

Governor Phil Murphy

REMARKS: Governor Murphy Delivers Keynote Address at the League of Municipalities 2023 Conference

11/16/2023

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Good afternoon!

To outgoing President, Mayor Ray Heck, thank you for that warm introduction. And thank you for your tremendous leadership, here with the League of Municipalities, and back home in the Township of Millstone.

I must say, Ray—you have offered a real master class in municipal leadership. I mean, outside of your time as Mayor, you have served as a police officer, a fire fighter, an emergency management coordinator. At this point, I gotta imagine, when folks call 9-1-1, they just patch it straight to your cell phone.

To Executive Director Mike Cerra—and the entire team here at the League of Municipalities—thank you, once again, for bringing us together, here in Atlantic City. And thank you for giving me the opportunity to interrupt your lunch!

I also want to say “congratulations and welcome” to incoming President Mayor Bill Chegwidan. Bill, I look forward to working with you to explore new opportunities to move our communities forward.

After all, with your background as an economics teacher—and my background as a recovering banker—I am sure we will have no shortage of topics to nerd out on together.

And finally, let me take a moment to recognize this year’s honorees.

First—we have our administration’s very own Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Laurie Doran, who will be receiving the well-deserved “Public Sector Career Recognition Award.” Congratulations, Laurie!

And my congratulations, as well, to this year’s Women in Government Honorees!

Finally, of course, I also want to recognize the two heroes who are, tragically, not with us today to accept their Distinguished Public Service Career Awards: Our former Lieutenant Governor, Sheila Oliver and our former President of the Board of Public Utilities (BPU), Joe Fiordaliso.

We have the honor, today, of being joined by a few members of the Oliver and Fiordaliso families. And I want to personally thank Charles Senior, Charles Jr., and Joe Jr., for joining us to honor Sheila and Joe’s memories.

With the loss of the two of them, it has not been the easiest year for our administration, and truthfully, our entire state. Sheila and Joe had been a part of our team since the very beginning. And every step of the way, they embodied the highest ideals of public service.

Just think about their life stories. Both Sheila and Joe started out as two kids from Newark—who were born with a passion for justice.

And both of them went on to lead the good fight in the halls of power, and ultimately, change our state for the better.

Well, today, I am proud to say that Sheila and Joe's remarkable legacies now live on in our administration. They live on through the leadership of public servants like Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs, Jacquelyn Suárez, Lieutenant Governor Tahesha Way, and President of the BPU, Christine Guhl-Sadovy.

And their legacies also live on in each one of you. All of you who work as mayors, council members, and more, to chip away at the challenges facing millions of our neighbors.

The fact is, as municipal leaders, you stand on the front lines of public service.

Whenever disaster strikes—like a flood, a forest fire, or a major traffic collision—you are among the first folks to receive the call.

And whenever our residents have complaints or concerns—you are also among the first provide them an open ear, and an open mind.

So in many ways, you understand the challenges our neighbors are grappling with better than anyone.

And like me, I know you have heard—time and again—that there is one challenge, in particular, that remains at the top of list for so many of our families: Affordability.

In our post-COVID reality, everyone is feeling the financial squeeze. Taxpayers, business owners, workers, renters—you name it.

This challenge stares us in the face every time we walk through the grocery store, and every time we pull into a gas station.

And as mayors and municipal leaders, you have a rare vantage point into understanding how rising costs harm our communities.

You see the pain first-hand, which means you also have keen insights into how we can help alleviate that pain.

That is exactly why this conference is so important.

It is an annual opportunity for us to come together, learn from one another—and hopefully—identify new solutions for helping our families get by.

Of course, when it comes to affordability, it is important to note, there are factors out of our control. Back in my banking days, we referred to this as “systematic risk”—the notion that, no matter what you do, you are going to face disruptions and challenges in the market.

Well, in just the past few years alone, we have endured a number of global challenges: a once-in-a-century pandemic. Supply chain snarls. A war in Europe, and now, a war in the Middle East.

These are all global disruptions that—inevitably—have a local impact, here in the Garden State. Some, in the form of higher prices. That is a reality we cannot change.

But what we can change, what we do have control over, as leaders and lawmakers, is how we decide to help our neighbors weather these storms.

And that is an area in which all of your insights, and your partnership, has been absolutely indispensable.

Because together—during a period of unprecedented uncertainty, on a worldwide scale, we have made significant progress in making life more affordable for our state's residents.

From bringing down the cost-of-living for working families, to making it easier for small business owners to stay in business, to creating new, good-paying job opportunities for our state's workers.

In fact, I recently came across a data point that speaks to our success.

Over the past six years, and even in the face of all the disruptions I just mentioned, New Jersey's small business community has grown at a remarkable rate.

In fact, since our administration took office, we have seen more than 60,000 new small businesses open their doors! That means New Jersey has more small businesses in operation, today, than ever before.

And during this same period—as we have seen family-owned businesses grow and thrive—we have also secured new rights and benefits for our state's workers. A higher minimum wage, expanded family leave, paid sick days.

In short—we have managed to strike the perfect balance between defending the rights of our workers, while also cultivating a more business-friendly environment in New Jersey.

Just recently, CNBC named us the most-improved state to do business, as well as a top three state in which to live and work. That is a win-win!

Now, to be sure, we have not reached the finish line by any stretch. But that being said, I would stack our record of success against any other state in the country.

For instance, look no further than the progress we have made in alleviating a financial headache that has plagued New Jerseyans for decades: property taxes.

Just weeks ago, for the second year in a row, our state provided direct property tax relief to more than one million New Jerseyans through the ANCHOR program.

This program has effectively reversed years of property tax increases and knocked the statewide average down to a level we have not seen since 2011.

In other words, our administration has the best record on property tax relief compared to any other administration in modern history. Period. Full stop.

Moreover, in addition to the ANCHOR Program, our administration has also taken steps to address property tax rates through programs like the "StayNJ" plan, which will eventually cut property taxes for many seniors by up to half, as well as the Municipal Relief Fund.

Over the past two fiscal years, we have invested \$225 million into the Municipal Relief Fund. This investment has directly supported your communities—so you can provide public services to our residents without having to jack up property tax rates.

And, on the note of addressing longstanding challenges that previous administrations have failed to address, let me also quickly plug that—over the past three years—we have fully funded our state pension for the first time in a generation! Let me tell you right now: in 2024, we intend to do it for a fourth year in a row as well.

But just as important as confronting the challenges that have dogged previous administrations, together, we are also making progress in pursuing new opportunities to make life more affordable in New Jersey.

As you all know, a crucial piece to this puzzle is supporting our family-owned businesses and revitalizing our downtowns—both of which were battered by the pandemic.

So to help our communities get back on their feet, our administration has vigorously supported a number of initiatives through the New Jersey Economic Development Authority and allied agencies. Altogether, these investments have amounted to more than \$1 billion in relief since the pandemic.

For instance, since 2021, we have invested roughly \$200 million into the Main Street Recovery Fund—which has helped our small businesses bounce back from the doldrums of the pandemic.

And most recently, back in August, I signed legislation into law creating the Boardwalk Preservation Fund—to support our Shore communities.

This is a \$100 million program specially designed to support the repair and renovation of boardwalks up and down the Shore. And with this funding, we are going to make sure that our wooden main streets can continue driving growth for our Shore economies for decades to come.

Now, while all of these Funds and programs benefit our communities in different ways, the fact is, each one of them is centered around the same, broader, economic strategy.

Making life more affordable for working families by rebuilding the three legs of the stool that have always buttressed New Jersey's success.

Growing the economy, reducing inequities, and restoring fiscal responsibility.

So, as we look forward to the last two years of our administration, I promise you this: we are going to run through the tape.

We are going to keep the victories coming! In fact, I think we can even notch another victory or two in the next few months, with the upcoming lame-duck legislative session.

And there is one item in particular that is top of mind for many small business owners in New Jersey: Liquor license reform.

Over the past couple years, this has been a real white whale for our state—or, I suppose I should say, a real black barrel.

But we are going to get this done—because our family-run restaurants are counting on us! And I remain confident as ever that—with the help of Speaker Coughlin and Senate President Scutari—we will find a solution. One that will give our small business owners a leg up while also protecting the investments made by owners who already have a liquor license.

Additionally, as we approach 2024, I know there is another hot topic that is on all of your minds. In fact, I understand the League hosted a conversation on the topic just this week: The State Development and Redevelopment Plan.

Updating the State Plan is a process that is literally decades in the making. And, just like any other issue, I promise you: it will be a collaborative process.

We are going to work together to create a new State Plan that will preserve and protect our natural resources, while also encouraging development and redevelopment where it is sorely needed. And when all is said and done, we will move forward—as one New Jersey—in building a smarter, greener, and more equitable state.

In that same spirit, our administration also remains fully committed to promoting shared services in New Jersey. Over the past six years, we have seen how shared service agreements can help lower costs for our residents while also improving the delivery of services.

So for those of you interested in bringing the benefits of shared services to your community, I would point you in the direction of Commissioner Suárez, her team at the DCA, and our shared services czars Nic Platt and Jordan Glatt.

They are currently accepting grant applications for two programs: the Local Efficiency Achievement Program as well as the School Regionalization Efficiency Program.

In recent years, the DCA has awarded more than \$11 million—through both of these programs—to help our communities expand shared services. So, consider this your invitation to apply today!

Now, before I let you all return to your lunch, I want to mention one last point.

Our administration's obsession—and I mean obsession—with making life more affordable for our families is rooted in

a deeper principle.

Because affordability is not just about easing the financial pressures on our families—so they can save more money or stay out of debt, though both are obviously important.

Affordability is also about staying true to our New Jersey values! It is about investing in the future of our family-owned shops and restaurants—our diners and delis—so they can keep their doors open for generations to come.

These local institutions have always stood at the heart of who we are in New Jersey. They are where our families make memories, where we come together to celebrate birthdays and graduations.

So if we lose these community treasures, the honest to God truth is: We will lose our identity as a state.

Because the spirit of New Jersey is embodied in the ingenuity and resilience of our family-owned businesses.

Businesses like Rabble Rise Donuts, in Montclair, or the Flounder Brewing Company, in Hillsborough —two local staples that have been able to keep their doors open, during hard times, thanks to our Main Street recovery programs.

And that is worth every penny, because in keeping these local businesses alive, we are—really—keeping the story of New Jersey alive! We are reviving hope in our shared future—and the promise of being able to hand our kids a proud family legacy.

So with that, I want to thank every one of you for doing your part to keep the story of New Jersey alive—and I look forward to seeing you next year!

May God bless you and your residents, and may God continue to bless the state of New Jersey and the United States of America.

Governor Phil Murphy

[Home \(/governor/\)](#)

Administration

[Governor Phil Murphy \(/governor/admin/about\)](#)

[Lt. Governor Tahesha Way \(/governor/admin/lt\)](#)

[In memoriam of Lt. Governor Sheila Y. Oliver \(/governor/admin/lt-sheila-y-oliver\)](#)

[Senior Staff \(/governor/admin/staff\)](#)

[Cabinet \(/governor/admin/cabinet\)](#)

[Office of Climate Action and the Green Economy \(/governor/climateaction/\)](#)

[Office of Equity \(/governor/admin/equity/\)](#)

[Office of Health Care Affordability and Transparency](#)

[\(/governor/admin/affordablehealthcare/index.shtml\)](#)

[Boards, Commissions & Authorities \(/governor/admin/bca\)](#)

[New Jersey Puerto Rico Commission \(https://www.nj.gov/puertoricocommission/\)](https://www.nj.gov/puertoricocommission/)

[Internship Opportunities \(/governor/admin/internship.shtml\)](#)

[Governor's Fellows Program \(/governor/admin/fellows\)](#)

Governor's Residence - Drumthwacket (<http://drumthwacket.org/>)

Key Initiatives

Economy & Jobs (</governor/initiatives/#Economy>)

Education (</governor/initiatives/#Education>)

Environment (</governor/initiatives/#Environment>)

Health (</governor/initiatives/#Health>)

Law & Justice (</governor/initiatives/#Justice>)

Transportation (</governor/initiatives/#Transportation>)

News & Events

Press Releases (/governor/news/news/562023/approved/news_archive.shtml)

Photos (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/govmurphy>)

Public Addresses (</governor/news/addresses>)

Executive Orders (/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo_archive.html)

Administrative Orders (/governor/news/ao/approved/ao_archive.shtml)

Direct Appointments (</governor/news/appointments>)

Advice and Consent Appointments (</governor/news/acappointments>)

Statements on Legislation (/governor/news/statements/approved/statements_archive.shtml)

Administration Reports (</governor/news/adminreports/approved/archive.shtml>)

Transition Reports (/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml)

Press Kits (</governor/news/press>)

Social

Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/governorphilmurphy/>)

Twitter (<https://twitter.com/GovMurphy>)

Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/govmurphy/>)

Snapchat (<https://www.snapchat.com/add/philmurphy>)

YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/njgovernorsoffice>)

Contact Us

Scheduling Requests (</governor/contact/scheduling/>)

Contact Us (</governor/contact/all/>)

Statewide

[NJ Home \(//www.nj.gov\)](http://www.nj.gov)

[Services A to Z \(//www.nj.gov/nj/gov/njgov/alphaserv.html\)](http://www.nj.gov/nj/gov/njgov/alphaserv.html)

[Departments/Agencies \(//www.nj.gov/nj/gov/deptserv/\)](http://www.nj.gov/nj/gov/deptserv/)

[FAQs \(//www.nj.gov/faqs/\)](http://www.nj.gov/faqs/)

[Contact Us \(//www.nj.gov/nj/feedback.html\)](http://www.nj.gov/nj/feedback.html)

[Privacy Notice \(//www.nj.gov/nj/privacy.html\)](http://www.nj.gov/nj/privacy.html)

[Legal Statement & Disclaimers \(//www.nj.gov/nj/legal.html\)](http://www.nj.gov/nj/legal.html)

[Accessibility Statement \(//www.nj.gov/nj/accessibility.html\)](http://www.nj.gov/nj/accessibility.html)

[\(//nj.gov/opra/\)](http://nj.gov/opra/)

[\(https://my.state.nj.us/openam/UI/Login\)](https://my.state.nj.us/openam/UI/Login)

[\(https://tech.nj.gov/\)](https://tech.nj.gov/)

Copyright © State of New Jersey, 1996-2023
Office of Governor PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625
609-292-6000