

Governor Phil Murphy

George Samir Helmy Accepts Appointment to the United States Senate

08/16/2024

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Good morning.

I must begin by thanking the Governor for his continued trust, his unwavering friendship, and for his belief in my ability to step in and take on the awesome responsibility of this office.

Your leadership has ushered what has been recognized as among the most progressive agendas of any Governor in the nation – and, I would argue, among the most effective.

I have been honored and proud to have been by your side as you made hard choice after hard choice to set our state on a positive and responsible trajectory.

I also thank Lieutenant Governor Tahesha Way and First Lady Tammy Murphy for their continued support and their leadership on a host of important issues over many years.

I say the same to my former boss, Senator Cory Booker. Serving as his State Director prepared me beyond words for working on the challenges and opportunities facing our state. I look forward to being his colleague, even if for just a short while and thank him for his support.

Speaker Craig Coughlin, Senate President Steve Sweeney, your presence here means a great deal to me and I am ever thankful for your friendship and your partnership.

I would say that along with Senate President Nick Scutari, even when we did not always agree on the specifics of policy, we never disagreed on the specifics of principle – namely, to make this state better for those who will come after us.

To my colleagues in the Governor's Office, thank you for being here and for the work you have undertaken in this chapter of your lives. Please know that I stand here on your shoulders as much as anyone else's.

To Mark Manigan and his better half, Kit, thank you for being here. Mark took a shot on a guy 11 months ago, only for him to ask to leave to continue to serve for a short while longer, thank you for allowing me this opportunity. I can't say enough about your leadership of RWJBarnabas Health and the value set you effuse through the organization that provides that greatest amount of care to underserved patients throughout the state.

And finally, I must acknowledge Bishop Daniel, Father Moises, and Father Gabriel of the Coptic Orthodox Church, whose spiritual guidance and leadership has been a continual source of personal strength and peace. I appreciate the importance of today to our community and hope to serve in a manner that makes you proud.

For those who do not know me, allow me a moment to tell my story. It is a story that is very much a New Jersey story, if not the American story. I am the son of immigrants who left the country they loved, left everything and nearly everyone they knew and cared about, and arrived, as millions had, in New Jersey.

Their hopes were the same as millions who came before and who have come since — my parents, who are here today, left everything behind and chose New Jersey as the place to give their as-yet-unborn sons the opportunity to pursue the American Dream.

After settling into a four-story brick apartment complex in Jersey City, my parents worked hard to climb the ladder of opportunity. This allowed us to move to Glen Ridge, where I went to among the best public schools in the nation. I then went on to proudly earn my bachelor's degree at Rutgers, our state university.

I am the older brother to a younger brother I have looked up to since we were kids. I am the husband to a wife I don't deserve and who is the rock of our family. And I am the father to two sons who are my joy and the most incredible young men.

My family's experiences, coupled with a deep appreciation for the opportunities made available to us in this great country, and the desire to be a part of defining a better future for my sons, was what drove me into public service.

My career in government started in this very building when Brendan Gill who is here today and later Mo Butler gave me a chance. They didn't know me at all when they hired me to serve in the offices of Senator Frank Lautenberg and Senator Cory Booker, respectively, giving me a shot when they didn't have to and opening doors that have led me here.

Of all the policy and legislative accomplishments of which I have been a part, it was my early assignments as a Senate caseworker which brought me the greatest joy and sense of accomplishment.

When I was hired, New Jerseyans were still reeling from the housing collapse and financial crisis of 2008, and our office was helping constituents refinance or modify their mortgages through the programs the federal government had created to ensure they kept a roof over their heads. Thirteen years later, I vividly remember those difficult conversations with families who were on the verge of losing their homes.

I remember the veterans who couldn't get appointments at the VA and the seniors dependent on Social Security facing an insurmountable mountain of bureaucracy.

I remember the joy when we were successful and the frustration when we weren't.

A few weeks ago, we celebrated the signing of the Full Funding Grant Agreement for the Gateway Program. The majority of the individuals who brought that work to completion over the last decade were not there and were not in the photos, and they wouldn't have it any other way.

And therein lies the core of what it means to be a staffer.

Getting the job done is what matters, the service is what matters.

It's not you on the press release, it's not your name on the building and it's not you who should be at the podium.

I must at this moment acknowledge those who have been oftentimes forgotten in the happenings over the past year — Senator Menendez's staff, past and present.

Collectively, they are known for talent and skill that rivals any Senate office. They were — and are — fiercely competitive in a way that makes all offices strive to be better. But most of all, they helped the people of New Jersey navigate the federal government.

And to them I say thank you.

I have never — nor will I ever — seek elected office. As a matter of fact, as the Governor alluded to, the idea of being called "Senator" bothers me deeply — and I recognize I'll now be spending the rest of my life telling people, "Please, go back to calling me what you did before."

Which for some in the room has not and will not be a problem.

But our residents deserve a functioning Senate office upon which they can call for help. Our nonprofits and local governments deserve an office that will fight for them to get support for grants or to help with navigating the arcane maze of federal agencies.

And yes, New Jersey deserves its full voice and representation on the floor of the United States Senate.

Relying on my familiarity with the Senate and a deep knowledge of the issues facing the state, I will stand as our crucial second vote in the Democratic Caucus under Majority Leader Chuck Schumer on the important items that will come before us over the next few months.

I will draw from the words of the man under whom I began this journey in public service, the late Senator Lautenberg. Upon his initial retirement from the Senate, in his final address on the floor in December 2000, he said, “The fact of the matter is, if we defend the interests of our states, in concert with the interests of our country, we will have done our jobs correctly.”

I’d once again like to thank the Governor for the trust he’s shown in me and commit to stepping down early to give the duly elected Senator the chance to begin his work in earnest a few weeks early. So although I will only serve in this role for a few months, I will do my very best to ensure that our work is about “us,” not “I.”

We work for the people of New Jersey and, beyond them, the people of the United States – not ourselves.

The work we do, and the ultimate credit for it and benefit of it, goes to the people we serve.

If nothing else, if my short time in office can begin to restore a small measure of faith and belief in the honor of public service, then I shall have done my job correctly.

As I close, I must again thank Caroline, Joshua, and Elijah. We know this means a few more months of Dad missing games and not being as present as I would like, and I know that burden is much more yours to carry than mine.

I accept this appointment with great humility and with even greater determination, and I am eager to get back to work.

Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy

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