

Governor Christie: If We Want To Win The Future, Then We Need To Face It Boldly

Tuesday, January 12, 2016 Tags: [Other](#)



Excerpts from Governor Chris Christie's 2016 State of the State Address

Trenton, New Jersey
January 12, 2016

For Immediate Release
Tuesday, January 12, 2016

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"The state of New Jersey is strong and growing stronger every day. And everyone who said that New Jersey is ungovernable was wrong.

"In 2015, our economic recovery went from strong to stronger. We achieved the best private sector job creation in New Jersey in fifteen years. After creating no jobs for eight years, we've created 224,000 new jobs in our six years. Our unemployment rate has fallen to 5.3 percent, the lowest it's been since 2008. Home sales continued to recover in 2015, rising by nearly 14 percent over the year before, and the number of construction permits issued is 10 percent higher than 2014 – at the highest level since 2006. Last year foreclosures fell by 20 percent – with declines in every single county in our state.

"On our watch, New Jersey has pulled back from the economic brink."

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"We've continued to make progress towards building safer, stronger communities, strengthening law enforcement and keeping violent offenders off the streets - while also helping to build the conditions for long term peace in our communities. From 2011 to 2014, crime in New Jersey fell 20 percent and incarceration fell 9.5 percent. In Camden, once the most violent city in America, the murder rate has dropped 52% in the three years since with the Mayor we transformed the police force.

"And one of the achievements that I'm proudest of – we've helped thousands of people whose lives have been devastated by drugs to get the help they need. Instead of prosecuting a failed war on drugs - a war on our own citizens – we've classified drug addiction as the illness it truly is, and worked to treat and rehabilitate some of the most vulnerable members of our society. Last year alone I signed ten new laws to address this issue, and today we're going to talk about the next steps we need to take to continue making progress."

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"But more than that – we've achieved a victory for a different kind of politics.

"Instead of accepting the cynicism and mediocrity of inaction here in New Jersey, we've shown what it means to achieve policies of consequence, principle and compromise.

"Instead of hiding from our problems or pretending they don't exist, we've confronted them openly. More often than not, we've done it together, as Republicans and Democrats. We don't agree on everything, but we don't have to – as long as we keep talking to each other and trying to do the right thing.

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"Instead of slick soundbites, we've governed through hard conversations. I've certainly had plenty of them with many of you in this room. And I intend to have more today. Those conversations haven't always won me friends, but it was never about that. The only thing I've ever tried to win is a better deal for all the people of New Jersey.

"Instead of going for the quick fixes or the easy solutions, we've gone for hard solutions and a long term revolution in the way we run our state. This is what it means to be a Governor; to be a real leader. It's the difference between talking a big game and attacking problems head-on and being responsible for achieving solutions. No matter how unpopular – the test is simple – is it right for New Jersey. In the way we teach our children. In the way we care for the most vulnerable members of our society. In the way we keep our streets safe, build better neighborhoods and grow stronger businesses."

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"Now in Washington, that's not true. All we're going to hear about the big challenges that we face today as a nation is a lot of hot air from Congress and the White House. The state of the union isn't a call to action, it's a fantasy wish list by a President who has failed us. It's the world as he wishes it was; not the real world his failed leadership has left to all Americans.

"For the last six years, we've done something different in New Jersey. A lot of people in this room have shown the courage to set aside partisan differences and achieve real progress. To all those who have chosen to reach out across the aisle – thank you. Thank you for everything you've done for our state.

"Now we face a truly dangerous moment. We've got elections for a new Governor and the entire Legislature less than two years away. So now all of you have a choice. Do we keep working to get things done and to move New Jersey forward? Or are we going to pander to special interests, and send New Jersey back to the bad old days? Unfortunately, we see signs of this already. Signs of fiscal irresponsibility to pander to a cynical leadership of a narrow constituency. We can't let this happen."

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Will you support practical, common sense ideas that the vast majority of people believe in and need us to do; or will you go for short-sighted, politically motivated, fiscally reckless policies which will destroy our state? In the process, we will drive citizens out of New Jersey.

"How will we drive citizens from our state? What irresponsible policies am I talking about? Let me be very clear about the course you may pursue and the cost to our state and our citizens."

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"You have begun the pursuit of a constitutional amendment to guarantee pension payments over all other types of state spending... 8.1 million New Jerseyans would become second class citizens. Public pensioners would be a special class of citizens whose retirement is protected above all other public concerns"

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"Today, I'm asking you to join me in doubling down on our state's fight against drug addiction.

"There are few things that I've worked on harder as Governor or that I believe as strongly as this. Drug addiction, just like cancer, is an illness. It can strike anyone, from any station in life. We're talking about people who could be my son or daughter – people who could be your kids, your husbands and wives. There but for the grace of God go each and every one of us."

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"Through the reforms we delivered, like mandatory drug court, we have a smaller prison population today.

"Today, this smaller population gives me the ability and opportunity to announce something extraordinarily exciting and unique across our country. We are closing a traditional state prison. Yes, our population is down enough that we have closed Mid-State Prison. Today, it stands empty as testimony to this Administration's work in reducing crime and recidivism. So what do we do with Mid-State? I propose today that we re-open Mid-State as a fully dedicated, certified drug abuse treatment facility for New Jersey prison inmates.

"The victims of addiction deserve treatment, whether they're in the community or incarcerated. If we can break the cycle of addiction anywhere, we should break it.

"So I've directed Commissioner Lanigan of the Department of Corrections and Commissioner Connelly of the Department of Human Services to implement the first licensed substance abuse treatment program at the Mid-State Correctional Facility. Next year it will re-open for its new mission. We are doing this because every life is a precious gift from God. Again, we must give all our citizens the chance to reclaim their lives."

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"It's undeniable that we've made a lot of progress in New Jersey over the last six years. There are things we've achieved that can be an inspiration and model for reformers in other states and at the national level. So let's keep going forward together. There will always be naysayers, the talking heads in the media and the unabashed partisans who think only liberal Democrats achieve anything worthy of praise. I've ignored those folks my whole career and I will continue to do so. They are the same folks who I said I shouldn't be U.S. Attorney. The same ones who opposed me for Governor in 2009. The same ones who called me a one-termer. Their record speaks for itself.

"This is our path forward from here. The state of New Jersey is strong. If we work together, we can make it even stronger. But we can also make it smarter, more efficient, more resourceful – and more compassionate. And if we are not careful, we can make it weaker if we give in to the selfish special interests. I will say no and I pray you will join me.

"I have spent the last thirteen years of my life as US Attorney and governor of this state fighting for fairness and justice and opportunity for the people of this state. Every day I wake up and think about how to make New Jersey better, and how to make our country better. I feel so privileged to have served these last 13 years. I thank the people of New Jersey for the chances they have given me.

"I believe our best days lie ahead. But if we want to win the future, then we need to face it boldly. We can't shirk from the difficult decisions and hard conversations we need to have. We can't choose to only pass the easy reforms or the ones that the media or the special interests like.

"Government service is an enormous privilege and a special opportunity. Look around us. This great hall should inspire acts of sacrifice and greatness, not pettiness and self-service. We can do better by remembering who gave us these jobs – not the campaign contributors, not the folks who occupy the palaces on State Street - - the everyday heroes of New Jersey life. They work and struggle to make their lives better over the hurdles that life places before them. Let's not have those that serve in this chamber and what you do be another hurdle in their lives. Let us be the powerful who clear the hurdles for them that they cannot clear alone. We can do that by putting ourselves in their shoes; not be putting ourselves deeper in their pockets and their lives.

"We must try and make things better for all, not just the monied few who roam these halls as if they own them. They think they've bought them. They're wrong – but only if we make it so. Because all of us have been blessed with the strength and resources and wisdom to do the right thing.

"Let's try. Let's work hard. Let's do better than we did yesterday. Let's say what needs to be said. Let's make New Jersey a better place to live, for all our people.

"I've never had a greater honor than being Governor. I will never stop fighting for those who elected me. I will never stay silent to injustices. I will never settle for less – from any of us. That is who I am because that is who New Jersey taught me to be.

"Thank you and God bless you and God bless the great state of New Jersey."

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