

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Delivers Remarks at New Jersey Acting Attorney General Platkin's Summit on Combatting Bias, Hate, and Violence

06/21/2022

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Larry Hamm, for that introduction, and thank you, as well, for your continued work and partnership with our administration to eradicate hate in all its forms.

To Acting Attorney General Matt Platkin, thank you for leading our administration's efforts to meaningfully combat bias wherever it pops up across our state.

As you all know, I have known Matt for a long time – longer than almost any other member of my team. I know he takes this mission not just from a viewpoint of his professional obligation as New Jersey's chief law enforcement officer, but as a uniquely moral obligation educated through his Jewish faith,

I also give my deepest appreciation to your partners in this effort – those who have already spoken – including Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver, State Police Superintendent Colonel Pat Callahan, United States Attorney Phil Sellinger, and Imam Shareef.

A huge shoutout to Rutgers University for hosting us today. This institution plays a tremendous role in all facets of the future of our state. This mission includes ensuring that the students who walk into Rutgers as freshman leave with all the tools to not only forge a successful career, but also the tools to be engaged and caring citizens of this nation and residents of this state.

That includes respecting the great diversity of our state. Not just respecting, I should say, but revering. Our diversity is truly one of our greatest strengths. It has been for generations. And we will not shy from upholding and promoting these values.

And, with that, I also thank each and every one here with us today, with a special thanks to all the panelists who will be presenting and speaking.

Regardless of your role at this summit, after it ends, you will take with you a responsibility to make New Jersey a model for all states in not only honoring our diversity, but ensuring that every resident of our state can live in peace and can work without prejudice toward achieving their American Dream.

I do not feel the need to repeat the statistics which those who have spoken before me have laid out. Suffice it to say we all recognize that incidents of bias in New Jersey are increasing. Those numbers cannot be interpreted any other way.

Even if we accept the notion that part of this increase can be from a greater willingness on the part of those who have been the victims of bias to step forward, that is of little solace.

Yes, we must applaud the bravery of those who refuse to sit silently and allow others to belittle or threaten, or in the worst cases, strike out violently against an individual who has done them no harm, but by whom, for some reason they feel intimidated. For the, this may be the hardest step.

But the recognition is that if our numbers are increasing, in part, because of this willingness to step forward, that begs the question – how many previous acts have gone unreported and how many of our fellow New Jerseyans suffered silently at the hands and mouths of their tormentors?

For our young people, especially, given the numbers of instances of bias reported to have occurred in their schools – the one place that, outside of the home, is supposed to be the safest and most supportive – answering this question gives me chills.

And I am sure it does for many of you, as well.

And I am doubly concerned given the erosion of our national political and social dialogue. We do appear to be regressing in many cases.

For some, the recent instances of racially motivated hate – whether it be the murder of George Floyd or the wanton slaughter last month of innocent Black supermarket shoppers in Buffalo – has elicited the exact opposite response than what it should.

Amazingly there are those who believe that the natural response to these incidents isn't to acknowledge hundreds of years of institutionalized racism, but to dig in their heels in ignorance to claim such issues don't exist or, worse yet, that they are somehow the victims.

And I am certain these individuals did not spend their weekends pondering the meaning of Juneteenth or searching their own souls to ask for forgiveness for their own hatred, or spending any time to come to terms with where such enmity comes from.

As a quick aside, the French existentialist, Jean-Paul Sartre, once wrote, "The anti-Semite claims that the problems that he is facing are due to another race, another time, another event; in short, he is responsible for nothing. The anti-Semite is a man who does not hate the Jews, but since he does not feel in control of things he hates himself."

Now, Sartre has been debated for 70 years, but despite that these words, I think, can be broadened to include all who profess hate.

In fact, the news showed pictures of racists espousing replacement conspiracy while marching in Tennessee to protest a Juneteenth commemoration. Again, blaming others.

The same can be said for those who continue to show their ignorance and intolerance through anti-religious bias. While the numbers show that religious bias is not limited to just one faith, I am concerned by the sustained numbers of instances of anti-Semitism.

I am also greatly concerned by the increase in instances of bias against members of our LGBTQIA+ community, particularly the transgender community and even more so against trans youth.

And what is most concerning to me here is that these numbers are increasing against a national backdrop of far-right politicians – including some of my own gubernatorial colleagues – actively campaigning to see who can make their states the most hostile to their LGBTQIA+ residents.

There is no doubt a connection that can be made from these politicians spouting hate and misinformation, and trying to use those as a governing strategy, to the self-empowerment of those bent on targeting LGBTQIA+ youth at exactly the time when they may be at their most vulnerable.

So, where the statistics reported through the Attorney General’s offices are our call to action, today is about how we answer this call.

The first part of any problem, as the saying goes, is acknowledging that one exists. And through this gathering, there is certainly none among us who needs to be convinced.

Harder, though, are finding the strategies through which we can push down these numbers.

Community engagement, yes. Education, yes. Reporting, yes. Enforcement of our laws, yes.

But we should not be afraid to be creative. This is a state which has never shied from taking on the big challenges through out-of-the-box thinking. Today should be no different.

Our goal should be no loftier than that of President George Washington, who responded to the fears of the congregation of Rhode Island’s Touro Synagogue that the newly formed United States government would forget its Jewish residents, by confirming to him that this would be a nation that “gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.”

Our history shows that we haven’t always been perfect in this pursuit. But now is our time to make up for those past failures – including the failures within our state.

And, in doing so, we can live up to the remainder of President Washington’s response to the Touro synagogue congregation – that “every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make him afraid.”

Before I turn the program back over, and so you can begin, in earnest, your deliberations for today, I want to make note of part of the statistics which, while I am not grateful, I can say that I am at least relieved.

The majority of the reported instances of bias were verbal.

And, thankfully, none resulted in the death of any New Jerseyan.

I fear for what our statistics could be if we did not have in place the smart and strong gun safety laws which have made us a national model.

I fear for what could have been had weapons of war been as readily available in New Jersey as they are in other states.

And I fear for what they could have been if New Jersey had the numbers of concealed weapons walking around our streets as other states – including those which now no longer even require an individual to apply for a concealed-carry permit.

This is where the work you are undertaking today intersects with our continued efforts to further strengthen our gun laws to ensure that no weapon ends up in the wrong hands – especially hands under the control of a head full of hate.

So, let’s continue to do all we can, on every front, to ensure that every New Jerseyan can live lives full of respect and dignity.

I’m not asking that we all must become best friends. That’s just not going to happen.

But we can create a state where all are welcomed, all are respected, and where all can live without fear under their own vine and fig tree.

And, in doing so, we will be doing more to promote our nation’s 250-year experiment in securing liberty than we shall ever know.

Again, I thank you all for taking today to be part of this summit. I wish you the very best for a productive and meaningful day.

Thank you!

Governor Phil Murphy

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