

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Delivers Second Inaugural Address

01/18/2022

January 18, 2022

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

"New Jersey: The Opportunity State"

Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver and family.

Chief Justice Rabner and Justices of the Supreme Court.

Members of our Congressional Delegation – Representatives Pallone, Pascrell, Norcross, Watson Coleman, Gottheimer, and Sherrill.

Senate President Scutari and Speaker Coughlin.

Majority Leaders Ruiz and Greenwald.

Minority Leader Oroho.

Former Governors Florio, McGreevey, Codey, Corzine, and Christie.

First Lady Tammy Murphy and Josh, Emma, Charlie, and Sam ... and more about you later.

Members of the Cabinet and Senior Staff.

Distinguished members of the Diplomatic Corps.

Clergy, honored veterans, members of law enforcement.

Family, friends, and my fellow New Jerseyans.

This is a day of reaffirming our oaths, rededicating ourselves to service, and renewing our priorities.

Yet it is also a moment for reflection and remembrance.

On your way into this building, you walked past a field of 3,000 flags, each representing approximately ten of our fellow New Jerseyans lost since the start of the pandemic.

As we continue to work to disperse the dark clouds of COVID that hang over our state, we honor the tremendous sacrifices so many have made in their daily lives to help us return to normal.

But we honor, especially, those who will not be with us to see the blue skies we know await us.

They were fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, neighbors and friends. Moreover, they were proud New Jerseyans.

In their memory, I ask that we all pause for a moment of silence.

Thank you.

I first sought this office with a clear purpose ... to grow and strengthen New Jersey's middle class ... to make our state stronger and fairer... and to build an economy that works for every family.

In short, to see New Jersey be the place where the American Dream not only lives, but thrives.

This purpose was born from my own life journey.

Even as we have responded to a global pandemic over the past two years, this has been my guiding purpose every day for the past four.

And it will be my purpose every day for the next four.

I am humbled to be the first member of my party to have been given the privilege of a second term in 44 years.

I am honored to follow in the footsteps of a dear friend – and friend of so many – Governor Brendan Byrne.

But being governor is not about the party to which we belong.

So I renew my pledge to be the governor for all of New Jersey ... the governor for everyone who voted for me, and for everyone who did not.

After all, we are all New Jerseyans.

As diverse as we are, we share common challenges, common cause, and a common bond.

Together, we have been through so much.

And together we will seek a brighter tomorrow.

Yet just because one year or one term ends and another begins does not mean that the challenges of the previous four years cease to exist.

If only it were that simple.

We know that many challenges remain – and that many more will surely come.

To start, we continue waging war against a pandemic that has uprooted many of our fellow New Jerseyans' very sense of security.

And, for far too many across our state, and indeed our nation, the fraught state of our politics has brought with it an added fear that the American Dream is dying.

So, our job is to make living, working, and raising a family in New Jersey secure again for every one of the nine-point-three million members of our extended family.

It is our duty to ensure a recovery from COVID that reaches far and wide to include every New Jerseyan, and to set them alongside us on the path forward.

And it is our duty to get the American Dream working for everyone, as well.

... To make good on the promise that you can do better than your parents and that your kids will do better than you ...

... and to reward hard work and make sure everyone gets their fair shot and everyone does their fair share.

These goals are inextricably linked.

Our state's nickname, "The Garden State," points back to when agriculture was our main industry and our state was the breadbasket of a young nation.

But over the past 245 years, we became known for growing something more.

We grew industries which, in turn, grew proud cities and towns.

The seeds of innovation planted here grew into technologies that, quite literally, built the modern world.

We grew jobs – good-paying jobs. We grew on the shoulders of organized labor. We grew diverse.

We grew a strong and inclusive middle class.

So, yes, we are still proudly the Garden State. But our task is building a New Jersey that is also the Opportunity State.

An opportunity state that works from the middle out and the bottom up.

And an opportunity state that doesn't just let current generations – us and our children – prosper, but ensures that those who will follow – our children's children – can prosper even more.

My brother, my two sisters, and I were raised, as many have heard me say, "middle class on a good day."

In reality, we were working poor.

Only one of our parents held a high-school diploma.

What they earned – my mother from her secretarial job, my father from the many jobs he held – they put right back into our household.

But what they gave us – an abiding faith, a love of country, a strong set of values – was worth far more.

I put myself through college and graduate school through a combination of part-time jobs and student loans.

And when I started my career, I started at the bottom.

Through hard work, more than a little luck, and thanks to God, I did better than my parents.

And so did each of my siblings.

We have lived the American Dream.

That dream is supposed to be the promise of America.

Yet today, the American Dream that worked for a family like mine feels out of reach for too many.

No family deserves that.

I'm often asked why I decided to engage in public service and, specifically, to run for Governor.

Of course, there are many reasons, but the most fundamental answer is this ...

... I want this generation, and the generations that follow, to have the same shot to build a better life that I had.

Every family deserves that.

I ran for governor to rebuild this path to opportunity and prosperity for everyone in New Jersey.

This is my core motivation, what drives me every single day.

This is my North Star.

The poet Langston Hughes understood we could close the gap between what is promised and what is done, and I quote him,

"O, let my land be a land where Liberty

Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath

But opportunity is real, and life is free

Equality is in the air we breathe."

So, our goal for these next four years is to make sure that the American Dream – an American Dream with Jersey flavor and with Jersey attitude – is alive and well.

It is about moving people forward without leaving people behind.

... It is about voices raised together with a backbeat you cannot miss.

... It is about taking away obstacles and adding seats around the table of possibility and prosperity.

... Most of all, it is about filling the air we breathe with real opportunity and full equality.

Throughout the course of the past four years, I have had the great privilege to talk with and, more importantly, listen to literally thousands of New Jerseyans.

And this by itself is a very good lesson for all of us in public office. We can all listen more, including me.

But no matter where they live, no matter whether their family has been here for generations or just came across a river or an ocean to make New Jersey their home, I hear common themes and common dreams.

They want a New Jersey with more opportunity for a good job and an even better career.

They want a New Jersey that gives them the opportunity of a fair shot at reaching their potential – and which calls on everyone to live up to their responsibility to do their fair share to make New Jersey work for all of us.

So a stronger and fairer New Jersey that makes sure everyone gets a fair shot and everyone does their fair share isn't just my agenda, it's theirs, too.

And they want a New Jersey that listens to them.

A New Jersey that is more affordable, especially when it comes to three of the biggest expenses facing their family and many others like theirs – health care, higher education, and property taxes.

As I said in my State of the State Address a week ago, we're going to continue making health care more affordable by working across the array of stakeholders – advocates, providers, and insurers – to make common sense decisions that drive down costs while not jeopardizing either the quality of care or our state's reputation as home of one of the nation's finest health care systems.

We're going to continue to work with our colleges and universities, invest in our students, and make higher education more accessible and affordable.

And we're going to keep chopping away at property taxes.

Though property taxes are not set by the state – by either me or the Legislature – the decisions and investments we make directly impact their trajectory.

Every dollar of new state funding for our schools and communities, for local roads and libraries, and for countless other areas, is a dollar that stays in your pocket as a property taxpayer.

Using this mindset, each of our administration's first four years have ranked among four of the lowest year-over-year increases in property taxes on record.

But I'm not going to be satisfied with just slowing property tax growth. I want to get us to a place where we can begin to see them go down.

So, for example, we're going to keep working toward fully funding our public schools.

Likewise, we will continue to grow pre-K with a goal of ensuring universal preschool for every young learner in every community.

And we're going to continue growing the innovation economy that will power our future and make us a model for the nation and the world.

... Businesses in the clean energy industry that will literally fuel this revolution while fighting climate change – most notably offshore wind.

... Businesses in the life sciences and medicine that will find treatments and cures for diseases and conditions once thought unconquerable.

... Television and film production, because New Jersey is ready for its close up.

... Businesses on the cutting edge of new technologies that will revolutionize our grasp of the possible.

... Businesses in the new cannabis industry that we are setting up in the name of social justice.

... In online gaming and sports betting, which we now dominate.

... Businesses whose physical locations will be built, and staffed, by the hands of organized labor.

... And, importantly, the small businesses that turn Main Street from just a strip of pavement into the center of a thriving community – the mom & pop, the neighborhood restaurant, the corner bar, the child care center, the art gallery, the theater, the independent retailer.

Over the past four years, I have attended many groundbreaking for all of the above.

In the next four, I look forward to many more ribbon-cuttings.

And, the people of New Jersey want us to treat their tax dollars, whether they go to support their schools or improve their roads, as if they were our own.

And we are.

I pledge to you now, that the next four years will not see us stray from the path of fiscal responsibility that we are on ...

... The path that asks those at the top to pay their fair share so we can do more for more of our people and our communities.

... The path that has the bond rating agencies once again optimistic about our future.

... The path that has us meeting our full pension obligation.

... The path that has seen us partner with our public workers to save them, and you, billions of dollars while preserving the quality of health care.

... The path that is delivering a more innovative and smaller state government than four years ago.

... The path that has delivered 14 tax cuts, and hundreds of millions of dollars in direct tax relief, for our middle-class and working families and seniors.

We are turning New Jersey around, just as we said we would four years ago.

But that work is not done and we will not be distracted from our mission. Our mission is constant and our efforts relentless because many of the obstacles before us are deeply rooted.

We have more gun safety bills to see passed and enacted.

We have more work to do to ensure voting rights are expanded and protected ... unlike what we are seeing in many other states.

And we have a state Supreme Court that will have three additional vacancies, and we will put forward nominees who will uphold its respected legacy of fairness and independence.

As I said, just because one term has ended and another has begun does not mean the old challenges fade away.

So, no, our original mission is not yet done.

Our objectives remain constant.

We're on year five of our eight-year journey together.

A new term is not about moving to the next shiny object for the sake of it.

And it clearly is not about saying one thing to one group and something different to another.

Our task is about steady hard work toward a vision that brings us all together and brings us all along.

In this, and more, I am who I said I would be.

And now is the time to redouble our efforts to ensure the New Jersey we hand to the next administration is stronger, fairer, more resilient, and better situated for the years to come.

... to ensure the New Jersey we pass along will have even more fertile ground for opportunity to take root.

I would be remiss if I did not stop to thank the many people who have stood alongside me as we've undertaken this work.

I have been incredibly lucky to have Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver as my partner in governing.

Sheila had already inspired many throughout her years of public service prior to becoming Lieutenant Governor.

And, every day of the past four years, she has continued to inspire.

For countless young women and girls of color, she is an example that there is no hill that you cannot climb.

And, for me, she has been a tremendous source of encouragement as well as a sounding board.

I am so lucky to have you by my side in this journey.

But we are just as lucky to have her as our Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs, which oversees so many of the programs vital to the lives of the places our fellow New Jerseyans proudly call their hometowns.

Over the past two years, the Department has stood tall to help families impacted by COVID to stay in their homes, to keep the lights on, and to keep warm.

And, more broadly, her leadership has not just been invaluable, but also transformational, in our work to revitalize and secure the future of Atlantic City.

I am equally grateful to, and inspired by, each of the dedicated and hardworking members of the Cabinet and staff ...

... Women and men who have answered the call to public service because they believe in this mission but more importantly, because they believe in the people of New Jersey.

This has never been more evident than across the past two years. The pandemic has required a whole-of-government response because it left no part of our state untouched.

And you have more than delivered. I thank you.

And to my partners in the Legislature, on both sides of the aisle, I look forward to working with you to not just meet the challenges ahead, but to rise above them.

And while we're at it, let's rise above party labels to do good things – lasting things – for every New Jerseyan.

And to my family.

I do not know where I would be without our tremendous First Lady Tammy Murphy.

Tammy has led the effort to take head-on our state's infant and maternal mortality crisis.

Through her work, we are leading the nation in new laws and programs that have put New Jersey on the path to being the safest place in America to deliver and raise a child.

She's been a leading voice in our efforts to combat global climate change and in equipping our students with the tools to confront these issues.

She's supported women-owned startups, among so many other initiatives.

And she has passionately and diligently led the work to restore Drumthwacket to make it not just a home for governors, but a place where all residents can take pride in and celebrate what it means to be a New Jerseyan.

Moreover, she's been a singular source of personal strength and inspiration to me.

And, to our four kids – Josh, Emma, Charlie, and Sam.

Over the past four years your mom and I have had the privilege of watching you all transform into wonderful young adults.

You each have viewed public service as a team sport for many years now and on both sides of the Atlantic, but especially these past four.

You don't just show up – which you do – but you each contribute mightily to the cause.

And, at times, it has hardly been easy on you. Your grace and character have shone through.

For all I ever do as governor, you will still be, by far, our greatest accomplishments.

And I remain mindful of all those who shaped us – and who are with us in spirit only – whose own sacrifices will never be forgotten or overlooked.

As Tammy mentioned, I swore my oath on the Holy Scriptures her great-great-grandmother presented to her grandmother on her wedding day more than 100 years ago.

Its leather cover shows its age.

But the words of its pages read just as clearly as ever.

Its guidance is as pure as ever.

And the values it instills in all of us are as strong as ever – service, sacrifice, family, and humility.

These are the values that run deep in New Jersey.

They are the values we need to reach for once again to show our nation the path forward.

Our national political discourse is in shambles.

I can fully understand why some fear the American Dream is dying, and out of reach.

But, I will not be among them.

As I said when I proudly, yet humbly, accepted my re-election, if you want to know what the future looks like, if you want to understand what America can be, come to New Jersey.

If you want to see what is right with America, look to New Jersey.

As my Congressional colleagues who stand on the right side of history would agree, where Washington has bogged down, we have moved forward.

... Where Washington has too often done too little, we have worked together to achieve so much.

... Where some in Washington pander to the powerful and the wealthiest, we are lifting up working families and strengthening the middle class while ensuring those at the top do and pay their fair share.

... Where some in Washington brag about holding back progress, we put our heads down and are doing the hard work.

Where some in Washington cling to the Big Lie, we believe in a bigger truth and we reach for big dreams.

And while some in Washington just want to fight with each other, in New Jersey – where we are no strangers to arguing – we still fight for each other.

Some 70 years ago, in a speech to the American Legion during the height of McCarthyism, the then-Governor of Illinois, and future United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai Stevenson, zeroed-in on what a nation being driven apart at the time needed ...

America needed, and I will quote him, “A patriotism that puts country ahead of self; a patriotism which is not short, frenzied outbursts of emotion, but the tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime.”

We need this patriotism again.

Shouting about how much you love your country is no substitute for showing how you love our country.

Voting is a patriotic act.

Opening doors of opportunity for those who have been kept out is a patriotic act.

Standing for fairness is a patriotic act.

Ensuring good government is a patriotic act.

Let’s make New Jersey the proof that the ongoing American Experiment is not about to come to an end.

After all, to be an American is a privilege – to be a New Jerseyan is an honor.

In December 1776, it was in New Jersey where the American Revolution turned, and where the American Spirit was renewed.

Now, in January 2022, let us make New Jersey the place where the direction of our nation is righted, where the spirit of our nation is restored, and where our common destiny as Americans – regardless of our political party or persuasion – is reaffirmed.

So, together, we embark on a new year – the first of four filled with possibility and promise, and where we continue building on the progress of the past four.

Now, in the quiet cold of winter with a new spring on the horizon, it is time to look forward ... and to move forward.

And we will move forward in the only way we know how, and in the only fashion our state has ever done – together.

So, this is my vow to serve in New Jersey, whether you voted for me or not.

Every single day I will fight for you.

Every single day I will work to move our state forward.

And every single day I will dedicate to making New Jersey the state where the future works for each of us because I will be the governor working for all of us.

That is why I am committed to making sure everyone across our great state has their fair shot and each of us does our fair share.

That is the American Dream with New Jersey flavor and attitude – and Jersey values.

And that is how we make New Jersey the Opportunity State.

Thank you so very much.

May God bless you all. And may God bless the Great State of New Jersey and the United States of America.

Governor Phil Murphy

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