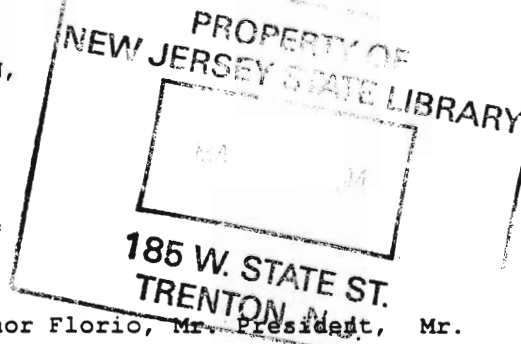




THE INAUGURAL SPEECH
OF CHRISTINE TODD WHITMAN,
THE WAR MEMORIAL,
TRENTON, NEW JERSEY,
TUESDAY, JANUARY 18, 1994



Mr. Chief Justice, Governor Florio, Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is with an eagerness to tackle the challenges ahead that I take office as New Jersey's 50th chief executive-- and its first woman governor.

On behalf of the people of New Jersey, I would like to thank Governor Florio for his years of public service. We agreed on some issues, disagreed on others, but no one ever doubted that you cared deeply.

Some say it is a proud moment to be sworn into such a high office as governor. For me, however, this is also a humbling moment.

No one reaches this position alone. Certainly I didn't, and I want to thank all of you who made it possible.

I especially want to thank my husband John and my two children, Kate and Taylor, for standing by me during a long tough campaign.

Today's inauguration marks not a victory of partisanship, but a test of our democracy, of our ability to govern ourselves.

As a people, we face a crisis of confidence.

Many have lost faith in the ability of government to deliver services efficiently, to lend a helping hand when it is needed and to get out of the way when it is not.

We worry about the ability of our economy to generate jobs and restore prosperity.

We question the ability of our schools to deliver the quality education our children deserve at a price their parents can afford.

And we question the ability of our criminal justice system to prevent crime, and to deliver justice and safety.

Americans have lost faith in the institutions that are the foundations of our democracy. They question those they have elected to serve them.

Wherever I go, whether I'm in a shopping mall, attending a Devils or Nets game, or taking questions on a call-in show, I hear the same implicit question:

"After the oaths, after the speeches, after all the parties and festivities, will you remember your promises and will you keep them?"

As the first statement of my governorship, to every voter in New Jersey, let me answer that question: "I have just taken the oath of this office you have entrusted to me. To me, this oath means one thing: I will not hedge. I will not backtrack. I will keep my promises to you, my friends, to the best of my ability, so help me God."

But I can't do it alone.

I need your help, your wisdom and your support.

If government is to be "for the people," it must be "of" and "by the people."

For democracy to work, as Abraham Lincoln said in his first inaugural speech, we in government must have "a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people."

Government must trust and listen to the people, or it is not a democracy.

That is why I have spent the last four years listening to you.

And it is why I will keep listening for as long as I am your governor.

I believe in the people of this state. I believe in open government. I believe that the best decisions are based on consensus. And, like you, I believe deeply in the need for fundamental change.

To those who question whether I am serious about bucking the special interests who hold so much quiet power in the city, let me be clear: I did not run for governor to conduct "business as usual."

I'm not one of the boys. It is going to be different around here.

The only way government can win back your trust is to earn it.

Our principal problems are not the product of great global economic shifts or other vast, unseen forces. They are the creation of government.

Of government that puts special interests ahead of the people's interests.

Of government that refuses to change.

You know it. I know it. And this time, together, we're going to fix it.

New Jersey should lead the nation.

In a world driven by ideas and technology, we boast some of the world's leading telecommunications, pharmaceutical, chemical and other high-tech firms.

We have first-class universities, great ports, and a prime location between America's financial and political seats of power. We have great natural resources, from the Highlands to the Shore.

New Jersey should be the engine of economic growth that leads this nation into the 21st Century. It should be a powerful engine of prosperity that gives our children the same opportunity that our parents worked so hard to give us -- the chance for a better life.

Together, we will unshackle that economic engine from the restraining chains of high taxes.

Four months ago, I said I would put 1.4 billion of your tax dollars back into your pocket by cutting taxes over the next three years, with the first cut coming in July.

The skeptics groaned ...

But here we are.

And I say, why wait until the next fiscal year starts in July?

Between now and then, families have car payments and credit card bills that will come due. Senior citizens on fixed incomes will be struggling to make ends meet.

And businesses have payrolls to make. Their plans to create new jobs are sitting on shelves, waiting for a stronger economy.

Let's not keep economic growth waiting another minute.

If President Clinton and his Congress can reach backward into time and raise your taxes retroactively, your governor and your Legislature can cut them retroactively.

That is why I am asking my partners in the Legislature, Senate President Donald DiFrancesco and Assembly Speaker Chuck Haytaian, to enact a 5 percent income tax cut for every family in New Jersey effective January 1, 1994 -- 17 days ago.

Second, I am asking the Legislature to eliminate all income taxes on those earning less than \$7,500, again retroactively to January 1 this year. Those who are struggling the hardest need a tax cut the most.

Third, I am asking the Legislature to cut the corporate business tax to 9 percent, again effective January 1 this year.

We will be competitive. No more losing our employers to job raids by low-tax states!

New Jersey is open for business.

Crafting a budget that covers not only the cost of these tax cuts, but also makes up for more than \$1 billion in previous "one shot" revenues will not be easy.

We must do so without gutting the state services on which so many of us depend. And we must do so without driving up property taxes.

The "shell game" of raising one tax to cut another is over. My budget task force and the 350 citizens who served on my transition teams have been poring over every department's budget. My cabinet officials take office with a mandate to find ways to provide the same or better service for less. Hundreds of citizens have been writing in with their ideas on how we can save 5 cents on every tax dollar we spend.

Let me tell you: Once we all put our minds to it, it's amazing all the ways we can find to save money.

Take just three areas: A vast amount of uncollected "bad driver" surcharges are owed to the state, yet no attempt has been made to collect them. We're owed unclaimed federal Medicaid funds for health care services provided to poor children by their schools.

And even an inmate from Rahway state prison wrote in to the "Our Tax Dollars" program to point out that more than \$160 million in fines owed by criminals have never been collected.

Together, these three areas alone offer the potential for closing the budget gap by several hundred million dollars.

What's more, almost \$200 million has been left unspent in each of the last two budgets because programs were overfunded. I am directing my cabinet to try to save at least that much from current-year accounts.

Budget cuts are just part of the equation.

To cut taxes in each of the next three fiscal years will require sustained economic growth.

Economic growth doesn't just happen. We have to plan for it, encourage it, and court it.

That's why I have directed my secretary of state to serve as an advocate for business. And it's why the first executive order of my administration -- which I am signing in front of you today -- creates a New Jersey Economic Master Plan Commission to develop the long term strategy we need to make New Jersey the economic powerhouse it deserves to be.

(Peter Verniero brings the executive order to the podium. The governor signs it.)

Done!

(Governor hands executive order to Verniero, who returns to his seat.)

Make no mistake about it: We are in a battle for jobs with Pennsylvania, the Carolinas, and the Sunbelt every day. One of the main reasons we've been losing that battle is state government.

We must cut through the needless overregulation that drives businesses out of New Jersey and discourages new firms from locating here. We can protect the environment without taking years to process a permit.

Our businesses deserves better and you deserve better.

It isn't just a question of money being wasted. It's a question of duplication, inept planning, and inadequate service.

We have 68 Department of Labor field offices, yet in some counties we require unemployed workers to sign up for unemployment benefits in one office, then drive 10 miles to another office to find out what jobs are available.

Look at how the state regulates cemeteries: If you are buried with members of your own religion, your corpse is regulated by the Attorney Genral's office. But if you are buried in a non-sectarian cemetery, the Department of BANKING has jurisdiction over your remains. That's right ... Banking. Do we really need two different state agencies to regulate the dead?

From cradle to grave, our state government needs reform.

We must reinvent government the way American corporations have been reinventing themselves to survive in the 1990's.

100 electric me
billion service corporation with 60,000 employees. And that's what we're going to provide: Service. Efficient, cost-effective service.

After all, we work for you.

And of all the tasks we are entrusted to perform as your state government, nothing is more sacred than our responsibility to educate your children.

The school system we have today was developed in the 19th Century to prepare children of farmers and new immigrants for an Industrial Revolution that wanted bodies to do repetitive factory work.

The world has changed and our education system must change with it.

Employers today require a highly educated work force that knows how to think and how to be creative. The state that can provide the best-educated workers is the state that will be the economic powerhouse of the 21st Century.

The states that fail will fall behind.

We must make New Jersey number one.

We -- parents, teachers, students, administrators, government leaders and business executives -- must work together to reinvent education.

We must make it our top priority to teach our children -- all our children -- to read in kindergarten, first grade and second grade when they are enthusiastic about learning. That way, we will not have to spend tens of millions of dollars in junior high school, high school and college trying to rectify the failures of the past.

We are going to inject competition and encourage innovation in our schools by developing alternatives like magnet schools and charter schools within our public school systems to give parents a choice of where to send their children.

Schools should compete for the chance to teach our children. They are our greatest treasures.

If we are going to teach democracy in our schools, we should practice democracy in our school system.

In Jersey City, five long years of state control have not fixed schools that continue to do far too little. We should give Mayor Bret Schundler the green light to test school vouchers and invite the top school experts in the nation to measure the results.

We will get politics out of the Department of Education by giving the education commissioner an independent five-year term.

We will push authority down to the local level, because I trust parents who love their children to get involved in school boards and PTA's. The state can give you better schools, but you must be responsible for raising your children.

We will develop a strong core curriculum that teaches every student the basics of reading, writing, arithmetic, and a respect for our nation's heritage.

We will make our schools safe, and we will demand discipline in our classrooms. The last thing children should learn about in school is violence and fear.

Personal safety is a sacred right in America. Our children, our parents, all of us, deserve to live in peace.

Yet far too many of us are imprisoned by fear of crime.

Some say we should turn our heads, give up, and just accept a violent crime-ridden society.

Some say crime is too tough a problem to solve. My answer to them? We're tougher.

We know that a small percentage of hardened criminals commit most of the violent crime. It's time to make every criminal know that he or she will serve 70 percent of the court's sentence. And for three-time violent offenders -- those who make a career out of crime -- it should be "three strikes and you're in" ... for life.

We also also need to set up boot camps and other alternatives to teach young people who are toying with the criminal life that they want to go straight instead. Everybody deserves a second chance. But not a third.

Criminals are not the victims of society. Society is the victim of criminals. The way to make our streets safe again is to make sure criminals know they will pay dearly -- and perhaps permanently-- for their crimes. We will.

Our blueprint to make New Jersey first is an agenda of economic growth, good schools and safe streets. An agenda of hope, optimism and determination. Of government that is "for the people" because it is "of" and "by the people."

The hope, the vision, the strength of our people is our guarantee of success.

And what remarkable people make up this state! In the factories of Paterson and the research laboratories of Princeton, in the ethnic neighborhoods of Perth Amboy and senior citizen villages of Lakewood, in the towns of the Shore and the Pinelands, and in cities like Camden and Newark -- all across our state, I have come to know so many of New Jersey's people.

We are one Family. One community. One state.

There is a phrase in Spanish that means all that: "Somos un solo pueblo."

When one of us is out of work, homeless, cannot read, or is a victim of violent crime, we all suffer. And when we help one another succeed, we all succeed.

I remember a young writer who, I think, must have learned about America as a student in New Jersey. Over six decades ago, he wrote of "a sense of overwhelming gratitude and gladness that America was there ...that in the heart of the....people the old generosities and devotions fought on... indomitable and undefeated."

"The best of America," F. Scott Fitzgerald concluded, is "the best of the world." And I can tell you that the best of New Jersey is the best of America.

In the people, we will place our faith. On trust in the people, we will build our agenda of opportunity and growth.

This is our state.

This is our time.

Last week, I met the children from Mrs. Reilly's second grade class at the Gables School in Neptune. Each child brought along a letter.

"We should all learn to share and be nice to each other," Claudia Grier wrote. "I know that you have a demanding job ahead of you and I will be there to help you." Claudia's here today, and Claudia, thank you for offering to help.

It will take everyone's help to meet the challenge ahead.

It won't always be easy and we won't always agree. But we must not fear change.

In 1776, this state was at the forefront of a revolution. We are there again today. Let's show the world what New Jersey can do.

Together, we will make New Jersey first.