

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Addresses the Jersey Boys State Program

Gov. Christie Whitman today spoke to the Jersey Boys State Program about education reform and open space preservation and stressed the importance of leadership in today's society.

The Governor congratulated the newly-elected governor of the Jersey Boys State Program, and praised the young men for their commitment and enthusiasm for school and community.

Attached is a copy of her remarks.

REMARKS OF GOVERNOR CHRISTINE TODD WHITMAN AMERICAN LEGION BOYS STATE LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP THURSDAY, JUNE 25, 1998

Thank you, Bill (Baroni). I applaud the American Legion for the fine job it does every year. I'm constantly impressed by the staff's commitment and by your enthusiasm.

This week you've had a taste of decision-making and the importance of leadership in the political process. I want to offer a couple of real-world examples of decision-making and leadership as they relate to New Jersey.

Politics has been called the art of the possible. The public demands leadership, the pundits demand consistency, and the political realities often demand compromise. The art is in meeting these demands while creating good, sound policies.

Case in point: school funding. We have a limited amount of dollars to spend, and seemingly unlimited needs, especially in our poorest districts. How do you make the dollars make a difference? How do you make sure State aid improves education?

For 28 years, our State Supreme Court kept saying that no matter how much state government increased school aid, we weren't doing enough for the poorest districts.

Our constitution requires that the State provide a "thorough and efficient" education for every child in every public school. That's a good requirement, and we should do all we can to meet it. The problem was that for years the Court defined "thorough and efficient" strictly in dollar terms, not in terms of the quality of education.

They called for a strictly fiscal solution: more money for poor districts. And so we spent more and more money. In fact, we put more dollars into State aid to schools today than we put into the entire state budget in 1981, the year most of you were born.

But over the years, we didn't always get better-educated students. If anything, some did worse. Their districts got more money, but it didn't reach the classroom. It didn't help them learn what they needed to know. Something had to change.

Leadership demanded that we convince the Court that what our constitution guarantees isn't only about money but also about the content and quality of education. So we sat down and devised core curriculum standards. As you know, these cover seven areas - including math, English, science, and history. Then we revised our statewide tests to cover each subject area.

Once the standards were set, we said we'd tie State aid to achieving them. And for the poorest districts, we set out to restructure the way they teach from top to bottom.

Here's what's important. Yes, we're spending more money. But we've also taken a stand for quality. For the first time, we are making sure the money we send to your district results in real achievement. It means that no matter where you go to school, you can receive the first-rate education you deserve.

This spring, our leadership paid off. The State Supreme Court affirmed that our standards-based plan at last fulfills the State's constitutional duty to every student. We have ended a 28-year court battle. More important, we have entered a new era in which the focus is not on how many dollars come into your school but how many scholars come out of it.

Leadership helped solve our school-funding dilemma. And leadership - with a healthy dose of compromise - helped address another challenge: preserving open space.

I mentioned how much school aid has gone up since you were born. In those same years, the available natural land in our state has dwindled at nearly the same pace.

Where once we saw trees we now see townhouses; places that could have been parks are now parking lots. As open space has disappeared, it has begun to threaten the quality of life we enjoy - clean air, clean water, and places to run around and have fun.

We've already saved hundreds of thousands of acres through New Jersey's Green Acres and Farmland Preservation programs. But leadership requires that we accelerate our rate of preservation. More than half of all our farmland has disappeared since 1950. We must act now or lose it forever.

A commission I appointed, called the Council on New Jersey Outdoors, recommended that our state preserve 1 million more acres of open space and farmland within the next 10 years to preserve our quality of life and maintain our farming industry.

I made their recommendation a centerpiece of my inaugural address in January and stated it as one of the chief goals of my second term.

Last month, I offered a way to pay for reaching that goal. I combined our open space plan with a transportation plan we had in the works. I proposed asking voters this November to approve paying 7 cents per gallon more in gasoline tax - 5 cents for transportation, and 2 cents for open space and farmland preservation.

For someone who's known for cutting taxes, it wasn't easy for me to propose a tax increase. But leadership demands that you fight for what you believe in. I've always said that while we should try to keep taxes as low as possible, sometimes it's necessary to raise a tax for a good purpose.

Well, the reaction from legislators was mixed. Some didn't like it. And the rest of them hated it.

Seriously, many legislators told us they had no problem with preserving open space, and no problem with raising the gas tax, but they didn't want to use the gas tax for purposes outside of transportation.

Day after day, the papers said the proposal was going nowhere - that we didn't have support for the 2 cents. But the important thing to me was that everyone seemed to agree on the larger picture. Everyone agreed that the goal was right: saving a million acres now, before it's too late.

So we worked closely with the Legislature. We searched for common ground. And we reached an agreement. As Assemblyman Leonard Lance told you earlier this week, he and Senate President DiFrancesco have introduced legislation to achieve our goal.

This legislation will ask voters in November to dedicate \$100 million in existing revenues each year for the next 10 years for open space and farmland preservation. This money will pay for preservation and financing the bonds to reach our million-acre goal.

Here, leadership was about the goal, not the route to the goal. By compromising on the funding plan, we were able to keep New Jersey's greater good in focus. Now it's up to us to show voters why it's so important to make this commitment.

I'm proud of what we've achieved for schools and for preservation because of what it means for you, your children, and your grandchildren. Stronger schools and more open space will make New Jersey a better place to live for generations to come.

As you apply your Boys State experience to life in your communities, remember that leadership is about keeping the ultimate goal in mind. Be flexible. But be firm on what you believe in. Don't budge on what really matters. The result will be policies with which you can live - and a record of service to your community of which you'll be proud.

Good luck, and congratulations again to your new governor

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