

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Delivers Remarks at National Governors Association Summer Meeting

07/15/2022

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Once, again, to Governor Hutchinson, it has been an honor to serve alongside you as NGA Vice Chair over the past year. I am honored to call you my friend as I am honored to step into the role of Chair.

And I am honored to be the first Chair to come from New Jersey!

To Governor Cox, thank you for your words and your willingness to join me in what I anticipate to be an equally productive and rewarding partnership for the year to come. I greatly appreciate your leadership and support.

And to all of you, my colleagues from across our nation – from state to commonwealth to territory – I am energized by the prospect for our continued progress.

There is a reason for this. Since its founding in 1908, this association has stood steadfast to its mission to facilitate bipartisan solutions.

In our polarized times, this is the example that we must make for the residents we have the privilege and honor to serve. Even if NGA did nothing more than get us all in a room together a few times a year to talk to each other and listen to each other, it would serve a worthy purpose.

But the NGA has fostered opportunities to create and refine policies and programs that truly make a difference in our states.

Any of you who have gotten to know me know that one of my lifelong heroes was President John F. Kennedy. And it was he who said, "Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer."

He said that in February 1958 – yet those words still ring true.

However much I revere these words, and the man who said them, I would also like us to always keep in mind words of a more recent vintage: "There must be no room for contempt or hate. We are friends. We must always be friends."

Those words were spoken by our Vice Chairman, Governor Cox, in his 2021 State of the State Address. He may have been speaking to his fellow Utahns, but he very well spoke for all of us.

I do not expect that, over the course of the next year, any of us are going to take off our hats as either "Democrats" or "Republicans." In fact, I know we each wear these hats, and the respective underlying ideals they espouse – with great pride.

But I ask that we endeavor to look below these hats – and at each other's faces – and recognize that we are partisans third, governors second, and Americans first and foremost.

To be honest, most of our constituents don't really care what party we represent. They elected us to deliver solutions. They asked us to lead our states to make their lives, and those of their families and neighbors, a little better.

And, again, to be honest, they, like the majority of Americans, just want us to find common ground.

I am confident we can succeed. I am confident that we can continue to prove that states are – as the Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis once said – "the laboratories of democracy."

One way the NGA works to prove these words are through the annual Chair's Initiatives.

I've seen very successful Chair's Initiatives since I took office in New Jersey in 2018 ...

... Former Governor Brian Sandoval's to modernize energy and transportation infrastructure.

... Former Governor Steve Bullock's to create more, good American jobs.

... Governor Hogan's initiative for stronger national infrastructure in all its forms.

... And, for this past year, Governor Hutchinson's Computer Science Education Initiative.

Following in their molds, I am honored to take the cover off my 2022 – 2023 Chair's Initiative on strengthening youth mental health.

We are all aware of the youth mental health crisis in our country. It is a crisis that the pandemic did not create but exposed more fully. It is one we must tackle together and now.

This initiative will have four distinct yet completely complementary pillars.

The first pillar is prevention and resilience building, with a clear focus on creating welcoming, supportive, and healthy environments for children to grow into productive and healthy adults – environments that seamlessly weave age-appropriate mental and behavioral health tools into the fabric of children's lives through in their schools, homes, and communities.

Second, reducing the stigma associated with mental health challenges by normalizing making it so young people not only know how to access help but know how to ask for it. And, when they do, we will back them up with access through education, helplines, and necessary state services centered on empathy.

To this point, we know our nation's mental health workforce is depleted, leading to care that is in some cases too expensive and, in others, nearly inaccessible whether by distance or time. So, meeting these twin challenges will be our third pillar – building a robust system of supports by leveraging innovative funding opportunities that can supplement and amplify our own existing in-state investments and programs.

And, finally, pillar number four – providing parents, caregivers, and educators the training and support they need. We know that when adults suffer mental health challenges, so do the children in their care. Adults who are empowered in managing their own mental health are better equipped to identify negative signs and to provide positive supports for youth.

I have chosen strengthening youth mental health as this year's Chair's Initiative because as challenging as the previous two years have been for us adults, we know the strain is nothing compared to what too many of America's children were under.

The youngest have missed out on critical education and socialization opportunities during their most formative years. Pre-teens and teens missed out on milestones they'd looked forward to for the whole of their young lives – graduations, proms, sports, senior trips, and summer camps.

They missed time with family and friends – and too many of them lost family and friends.

And while it's easy for us to say we're getting back to normal, we know that road back has a few more twists and turns, and few more bumps, for those who may not have the ability to fully understand why they are feeling the way they do.

We know that the rates of stress reported by our young people are extraordinarily high. Now, I think we all remember how tough it was to grow up, and the educational, emotional, and other challenges we each faced.

But I cannot imagine what it has been like for millions of American children who had the very notion of stability upended – and that's for those who already were living in stable families.

We know there are many other children who were already falling through the cracks – children already living with a mental health challenge – and who the pandemic tried to swallow up whole.

As Governors, one of our most important and sacred responsibilities is to our state's children. It is our jobs to ensure their safety. It is our jobs to ensure their educations. It is our jobs to ensure their health and well-being, both physically and mentally.

Naturally, each state will find its own path to achieving these goals. Several states are already pursuing some of these priorities through NGA programs.

We have a good foundation upon which to build. And, as states are the "laboratories of democracy," so, too, are our states the laboratories for innovation. So, throughout the course of this year, I will welcome your ideas. I am eager to hear what works – and what doesn't.

We'll be announcing our first few collaboration sessions soon but make no doubt this conversation starts today.

I thank you all, again, for the honor to serve as Chairman of the National Governors Association – and I again thank Governor Cox for joining me in this endeavor. And I thank each of you for your partnership.

To Executive Director Bill McBride and the terrific team at NGA headquarters, I look forward to the next 12 months.

Now, to help formally kick off this year's Chair's Initiative, I'm proud to welcome my wife and partner, New Jersey First Lady Tammy Snyder Murphy to the stage.

Throughout our administration, Tammy has focused her efforts on the critical issue of maternal and infant health, bringing together the health care, academic, and advocacy communities through her innovative Nurture NJ initiative.

We are hoping to explore ways to holistically support families this coming year, and to that end, Tammy will lead a Spouse's Initiative that looks to similarly address the maternal and infant health crisis facing the United States.

The issues she has keyed in on have many parallels with youth mental health. To help us explore those connections, please join me in welcoming First Lady Tammy Murphy and our panelists.

Governor Phil Murphy

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