

"...all policy is personal."



state of the state two-thousand and one

**GOVERNOR CHRISTINE TODD WHITMAN
STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS
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Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Madam Chief Justice, distinguished members of the Legislature, honored guests, fellow New Jerseyans:

As you know, this may be the last time I report to you on the state of the state. Whether it is or not, I want to take this opportunity to offer a few words of gratitude.

To the members of the Legislature, thank you for your leadership. To the members of my Cabinet and administration, thank you all for your hard work. To my husband, John, my daughter, Kate, and my son, Taylor, thank you for your patience and love and counsel. And of course, to the people of New Jersey, I will always be grateful for the privilege of having served as your governor.

What an extraordinary privilege it has been. Our state is 8.4 million people strong. It has the 16th largest economy in the world, the second highest per capita income in the United States.

We are the home state of Nobel laureates and innovative geniuses, of electrifying performers, inspiring teachers, and gifted writers. We are the Crossroads of the American Revolution and the proving ground of the high-tech revolution.

We are the home of Ellis Island and a strong immigrant tradition, a place where more than 100 languages are spoken.

We are a state of large, sweeping achievement and individual acts of stunning courage. We are the state where a boy named Sammy Gordon sold lemonade to help the victims of the Oklahoma City bombing ... where Seton Hall student Dana Christmas rescued hallmates from a fire despite suffering severe burns herself ... where state park maintenance worker Roger Weck swam out to save four people from drowning in a riptide off Island Beach and then calmly and humbly went back to his job.

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As these three heroes show, we are many faces in one truly amazing family.

If all politics is local, then all policy is personal. Whether you are cutting a tax or expanding prescription assistance, whether you are preserving a farm or raising academic standards, in doing so you affect the life of a community, a neighborhood, a family, a person.

When a tax cut saves a family money that it can put toward mortgage payments, that's personal. When a senior citizen can qualify for PAAD and get the medicine to keep her blood pressure under control, that's personal.

When a business incentive leads a company in your community to hire dozens of new workers, and your neighbor is one of them, that's personal too.

The start of a new year is a time to take inventory. In that spirit, let's look at how New Jersey has changed through what we've accomplished together, not just in the past twelve months but in the past seven years.

Our state economy is more robust. We've added more than 435,000 jobs since I took office, and our unemployment rate for the past year has been at or below the national average.

Our communities are safer, with the lowest crime rate in more than a generation.

Our children are better off. New Jersey is one of only six states in America -- and the only one in the Northeast -- to have reduced the child poverty rate by 33 percent or more since 1993.

Even as the state has been growing, our air and water are cleaner, with fewer days of high ozone and carbon monoxide and far fewer beach closings.

We've made our schools stronger, with more rigorous tests and standards, a greater commitment to teacher excellence, and a school construction plan unrivaled by any other state.

We've cut by more than half the number of people relying on welfare and have greatly reduced the waiting list for community services for people with developmental disabilities.

Last but certainly not least, we've made our state more affordable,

with 39 tax cuts that have saved taxpayers nearly \$12 billion.

By these and almost any objective measure, New Jersey today is a far better place in which to live, work, and raise a family. The New Jersey Legislature has been a partner in our success, and I ask the members to stand so we can show them our appreciation.

Measures are important, but measures aren't why I ran for governor. Nor, I suspect, are they why the members of this Legislature ran for office.

The critics and pundits will say what they like, but what makes this job so rewarding is that each day we have the opportunity to help people make a better life for themselves.

That means helping a welfare recipient move from public assistance into a good job. It means helping a couple purchase their first home. It means providing the seed money to turn an idea scribbled on a napkin into a profitable business.

For Bill Byrne, it means gaining independence. Bill is a person with developmental disabilities. For years, he was waiting for supportive housing so he could live on his own.

Together with this Legislature, we made a commitment for additional money to expand community services for thousands of people with disabilities and for their families.

Today, Bill is living in an apartment in Morristown. Though he gets some assistance, his goal is to live on his own with no help. I have no doubt he will achieve that goal.

He wrote me a letter to say, "I am a success because of what you did." Of course, I'm glad we were there to help, but the truth is that Bill Byrne is a success because of what he did.

Andrea Badan is also building a better life. For years, welfare was the only way she could support herself and two children. Out of the job market for more than a decade, she received job training and moral support from our Work First New Jersey program.

That support was so strong that Andrea first called her caseworker -- not her kids, not a friend, or even her sister -- with the news that she landed the job she wanted at a local hospital.

She says, "When they told me I got the job, I felt so good about

myself. My self-esteem went way up."

Work First didn't get Andrea the job, nor did it boost her self-esteem; she did those things herself. We just helped her get there.

That's what I mean when I say policy is personal. It's giving people the help they need to provide for themselves and their families. It's removing a barrier that may prevent someone from enjoying the quality of life most of us take for granted.

For many families in New Jersey, that barrier has been health insurance.

Three years ago, I stood before you and shared my vision of affordable health care coverage for every child in the state.

Today, more than 75,000 New Jersey children are enrolled in our KidCare program, an enrollment record the Children's Defense Fund ranks among the best in the country.

I am also proud that our program has been recognized as one of the most generous in America. Now it's time to reach every child.

To complete my vision of universal, affordable coverage for kids, I am proposing that we allow all New Jersey families to purchase insurance for their children through our program at significantly lower rates than in the private market.

Last year, this Legislature went beyond providing health insurance for children. In October, we launched FamilyCare, our affordable insurance program for adults.

I am pleased to announce that in FamilyCare's first 100 days, we enrolled nearly 60,000 people. Applications for this program continue to pour in at nearly 2,000 per week.

What does this mean for families? Well, if you ask the young mother of the Sullivan family who wrote to me last fall, it means peace of mind. She wrote, "For the first time in 13 years, my husband and I will have insurance. I haven't even had a physical in 13 years."

FamilyCare is a program in which we can take enormous pride, but we have to complete the job. I urge this Legislature: let's raise the income limits for single adults and couples without children so they're the same as parents already covered by FamilyCare.

All policy is personal, and for me few policies are more personal than our efforts to preserve open space in the Garden State. Raised on a farm, I want every New Jersey child now and in the future to enjoy the character of the state I have always loved.

I'm very proud of what we've done together. We've preserved nearly as much land during this administration as was preserved under the Florio, Kean, Byrne, Cahill, and Hughes administrations combined.

What's more, I'm pleased to say that as of today, the Garden State Preservation Trust, which the Legislature has supported so strongly, has made commitments of funding that will bring us to 200,000 acres preserved. That's already one fifth of the way to our goal of preserving one million acres by 2010.

When I talk about preserving land, I don't want you to think of this land enclosed in glass with a giant "Do Not Touch" sign slapped on it. On the contrary, we want people to visit our parks, historic sites, and wildlife areas. We want them to swim, hike, bike, and explore our state's natural beauty -- not just saving our heritage but savoring it.

First, however, we must make sure our parks have the facilities to accommodate visitors. This can mean creating a trail, opening an interpretive center, or preserving a treasured historic building.

That requires money -- not just now, when times are good, but every year, so that our parks and historic areas continue to draw visitors and capture the imagination.

Last fall I asked the Garden State Preservation Trust to inventory our needs in state lands stewardship.

Based on their recommendations, I propose that we create a stable source of funding to upgrade our State parks, historic sites, and wildlife areas, and add facilities to new state lands.

We will call it the State Lands Stewardship Investment Fund and dedicate \$25 million for this fund each year from the Realty Transfer Fee that we already collect.

Let me give you an example of what this money can do. This is a musket used in the Revolutionary War. This musket was captured from a Hessian soldier during the Battle of Trenton in 1776. For the remainder of the war, it was used by a private from the Hunterdon County Militia.

This wonderful artifact is part of a private collection lent to the state

by Harry Kels Swan through his foundation. Some of the items are on display at Washington Crossing State Park.

We can use money from our stewardship fund to build on this collection and create a Revolutionary War center where New Jersey can proudly tell the world the story of the War for Independence.

I want to acknowledge Mr. Swan, and thank him for sharing his collection.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are blessed with some remarkable natural and historic resources. Let's make the most of them. Our goal should be nothing less than to create a world-class park system for the State of New Jersey.

I have said that all policy is personal. That's certainly true when it comes to finding a job. By cutting taxes and streamlining regulations, we have removed some of government's biggest barriers to job creation. Four hundred thirty-five thousand jobs later, we can be proud of what we've accomplished.

But the job market is a moving target. To continue our success, we must adjust our policies to reflect the changing economy. We've done that, thanks to this Legislature's leadership.

Last year you passed my proposal to invest \$165 million in a package of high-technology initiatives we called New Jersey Jobs for a New Economy.

Thanks to you, we are challenging universities to win more research dollars. We are creating 10 new business incubators and 30 cyberdistricts around the state. We have established a venture capital fund. We will soon build a technology center in South Jersey to match our success in North Brunswick.

We've made a great start. Today we can tell our young people with confidence that they can make their way in the new economy right here in New Jersey. But we must do more to secure their place in that new economy, and with your help we will.

As I will detail in my budget speech, I am proposing another high-tech package totaling \$200 million. Today I will highlight just one part of that plan -- one that shows our commitment to lead the way in preparing tomorrow's high-tech workers.

Last year we took some very strong higher education programs in

our state and made them even stronger. For the first time, we gave out \$15 million in High-Tech Workforce Excellence Grants on a competitive basis.

Those grants are already making a difference. I visited a program at Stevens Institute that is helping K-12 teachers in our Abbott districts make best use of the Internet to teach science and math, geared to our rigorous new standards. Over at Rutgers, they are using our grant to prepare biotech lab workers. At Bergen County Community College, they are training surgical assistants for high-tech operating rooms.

These initiatives reaffirm New Jersey's reputation as the Innovation Garden State. They have warranted our investment -- but so did many of the good ideas we couldn't fund last year.

So today I ask that you fund High-Tech Workforce Excellence Grants at an even higher level of \$20 million. Let's give New Jersey's superb colleges and universities the dollars they need to prepare students for good, high-paying jobs in the new economy.

Two weeks from now, in my budget speech, I will offer a number of other proposals to help us lock in the progress we have made together since 1994. Chief among them will be a teacher quality initiative that will complement all we have already done to give our children the outstanding education they deserve.

I have chosen to focus on these few plans today -- FamilyCare, land stewardship, and high technology -- because I believe, along with education, they reflect some of the most important and, I hope, lasting legacies of our seven years together in Trenton.

There's another legacy I hope to leave: a legacy of fiscal responsibility.

Because of our sound planning, tax cuts, and prudent financial stewardship, we've watched our economy grow and outpace all surrounding states. We have seen the rating agencies upgrade our bond rating four times since 1994.

Like any responsible family or business, we've used that opportunity to put money aside to help us remain strong -- in fact, we've been able to increase our surplus every year. So today, I'm pleased to tell you that in what will be my last budget, I'm proposing a surplus of one billion dollars, the largest ever proposed in our state's history.

Members of the Legislature: We have come a long way together. I think back to many moments.

Our work on Megan's Law and tax cuts. The struggles over auto insurance and school funding.

The loss of friends over the years, most recently Lou Romano. The spirit of bipartisanship on so many issues thanks to minority leaders Dick Codey and Joe Doria, who haven't always agreed with me, but who put aside differences when it came to helping the people of New Jersey.

I think about our welfare reforms, which I'd match against any in the country for balancing compassion and responsibility. Our historic property tax relief plan.

And of course our state's greatest victory of these years: our commitment to preserve another million acres for our children's children and for all time.

When I took the oath to begin my second term, I said I wanted to make New Jersey more livable. Considering last month's Quinnipiac poll reporting 86 percent of New Jerseyans rate their quality of life as good or excellent, it's clear we are succeeding.

I think of the woman who came up to hug me at a train station and said, "I'm in Work First and I'm on my way to a job."

I remember the email message that read, "Thanks so much for your efforts on car insurance reform. Our premium just went down over 23 percent."

The letter from a veteran who told me, "Your fiscal responsibility is beginning to restore my faith in government."

The mother of an eight-year old who wrote, "I really appreciate your efforts toward researching the causes of autism. I plan to expand my family within the next few years, and hopefully with the funding, my second child will have a better chance of not having autism."

I cherish the note from longtime beachgoer Irene Buch, who wrote to me in June of 1999, "as a lover of the ocean, I swam in the 59 degree water this past week, body surfing in the most beautiful, pristine water I have ever seen in my 75 years of going to the shore."

And then there is 10 year old Gabe Azaceta. As a first grader, Gabe

was having academic and behavior problems, and was missing school all the time. His mother found out about the Elysian Charter School of Hoboken and sent him there. Now Gabe is a high-achieving fifth grader, he's in several enrichment programs, and he's so interested in his studies that his mom says she has to pull him out of the science center at night.

As these examples prove, we can be proud of how state government has contributed to New Jersey's prosperity and quality of life. We can be prouder still of how New Jersey people themselves have made this state the best of America.

I take pride in the great teachers I've met during my visits to more than 60 elementary school classes. I remember the passion with which entrepreneurs have told me their plans and dreams.

I recall the good people of faith-based agencies like Elijah's Promise that have turned lives around by teaching people job skills and finding them work. I saw the enthusiasm of fourth graders from around the state as they saved Dimes for the Dome and helped bring back the luster to our State Capitol.

I have also seen how adversity has tested our New Jersey family and tapped heroes among us. I think of the courageous people I've met with a father or a mother or a child injured or killed in the line of duty. I think of the citizens who responded so quickly and compassionately after the Edison pipeline explosion, or Tropical Storm Floyd, or last year's plane crash in Burlington County.

And, of course, I will never forget the remarkable Seton Hall student you honored last fall.

As you know, I have made it a personal mission to encourage young people to take greater responsibility for themselves and their communities. With your approval, this administration has established character education programs to carry this message across the state.

I believe acts like that which Dana Christmas performed last January are the ultimate example of responsible behavior and deserve special recognition. Therefore, as my final proposal to you today, I recommend that we create a scholarship program that gives awards of \$10,000 to young New Jersey residents who have performed heroic deeds.

A special committee will determine criteria and award up to five scholarships a year. I am confident there will be many worthy candidates in the years ahead. But to ensure we never forget what

this award stands for, I propose we name it the Dana Christmas Scholarship for Heroism.

And to get the program started, I intend to use money from my own contingency fund to award the first scholarship to the Angel of Boland Hall herself, Dana Christmas.

I want to ask Dana to come forward to receive this award.

Fellow New Jerseyans, my time remaining as governor may well be measured in days and weeks, not months. Should that day come soon, I will leave the state in good hands, with exciting things in our future: new schools, more relief for property taxpayers, many more acres of open space.

I will leave New Jersey to the steady and strong leadership of Don DiFrancesco, who along with Jack Collins has brought honor to this Legislature and to our state.

We've done great things together because we have put the people's needs first.

People often ask me how I would like to have my tenure as governor remembered. I'm sure I speak for all of you when I say that the best thing people can say about our work together is that we have made New Jersey a truly better place in which to live, work, and raise a family -- a state that people are proud to call home.

Thank you, and God bless the Garden State.
