm glad that it happened.

I have so many wonderful memories ... not just the night I made a half-court shot at the high school basketball game ...

From my breakfast at Greystone my first day in office ...

In New Orleans, when the Chief of police told me that our state troopers were the best he'd ever seen.

And there were the patients I met during my visits to Greystone ... Bob, who admired my Governor's watch so much ... that I gave it to him.

And Peggy ... who I brought on stage so she could join the chorus in singing "We Wish You a Merry Christmas".

Those special memories ... will stay with me forever.

The past fourteen months have been so rewarding ... but with the end here, it's natural to wonder about regrets.

In the past month, I've asked myself that question more than once.

The truth is ...

Regrets ... I've had a few ... but then again too few to mention.

If we are fortunate, a little sunshine falls into each of our lives.

And I have been blessed with more than my share.

To think ...

... that the son of a funeral director, a generation removed from Ireland could rise to be Governor ... not once but twice ...

is more than my parents and their parents could have imagined.

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Frankly, it is more than I ever expected.

As a child, I was blessed with strong parents who taught me about hard work, the value of a handshake, and compassion for those less fortunate.

As a man, I have been blessed with a wife unwavering in her love, unfaltering in her devotion, and as caring as anyone who walks this earth.

As a father, I have been blessed with two sons ... good kids with strong values who are a credit to their name.

And now ... as a public servant ... I have been blessed with the opportunity to lead this State -- if only for a short time.

The opportunity to achieve public policy firsts, not just for New Jersey ...

but nationally ... has been incredibly gratifying.

You know, we became the first State to test the safety measures in every one of our schools.

We became the first state to mandate security upgrades at every single chemical plant.

We became the first government -- not simply the first state -- but the first government to make steroid testing mandatory for high school athletes.

The first State to develop a public cord and pla-cen-tal stem cell research bank ...

And the first State to award public money for stem cell research to save lives in the future.

I admit I didn't appreciate how awesome the responsibility of this office was until I got here.

Think about it.

Other than one's family, what greater responsibility and what greater joy could one have ... than to do right by your fellow citizens.

The responsibility is overwhelming ... and it is incredibly humbling.

Today ... as I prepare to leave this post, I still remain in awe of all the possibilities for good the office holds.

All the possibilities to provide a helping hand to those in need.

So how can I leave with regrets when I have been afforded such a wonderful opportunity.

I didn't seek the job ... I never expected the job ... but this has been an experience I will treasure for the rest of my life.

And for that I want to thank the citizens of this great State.

You have made these past fourteen months so amazing.

Every day you have reminded me what I love about public service.

Thank you ever so much.

We are so fortunate to be living in a state as wonderful as New Jersey.

A state with broad ethnic and racial diversity.

A state filled with cultural treasures from the New Jersey Performing Arts Center to Bruce Springsteen.

A state that is home to the beauty of the Jersey Shore and the allure of Atlantic City.

The passion of the Meadowlands and the innovation of our scientists.

A state rich in history -- where the Revolution was saved and the light bulb invented.

Throughout my time I have tried to serve in a manner that honors the greatness of our people and the richness of our history.

I have tried to bring stability during a period of turmoil.

I have tried to show that government can be a force of compassion and a beacon of hope.

Above all else, I have tried to show that government can always act with integrity and decency ... no matter how bad things seem.

You know, there is no playbook to guide you when you become Governor.

But it never occurred to me that being Governor meant I had to sacrifice my life with my family ...

It never occurred to me that I couldn't talk to the public the same way I talk to my family, my friends, or my neighbors ...

or that assuming this job under these circumstances meant I could not get anything done.

I have learned a great deal in the past fourteen months.

And I've also learned a great deal about myself.

I learned the advice my parents gave me --

stay humble ...

keep your sense of humor ...

and be true to your principles --

is still the best advice I ever received.

It can be easy to let the power of elected office overwhelm the values of your upbringing.

And there were plenty of times I struggled to stay true to their advice.

But staying true to your roots will keep you grounded in reality ... and that reality will serve the public well.

More than anything I have learned this ...

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The people of this State look to us for leadership ...

They look to us to make decisions on their behalf ...

decisions that will affect their lives today and their children's lives tomorrow.

They understand the problems New Jersey faces.

They understand more than pundits or political leaders appreciate.

They understand the trade offs, the moral dilemmas, the political difficulties of every issue we confront. Sadly, they don't have high expectations.

But they expect to be treated like adults.

They expect straight talk ... not fancy spin ... about the choices that affect their lives.

They expect us to be realistic about what can be achieved ... and at what cost.

They expect us to say what we mean ... and mean what we say.

Ultimately, they may not agree with every decision we make.

But they will respect and appreciate the candor.

When I took this office, New Jersey was in a state of shock.

People questioned how anything could be accomplished.

But we put policies before politics ... and let our principles guide our decisions.

We told the public what we stood for ... and why it was important.

We invited citizens to participate ... with their ideas and with their energies ... and they responded.

And at the end of the day, the commitment of our citizens ... our Legislators ... and our communities ... to a common set of values ... accomplished a great deal.

Together, we passed the toughest pay to play ban of any State ... anywhere in America.

We conducted a statewide ethics audit ... and we froze campaign contribution limits.

We restored the public advocate and we created an Inspector General.

We made New Jersey voters matter in Presidential politics.

We made ethics training mandatory for every state worker.

We watched a new day rise in the Meadowlands ... with the Giants and Jets working together to build a new stadium at no cost to the taxpayers.

We tore down toll booths and began the process to widen the turnpike and the parkway to make your ride quicker, safer, and easier.

We made community service a part of the high school experience.

We banned junk food and soda from our schools.

We cut the budget more than it has ever been cut ...

but we still found the money to expand health insurance for the working poor.

We ended the era of half-truths and budget gimmicks ... and Wall Street rewarded our fiscal discipline with the first credit upgrade in thirty years.

We finally raised the minimum wage for more than 200,000 New Jersey workers.

And I will soon sign historic legislation that will protect the public from the deadly hazards of second hand smoke.

We made the lives of New Jerseyans that suffer from a mental illness a whole lot better.

We made their hopes for a recovery a whole lot brighter and their quest for a more normal life a lot more likely.

We passed legislation to create ten thousand housing opportunities.

We created new incentives to attract and retain high quality direct care workers.

We wiped out penalties for people who cannot afford their stay in a state hospital.

We tore down Greystone, the symbol of a system that had lost its way ...

and in its place we are building a brand new hospital to give patients the care and love they deserve. We opened the mental health hotline twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

In a tough budget year, we found forty million dollars to expand screening and self-help centers.

We launched a statewide campaign to educate families and doctors about postpartum depression.

All in all, more than 90% of the recommendations made by the mental health task force have been implemented.

These initiatives will do so much ... to help so many ... improve their lives.

But as important as they are, our greatest achievement is shattering the stigma associated with mental illness.

Mental illness is a treatable disorder and not a condition that anyone should ever be ashamed of.

People with mental illness live among us everyday ...

they are our mothers and fathers ... our brothers and sisters ...

our sons and daughters ...

And yes ... our husbands and wives.

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And thanks to the support we have shown them ... they can hold their heads high and lead better, more productive lives.

For that I am both proud and grateful.

But as proud as I am of what we did, I also recognize there are areas we did not get to ... areas that will fall to us in this next legislature.

Front and center, we must act to save lives and ease suffering.

We must build the New Jersey Stem Cell Institute.

And we must provide long term funding for research grants.

Scientists and researchers are watching us and every day we delay has a cost.

New Jersey has always set the pace of medical innovation.

This leadership has created jobs and cures that have benefited New Jersey and the nation.

Our action on stem cell research will make sure New Jersey continues to be the leader in the race for cures.

Now last year's budget avoided the gimmicks of the past.

It used realistic estimates and reduced one time revenues by 40 percent.

It cut spending and earned high marks from Wall Street.

And unlike four years ago, it will be balanced for the incoming Governor.

But that budget must become the rule rather than the exception.

In the face of another huge, multi-billion dollar deficit, all of us must hold the line for fiscal discipline.

This annual deficit that we face, and will continue to face, has many godfathers.

But one of the fastest rising costs is employee benefits.

As Governor, I have seen up close the dedication of our State employees.

So whether you work in a State institution, plow the roads, or perform another function of State government ...

I want to thank you for the job you do.

Benefits are a critical part of recruiting and retaining our high quality workforce.

But abuses of the system hurt the very people benefits are meant to help ... and those abuses must be ended.

We also have an obligation to a fair and attractive benefits package at a reasonable cost to taxpayers.

Working with the public employee community, we must evaluate the report of the Benefits Review Task Force.

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Putting an end to the days of spending like there's no tomorrow is critical to our long term economic health ... and so is investing in New Jersey.

Our infrastructure -- whether it be open space, schools ... roads ... or institutions of higher learning ... are the building blocks of our economy and our greatness as a State.

Today we sit at a fork in the road.

Funding for the transportation trust fund has run its course.

Funding for school construction has all been committed.

Funding for open space is nearly gone.

And funding to expand higher education has fallen entirely to the universities themselves.

We have a choice.

We can continue to live off the fading investments of yesterday and just hope for the best.

Or we can make a decision that our generation of elected officials will make investments that will benefit the generations to follow.

In today's global economy, New Jersey is competing with every State in the nation and every country in the world for jobs and for investment.

We don't have the luxury of doing nothing. We can't just sit around and rely on past successes and our reputation.

It is too easy for workers and businesses to find what they need ... somewhere else.

Investments in education and transportation will not come without a cost ...

but the cost of that investment will pale in comparison to the cost of inaction.
Listen, I don't pretend to have all the answers. I don't think any of us do.

But ... whether one is the Governor or a legislator, a Democrat or a Republican ...

the obligation isn't to have the answer ... but to be part of the solution.

I know people will be tempted to seek political benefit in the face of the problems confronting Governor Corzine.

But the issues before this Legislature are bigger than any of us or either party.

Now is when the people of this State expect ...

that we put aside any differences for the greater good of this State.

The bi-partisan respect and cooperation that enabled us to achieve so much in the past year must continue ...

Jon Corzine wasn't here when the mess was created.

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He wasn't here when one party spent money like they just hit the Lottery ...

and he wasn't here when the other party borrowed to keep pace.

Governor Corzine has chosen to come here and use his talents to tackle problems not of his making.

And we, as the duly elected Legislature, have a responsibility to be a constructive part of the process and a meaningful partner in the search for answers.

We all have a stake in the outcome.

And we all must work together to get through the hard days that certainly lie ahead.

But whether the issue is benefits reform, the budget, ethics, or property taxes, let us make some public commitments.

Let us have the courage to take on the tough decisions ... because they are coming, if they aren't already here. Let us be willing to challenge the status quo and reach across the aisle for new ideas.

Let us have the strength to match the courage of our convictions with the power of our actions.

And let us govern ... confident with the knowledge that the public can handle the truth.

But whatever the issue -- no matter how difficult -- let us not forget why we are here.

Let us not forget that people who lead busy and demanding lives ... rely on us to act on their behalf.

They don't expect miracles -- but they don't deserve B.S.

So let us not be afraid to be up front with the people we represent.

They can handle the truth ... but more importantly ... they deserve it.

And our decisions will be far better received if we provide that simple courtesy.

There is so much we must do ... so many needs but so little time and so few precious resources.

There is nothing more powerful than good people coming together for a good cause ...

The quality of life in our State ...

The care of the most vulnerable ...

And the future of our economy are good causes that demand our cooperation and commitment.

Democrats and Republicans ... in the months ahead ...

Let us put aside our partisan differences ...

Let us come together for a better New Jersey ...

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And let us use the energy of our ideas and the passion of our beliefs to help Governor Corzine do what must be done.

As for me ... well ... don't worry too much about me ...

Former Governors don't just fade away ...

Some go to Washington ...

Some become elder statesmen ...

And some ... finally get the respect they deserve.

Me ... well, I have no intention of going gently into that good night.

There are still windmills to tilt at and dragons to slay.

And I intend to call 'em as I see 'em until my contract runs out.

But whatever title I hold ...

Whether it be Governor, Senator, or private citizen, my resolve to do right by the people of this state will not change.

My commitment to fight for the most vulnerable ... to battle for those without a voice ... will be as strong tomorrow as it is today.

So to my fellow residents, may you be as blessed and as fortunate as I have been over these past 14 months.

And so, on behalf of myself and my family ...

to all the people of New Jersey ...

thank you and God bless you all.

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