

STATE OF THE STATE

Tuesday, January 11, 2005

Reverend Clergy ...

Mr. Speaker ...

Madam Chief Justice ...

Justices of the Supreme Court ...

Members of our Congressional delegation ...

Members of the Legislature ...

Members of the Cabinet ...

Governors DiFrancesco and Florio ...

Honored guests ...

and fellow New Jerseyans ...

We have witnessed nature's fury on a historic level.

Millions of lives have been devastated in Southeast Asia.

The violence in Iraq and Afghanistan continues.

Our servicemen and women have spent their holidays in harms way... so we can spend ours safely at home.

Now, let us, take a moment to pray for our troops and all of those who have suffered in Southeast Asia.

To Speaker Sires and Majority Leader Roberts ...

To President Pro Tem Turner and Majority Leader Kenny ...

Thank you for your partnership and your friendship.

To Minority Leaders Lance and DeCroce ... thank you for the respect and courtesy you have shown to me during this transition.

Your criticism has been measured and fair.

To my family -- my wife, Mary Jo, my sons Kevin and Chris ...

thank you for the love and the strength you have given me -- not just in the past two months but over a lifetime.

You never let me forget that I am a husband and a father before a Governor and Senator.

And I want to thank the citizens of our great state.

I know it hasn't been easy -- both sides of the political establishment have tried your patience.

But you have welcomed me with optimism and open arms and for that I am grateful.

I assumed this office at a time of political upheaval for the people of New Jersey.

Our faith in government had been shaken.

But this moment in history has given us the opportunity to chart a new course.

Together, we have begun to restore faith, integrity, and hope to our government.

I fully recognize that I was not elected to this position.

I did not run for it.

And I did not seek it.

But, I will not run from the responsibility ... and I will not shy from the challenges.

That's not how I was raised.

Whether I am President of the Senate ...

Acting Governor ...

a candidate for Governor ...

a husband, or just dad ...

I am always going to be the same person.

I'm not going to change who I am or the values I hold just because I moved down the hall.

I am always going to remember my immigrant grandparents ...

who taught me to watch out for our neighbors and help those down on their luck.

And I won't forget the lessons my parents taught me about integrity and hard work ...

about respect and compassion ...

about working together and keeping your word ...

They are the values that I was taught.

They are the values that form the basis of my public service.

And they are the values that I bring to this position.

In the time I have as your Governor, I want to accomplish a few basic things.

I want to bring stability and dignity to the State House.

I want to start the process of restoring the public's trust in the institutions of government.

I want to be an advocate for the people who don't have time to read the newspaper ...

or the money to make a political contribution.

I want to build bi-partisan solutions ...and solicit new ideas from every political party and every community across our state.

Most importantly, I want to be honest about the issues ... about the problems ...

and the limits on what we can accomplish.

It is not enough just to identify problems -- we must work together to solve them.

We may not always agree ... but you will always know where I stand ... and my door will always be open.

In my first two months in office, I have worked hard to demonstrate that working together, we can make a fresh start.

Together, we are building something "new" ... right here in New Jersey.

We brought the struggles of the mentally ill to the forefront of the public's attention.

We made ethics in government the focus of our policy agenda.

We stopped the automatic increases in campaign contribution limits.

We created an Inspector General to root out waste, fraud, and mismanagement.

We hired a special ethics counsel to develop a mandatory training program.

We started plans to expand the southern portion of the New Jersey Turnpike.

We created a new vision for the Meadowlands.

And we fought the administration in Washington when their funding decisions threatened our safety.

Mr. President, homeland security isn't about the red states or the blue states.

It's about the United States.

It isn't about Republicans or Democrats.

It's about Americans.

Al Qaeda doesn't care how we vote.

Their killing knows no boundaries. Their hatred includes us all.

Mr. President, how can Wyoming receive \$30 dollars per capita for homeland security aid while New Jersey receives only \$6 dollars per capita?

Homeland security funding increased 24% this year but yet, funding was cut for Newark, one of only three cities put on Orange Alert this summer.

Mr. President. We live our lives in the shadow of the fallen towers.

For purposes of terrorism, the FBI has called the stretch between Port Newark and Newark International Airport the most dangerous two miles in America.

We have nuclear plants and oil refineries, chemical plants and financial districts.

We have been targeted before and we will likely be targeted again.

This is not a fight just to get our fair share from Washington.

This is a fight to protect our communities from an evil we all know.

Mr. President, our voices will not be quieted ... our efforts will not be stopped until you say "yes" to New Jersey.

Although Washington refuses to acknowledge the obvious, we are taking it upon ourselves to make sure New Jersey is prepared.

We invested more than \$300 million dollars of our own money in homeland security.

We created a homeland security unit within the State Police.

And we've worked with private industry to protect our most critical industrial sites.

But as we saw in Russia, terrorists have no hesitation using children to achieve their political objectives.

Who among us didn't reel in horror when a summer renovation was used as cover to hide weapons and explosives inside an elementary school?

Who among us didn't feel shivers when the building plans for two New Jersey schools were found in Iraq?

The four billion dollar deficit, the property tax crisis ... they pale in comparison to the safety of our children.

If we have one priority for the year ahead ...

it will be the safety of our school children.

If there is one thing we must all focus on ...

it is the protection of our schools.

And if the parents of New Jersey hear only one thing from me today ...

hear this ... I will leave no stone unturned (in my effort) to keep our children safe ... from the horrors of terrorism.

Educators aren't terrorism experts. They know about the S.A.T. not the C.I.A..

But they want to protect our schools ... and we must help them.

So a security checklist will be created ... and security experts will visit every school before classes start next fall.

Federal homeland security officials will come to New Jersey ... to host courses on school security.

National experts will teach bus drivers and administrators, teachers and nurses ... to recognize and prevent terrorist activities ...

and how to react, if, God forbid, something should happen.

We will publish standards and recommendations on the most effective safety technologies.

School construction and maintenance activities will be inspected by law enforcement ... so what happened in Russia never ever happens in New Jersey.

And to bring the best ideas from New Jersey and the nation together in one place ... Rutgers has agreed to host a forum on school security this spring.

I have asked a lot of General Harvey, Counter-terrorism Director Casperson, Superintendent Fuentes, and Commissioner Librera.

They have met the challenge and they deserve our thanks.

I entered public service because it offered the chance to make a difference ...

for our children ...

for our communities ... and for our neighbors in need.

But our ability to govern is threatened by the public's growing loss of confidence in the integrity of government.

This isn't a problem unique to one branch of government or one party.

It is a problem that affects each of us everyday.

And I will make every effort to restore the public's faith in government.

Under the leadership of Speaker Sires, we have already started the process.

We strengthened financial disclosure requirements ... and we eliminated no-bid contracts.

We stopped double-dipping on health care benefits ... and we toughened the conflict of interest laws.

We banned nepotism ... and we increased penalties for ethics and campaign finance violations.

We made significant progress ... but together we can and must do more this year.

Governor McGreevey's Executive Order on pay to play ... must become a permanent law.

And I am 100% committed to getting that done in the very near future.

There is nothing more important to our democracy than the trust of the citizens.

And when that trust wavers, the question is not whether we should act ... but how much we can achieve.

We must start with an overhaul of the Executive Commission on Ethics.

It needs more independence and its well-intentioned rules need more teeth.

Thanks to legislation you passed, the Commission now has an equal number of public and governmental members.

But I am not prepared to declare victory simply because that Commission is no longer dominated by the very people it oversees.

Today I am proposing that for the first time ever, a majority of the Commission be public members.

In addition, the Commission will undertake random audits and develop a mandatory training program.

And finally, the Commission must be granted sweeping, new enforcement powers and penalties.

I want to thank Senators Adler, Karcher, and Bernie Kenny as well as Assemblymembers Panter and Greenstein who have been leaders in this effort.

And most importantly Justice Daniel O'Hern and Professor Paula Franzese for their work on this issue ... we look forward to your full report.

I want the public to know we are serious about ethical accountability.

But the public must also know that government will be accountable to them.

For more than 20 years the Public Advocate stood as a champion of the person in need ... but without political capital.

It was one entity of government that stood independent ...

willing to fight whomever, including government itself, on behalf of ordinary citizens.

When Governor Whitman eliminated the Public Advocate, she did more than eliminate a level of government.

She eliminated accountability.

She eliminated a voice of the people.

And it's time to give that voice back to the people ... where it belongs.

This year, with the leadership of Assemblyman Caraballo and Senator Vitale, we must restore the Public Advocate.

Strengthening democracy means more than fighting public corruption.

It means maximizing voting opportunities and ensuring that every vote truly counts.

In the recent Presidential election, nearly 500,000 additional New Jerseyans registered to vote.

And 73% of those registered voted.

This is good news for democracy, but we can do better.

We should encourage greater participation by allowing people more time to register.

And we can make it easier to vote by allowing anyone to use an absentee ballot.

People must have confidence that their vote is counted.

Every electronically cast vote must produce a paper receipt.

Now, I don't know about you ... but I am tired of being a bystander in the Presidential primaries.

I am tired of watching small states like Iowa and New Hampshire pick our presidential candidates.

I am sure that each state is a fine place to raise a family.

But they do not have the population, the diversity, and the concerns that we do.

New Jersey must move up it's presidential primary.

We've discussed this for years.

Now the time has come to make New Jersey a Presidential player instead of an ATM machine for Presidential candidates!

I want to commend Majority Leader Roberts, Assemblyman Mayer, and Senator Gill for their work to strengthen our voting process.

Strengthening the integrity of our government shows our commitment to democracy ...

fighting for those without a voice shows true compassion.

For too long we have swept the problems of mental illness under the carpet ... and hoped that they would go away.

Well, that is not going to continue. Not on my watch.

The problems of mental illness are difficult and expensive.

They're not the type of issues we champion at our fundraisers or in our campaign brochures.

But how we handle the challenges of mental illness ... will speak volumes about how we handle ourselves as human beings.

One in every five New Jersey residents will suffer from a mental illness in their lifetime.

There are some who have said that mental health is my personal agenda.

Let me make it clear. I couldn't be prouder of the dignity and courage my wife has shown through her struggles and her advocacy.

But this isn't my agenda -- it's everyone's agenda.

And if it's not ... it should be!

Individuals with mental illness are our brothers and our sisters ... our mothers and our fathers.

They are our sons and daughters ... our neighbors and colleagues.

And, yes, our husbands and our wives.

And they all deserve better.

To begin with, their basic need for decent housing is not being met.

There are 8,000 chronically homeless people in New Jersey, the vast majority of whom suffer from mental illness.

50% of adults with severe mental illness live at home with their aging parents.

And the wait for housing for an individual in the state system can be five years!

The housing shortage destroys their quality of life.

It puts unnecessary and extraordinary costs on the citizens of this State.

And it makes their recovery from mental illness even harder.

Meeting this crisis has been a top priority of the Governor's Task Force on Mental Health.

And so today, I am proposing a \$200 million dollar housing trust fund for individuals with mental illness and other disabilities.

This will help create 10,000 affordable places to live over the next 10 years.

It will bring decency to the lives of individuals with mental illness.

It will bring relief to their families who have cared for them.

And it will let New Jersey ... begin to do better.

Our mental health facilities are facing a personnel crisis.

These jobs are difficult and salaries start as low as \$25,000 dollars per year.

On average, 38% of recent college graduates in community-based provider agencies will leave their job after one year.

If we can't retain quality people then we can't provide quality care.

So today I am proposing a new incentive to attract and retain mental health workers.

The state will forgive up to \$20,000 dollars in student loans ...

for any college graduate who works in a state, county, or non-profit mental health or social service agency.

These are only two initial recommendations from the Mental Health Task Force, and I look forward to their full report in March.

Postpartum depression is a very real and very serious problem for many mothers.

It can happen to a first time mom or a veteran mother.

It can occur a few days ... or a few months after childbirth.

It leaves mothers feeling sad and anxious, confused and afraid.

For too long, it has been difficult for women to openly talk about this form of depression ...

and the medical community has been slow to understand and treat its symptoms.

My family was fortunate. My wife recognized what was happening and we were able to get the help she needed.

Unfortunately, my family was more the exception than the rule.

Too many mothers battle this disease alone, unsure of what is happening, and afraid to ask for help.

We can't leave them alone.

We need to increase awareness among women and medical providers so the symptoms can be quickly recognized.

And we need to facilitate treatment so women can get the help they deserve.

Therefore, I have directed Commissioner Jacobs to organize an Education Campaign on postpartum depression.

And I am asking the Legislature to work with me so we can make New Jersey the only state to offer free mental health screenings for uninsured new mothers.

The care of individuals with mental illness is only one aspect of our health care system that can be improved in the year ahead.

More than a million New Jerseyans have no health insurance.

I know we have a budget crisis.

But that cannot be an excuse to do nothing.

We must find a way to do something ... and now.

Our state is blessed with 20 community health care centers that operate 67 facilities.

In our urban and rural areas, these centers are often the only medical option for Medicaid patients and the working poor with no insurance.

In 1991, Wayne Bryant and I sponsored legislation to allow community health centers to receive state funding for the first time.

And Wayne, along with Senators Rice and Lance and Assemblymen Greenwald and Payne have been their champion.

Even though we have 67 facilities, there are many communities in need that are not being served.

Today I am setting a goal to open ten new centers next year.

And with your help, these new centers will provide health care to 30,000 more residents.

Besides easy access to health care, these centers offer another benefit.

They get a special federal discount on prescription drugs for their patients.

But right now only two facilities have the expertise and resources to take advantage of this extraordinary benefit.

This means there are tens of thousands of needy patients that should have access to affordable prescription drugs but don't.

I cannot stand by and do nothing while easy access to life-saving drugs is so near.

So today I am making a commitment ...

that the Department of Health will provide whatever support and whatever resources are necessary ...

so every center in New Jersey can offer their patients cheaper prescription drugs.

What we are doing today is a start. There is more to be done.

And I look forward to working with Senator Vitale and Assemblyman Morgan to expand health coverage.

Thanks to the leadership of Senators Buono, Gormley, Kyrillos, Palaia and Singer ...

Speaker Sires, Assemblymembers Cohen, McKeon, Hackett, and Quigley

New Jersey was among the first states to recognize the gift of stem cell research ...

and the hope that it provides to so many ...

the hope that someday ... someday very soon, a cure or a treatment can be found.

We have to nurture that hope with more than just our words.

Our words are comforting, but words alone won't cure anyone's disease.

We have the scientists, we have the research industries, and we have the commitment to make New Jersey an international center of stem cell excellence.

But it will not happen by itself.

It will not happen ... without actions to match our words.

Today I am announcing a \$150 million dollar investment in the construction of the New Jersey Stem Cell Institute.

This will provide the financing to build and equip a world-class facility.

I am also announcing that New Jersey ... under the leadership of Dr. McCormick and Dr. Petillo ... will conduct an international search for the Director of our Institute.

Finally, I will ask the voters of New Jersey to put their faith behind a \$230 million dollar investment in the promise of stem cell research.

We are joined today by Christopher Reeve's mother, Barbara Johnson.

Mrs. Johnson, our actions today are a legacy to your son's achievements ... and his commitment to cure ... the incurable.

His efforts will never be forgotten.

Thank you for sharing him with us.

Helping those with mental illness ... increasing access to health care ... capitalizing on the promise of stem cell research ... these actions define our values as a state.

They demonstrate that our government is taking sensible steps to help people lead better and healthier lives.

Today, too many of our citizens work at jobs that don't pay enough to support their families.

If a man or a woman puts in an honest day's work, they should to be able to earn a living wage.

That's a fair proposition, one the workers of this state deserve ... and a proposition we should all support.

Today, 12 states have a higher minimum wage than New Jersey.

And none of them have New Jersey's high cost of living.

New Jersey should be a leader, not a laggard!

And today I am proposing that New Jersey increase its minimum wage to \$7.15 over the next two years.

This will help more than 200,000 New Jersey workers, most of them women and minorities ...

and to ensure that the minimum wage keeps pace with the cost of living...

I am proposing the creation of a business and labor advisory council to recommend regular increases.

This discussion wouldn't be possible without the leadership of Senator Sweeney and Assemblyman Gordon ... they have been great champions of working men and women.

I said I want to be realistic about what we can accomplish in the year ahead.

The public deserves better than false promises and unrealistic expectations.

If we can get these things done ...

- * a ban on pay to play ...

- * new laws to combat public corruption ...

- * a stronger electoral process ...

- * mandatory ethics training for state workers ...

- * restoring the Public Advocate ...

- * creating an Inspector General ...

- * better care and services for the mentally ill ...
- * increased access to medical care and prescription drugs ...
- * a world class stem cell research facility ...
- * an increase in the minimum wage ...

we will have accomplished a great deal for our state.

Clearly, there are other areas that will demand our attention in the year ahead.

I look forward to recommendations from Senators Smith and Sweeney as well as Assemblyman McKeon on how to improve the smart growth bill.

We must consider ... and act upon the report by Carl Van Horn and Michael Cole on the Property Tax Convention.

A four billion dollar budget deficit must be closed.

And the long term needs of the Transportation Trust Fund must be addressed.

But whatever the issue ...

let us always remember -- there is a difference between the problems we face in Trenton ... and the day to day struggles faced by so many of our citizens.

When it appears we are out of patience or have reached the end of our ability to compromise ...

think of the patient at Greystone Psychiatric Hospital who asks "Governor, when can I go home?"

Or the father struggling to raise a family on the minimum wage ...

Or the single mom who can't help with her kid's homework because she has to work a double shift.

Yes -- we have a huge budget deficit.

Yes -- the federal government seems indifferent to our requests.

And yes -- there are more needs to be met with fewer and fewer dollars.

But my parents taught me ...

to do what you can ...

with what you have ...

in the time you are given.

And now is that time.

I entered public service because it offered the ability to make a difference for those society has left behind.

And it still does.

But I can't do it alone. I need your help -- from both sides of the aisles and all branches of government.

I don't pretend to have all the answers and I don't intend to sugarcoat the challenges.

You know me -- I'm not afraid to ask for help from anyone who has a good idea.

I'm not afraid to seek the truth, even if it isn't pretty.

I am a product of this legislature, and I am proud to call you my colleagues.

To succeed, this body must light the way for the citizens of our state

Democrats and Republicans alike -- all those interested in the future of our state.

Come join this effort with your energy and with your ideas.

The friction and spark ... that comes with the forging of ideas ...

should be used to ignite a torch ...

that can bind us together ... and guide us along the way.

I draw strength from your collective wisdom and I pray that I can use my experience for the greater good.

If we are willing to work together and be sensible in what we can achieve ... then together we can make real and meaningful progress for the State we all love.

Thank you New Jersey.