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Governor Jon Corzine

## Speech

### Inaugural Address of Governor Jon S. Corzine January 17, 2006

Trenton – Following is the prepared text of New Jersey Governor Jon S. Corzine's Inaugural Address:

"Reverend Clergy, Governor Codey, Chief Justice Poritz and Members of the Judiciary, Colleagues of the 212th Legislature, Speaker Roberts and Minority Leaders Lance and DeCroce, Governors DiFrancesco, Florio, Byrne and Governor Acevedo Vila of Puerto Rico.

Members of the New Jersey Congressional Delegation, our senior Senator Frank Lautenberg and U.S. Senator-Designate Robert Menendez; Congressmen Pallone, Andrews, Frelinghuysen, Pascrell and Rothman; U.S. Attorney Christopher Christie; Colleagues from the U.S. Senate – Senators Biden, Sarbanes, Dodd and Torricelli; AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, and friends from labor; my family, friends, and fellow New Jerseyans:

Thank you all for joining in this passage of democracy. I am deeply humbled and honored to be entrusted with the stewardship of this office. All New Jerseyans should know my resolve to govern New Jersey as one community with one future. Like our nation, we are "one state" under God.

The oath I have just taken to uphold the Constitution of New Jersey is not a ceremony of triumph for one person, or one party, but a solemn covenant to serve "impartially and justly" for everyone. I will be true to that covenant, and to the citizens of New Jersey.

I know there are many in public life who take their oaths equally seriously – public servants who truly serve. Many are here today.

Respecting others' public service, there is one good and decent man who has worked tirelessly to restore the public trust and whose continued commitment will be needed, as together, we forge a new future for New Jersey.

Richard Codey never sought the governorship, but he seized a moment of crisis to return honor to the Governor's Office. Governor Codey – on behalf of all New Jerseyans – for all you have done – and for how you have led, you have earned our respect. Thank you.

In the spirit of service to which we dedicate ourselves today, let us pause and pay tribute to the men and women in uniform who risk their lives around the globe – many in our New Jersey National Guard. Let us pray for their safety as we do for all who sacrifice to protect us at home and abroad.

And, as we rededicate ourselves to a new beginning and a better New Jersey, we also owe ourselves an honest accounting of where we stand.

First, no one can doubt New Jerseyans' talent, our belief in hard work, and our capacity for creativity and innovation. Our people have boundless energy. Our people are good.

Across this state, across our nation and around the world, New Jersey sets a high bar. We are proud that Supreme Court Justices, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Cabinet officers, Chief Executives, singers, rappers, writers, scientists, and entrepreneurs all hail from New Jersey. Our children graduate from our schools at higher rates than anywhere else in the nation, and our income and education levels are among the very best. In their own lives and in their own hopes for their children, our people do not settle for less than excellence.

Today – I pledge to you that as your governor, I will never settle for less than excellence.

It is simply inexcusable that we have a state government that again and again ranks low in public trust and esteem. In the face of all our state can be, our self-government too often falls short of what it should be.

Today, courts govern the funding of our schools, the management of our child welfare programs, our housing and borrowing policies, and oversight of the management of our state's law enforcement. Our U.S. Attorney has stepped into a governance role of our state's medical school. And, our state is being sued to fulfill its financial obligation for public employee pensions.

This is not self-government, it is government by judicial fiat born of inaction or more regrettably – of neglect. And most troubling, that neglect is sometimes rooted in private or political gain, at the expense of the public interest.

I know you share my belief that it is time for us to change all of that -- time for change, not because I am a new governor or because I am so righteous, but because it is the right thing to do and the public demands it. There was a clear message heard last fall: we must change how our government does business, and we must remember, it is the people for whom we work.

To do that we will need real reform. And my highest priority will be ethics reform. I know there



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are legislators of both parties – men and women of conscience, who will stand with me, even push me.

Together, we will earn back the people's confidence and our own self-governance. Old orders and old ways may not pass easily, but the moment has come, the cause is urgent, and the will to act is at hand.

So I call on all my fellow public servants to join in an historic effort to end the toxic mix of politics, money and public business – at every level of New Jersey government. Let's award public contracts by competition and quality, not contributions.

Let us insist on an elected state comptroller – an independent watchdog over the state finances chosen by the people, responsible to the people and committed to restoring the people's trust.

Let us make these reforms permanent in the state's constitution so that they cannot be ignored in practice, subverted behind closed doors, or put aside after the present crisis of confidence subsides.

What we need is not a new day of reform, but a new era. An era where working with or serving in New Jersey state government is not viewed as a chance to make a deal, but as an opportunity to make a difference. A way to enrich, not the well connected, but the lives of our children, our working families, our veterans, and retirees.

Public integrity is not just about reputation or principles, as important as each is. What's at stake is social justice and fiscal responsibility. Every dollar squandered in violation of the public trust is a book not bought for a classroom, a prescription drug with a higher co-pay, meals-on-wheels not delivered, a road or science lab not built. With a multi-billion dollar structural deficit, mismanagement and misappropriation cannot and will not be tolerated.

To earn the public trust, we must act, but we also must trust the people with the truth. We cannot build a financial future on the crumbling, papered-over foundation of a recurring fiscal crisis. Too often, for too long, under both parties, fiscal gimmicks have been invented, recycled, and reapplied to mask fiscal realities. As Governor Codey said in November, his transition report can be summed up simply: "the state is pretty much broke."

The games are over. New Jersey must put its fiscal house in order. The time of one-shot budget fixes is past. It's time to balance the books.

Just as it's time to restore the transportation trust fund, get back on a path to full funding of public employee pensions, and to discipline and move forward with our school construction program.

The process of reestablishing our financial integrity will not be painless. Tough choices are ahead. I would prefer to be a governor with a public treasury flush with money to spend on good things for our state or further reduce the people's tax burden. But that is not the hand we have been dealt. And it is our task to do the best we can with today's stark realities. The state, like every responsible family, must learn to live within its means.

We will examine every program, measure performance, demand more for less, and root out spending that merely serves political not public purposes.

I will keep my pledge on property tax rebates, but we must also give the people a voice in the process of lasting reform. That is why I support a constitutional convention – a convocation of citizens, working within a framework established by their elected representatives. At long last, we must move to real and enduring property tax reform.

I know my friends in the Legislature understand fiscal and tax questions are explosive – but the time for procrastination is past.

The decisions should be taken; the tough choices made. Let us seize this moment and meet our challenges. We have no other choice.

Hold me accountable.

It is time to look beyond next year – or the next election – to the next generation. The people we serve are waiting – and in the words of Woodrow Wilson, "If you think too much about being reelected, it's very difficult to be worth reelecting."

Yes, government must reform and it must be disciplined, but we also must teach our children well, serve our seniors with respect, protect our health and environment and build our prosperity.

Public integrity and sound finances are the foundation for meeting our obligations. Without that foundation, children in foster homes are at risk, special needs children fall further behind and our police and firefighters will be unable to communicate when tragedy strikes. So – we face urgent challenges to do what is right for our people, and our economy.

In this context, New Jersey's prosperity is challenged by the deteriorating fundamentals of our economy. To put it simply, we are growing too few jobs, losing high paying, value-added jobs and replacing them with lower paying service work. Some of this trend can be explained by the strength of our history in telecommunications and pharmaceuticals and the restructuring of those industries.

On the other hand, we have done too little to fight for the high-end replacements – jobs in biotechnology, genomics, energy production, and finance. To meet this challenge – we will embrace pro-growth and pro-business initiatives.

With a new public-private partnership, focused on economic development, the Edison Innovation Fund, we can renew in this century what happened in the last – when vision, initiative and talent transformed rustbelt New Jersey into powerhouse New Jersey: a global

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leader in inventions, medicines and the then high-tech industries that gave our citizens the highest median income in the nation.

As a trailblazer in stem cell research, we can save and improve the quality of countless lives – as Carl Riccio and other advocates bravely argue. At the same time, we can move New Jersey's economy to the frontier of twenty-first century biotechnology.

And though this is a time of austerity, we must find the tools and the resources to fulfill our most fundamental commitments, starting with our commitment to our children, our families, and the health of our citizens. It is intolerable that a quarter million children in New Jersey go without healthcare, and that children lose their lives in our child welfare system.

We have always been a progressive state, with progressive values – and I will fight to sustain that tradition.

A just society must offer its hand to the vulnerable. And we must advance the hopes of our great middle class through higher education, affordable housing and decent recreation.

Economic growth and social justice need not be adversaries. With a policy and economic strategy to “invest, grow and prosper” we can and we will overcome our current problems, and meet future challenges.

Finally, I recognize that my most basic responsibility is to make certain that we do everything we can to protect our citizens from terrorist threats, crime and natural disasters. We learned all too well on 9/11 that we live in an era where danger is no longer an ocean away. In fact, it may be on the next block or in a neighboring community.

My Administration will be ever-vigilant and do all it can structurally and through investments to provide the tools needed by those on the frontlines of homeland and hometown security. The tragedy of 9/11 is branded into our souls, and the voices of the Jersey Girls and the other families of those lost demand nothing less.

Ethics and financial reform, property tax relief and reform, economic development, homeland and hometown security: these goals are neither partisan nor regional. They reflect the needs and aspirations of all New Jerseyans.

To achieve success I will need the help of all of you more than ever, and more than ever I am confident that the public and their elected officials will give that help because everyone knows this state can do better.

To my legislative colleagues, I understand there will be disagreements – but we need not be disagreeable. Civility and dialogue will increase the probability of our success.

For me, my oath and these pledges are a personal commitment to build that better New Jersey.

The promise in the eyes of every child should remind us each day that our work can make a difference. Those of us who temporarily hold elected office are summoned not just to exercise power, but to live up to the highest aspirations of our people.

I am a New Jerseyan by choice – I love our state and her people, and I want our state to be known for the high ideals of its people.

As Robert Kennedy famously quoted from George Bernard Shaw, “There are those who look at things the way they are and ask, ‘why’?.... I dream of things that never were and ask ‘why not?’”

I dream of the best New Jersey can be. I look to this audience and to the citizens at large and ask, ‘why not?’

Let us resolve that having been through a period of turmoil, we will not go back to business as usual. We can and must move with a new determination into a new era of honesty, responsibility and prosperity - with a government that earns the people's trust, and trusts the people with the truth.

It is truly time for a new beginning.

We will not achieve everything we want with one program, or even in one legislative session. But in the next four years, we can and must put New Jersey back on the right track. We will do it by choosing what is difficult but right, over what is easy but wrong.

If we live up to that standard, we can look forward to the time when all of us can say with pride: I make my home in the great state of New Jersey.

So I close with a simple pledge: that in the choices I make as your Governor, I will be guided by one principle – What is best for New Jersey.

And, in turn, I ask you – the citizens of New Jersey, hold me accountable.

Thank you and God bless you all.”

*Governor Jon S. Corzine*

*January Seventeenth Two Thousand and Six*

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