

# The NJ Advantage

An Interview with The Honorable Philip D. Murphy, Governor of New Jersey

**EDITORS' NOTE** Philip Murphy took the oath of office for a second term as New Jersey's 56th governor on January 18, 2022. He is the first Democratic governor to serve a second term in 44 years. Governor Murphy currently serves as Chair of the National Governors Association and the Democratic Governors Association. From 2009 until 2013, Governor Murphy served as the United States Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany, appointed by President Obama.



The Hon. Philip D. Murphy

He has been deeply engaged in civic life and philanthropic pursuits. In 2002, he began his involvement with 180 Turning Lives Around, a Monmouth County women's shelter where he ultimately served as board president from 2005 until 2009. That experience led the Governor and First Lady to found the teen helpline 2nd Floor. Additionally, Governor Murphy was a member of the Board of Directors of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, a nonprofit organization which works with local community development associations to transform urban neighborhoods across the country, from 2002 until 2009. In 2005, he chaired the New Jersey Benefits Review Task Force. He also co-chaired, with former Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano and the late Professor Roger Wilkins, a national task force on public education in the 21st Century for the Center for American Progress. In 2006, he was appointed National Finance Chair of the Democratic National Committee by Chairman and former Vermont Governor Howard Dean. In 2014, Governor and Mrs. Murphy founded New Start New Jersey, a "think-and-do tank" dedicated to seeking new policy directions to grow New Jersey's economy and middle class. The Murphys partnered with the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University to create the New Start Career Network, which specifically helps long-term unemployed New Jerseyans over age 45 get back into the workforce. From June 2015 until March 2017, Governor Murphy served on the national Board of the NAACP. In December 2018, he was named one of four honorees of the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Ripple of Hope Award from the nonprofit organization run by the family of the late Senator Kennedy for his efforts to ensure social justice and equal economic opportunity. Prior to entering public life, Governor Murphy worked for more than 20

years at Goldman Sachs, starting as an intern in 1982 and ending in 2003 as a member of the firm's management committee. During his business career, he led offices in Frankfurt, Germany, and Hong Kong. Governor Murphy is a graduate of Needham High School, Harvard University, and The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. He has been awarded numerous honorary degrees.

**Will you discuss your administration's focus on building a stronger and fairer economy for New Jersey?**

Our focus on building a stronger and fairer economy for New Jersey is centered on making our state more affordable and expanding opportunities for every community to do well. We have taken some significant steps on that journey already: we are on a path toward having a \$15 minimum wage; we have made a college degree more affordable through our community colleges and state universities; we've kick-started new industries, including film and wind; we've made major investments in infrastructure, including the Hudson Tunnel Project; and we've passed record tax relief through our ANCHOR program to ease the financial burden faced by working families.

The ANCHOR program is our most recent property tax relief program for homeowners and renters, and we've already had over 1.7 million taxpayers apply. The Hudson Tunnel Project is expected to create 72,000 jobs and strengthen the economy along the entire north-east corridor.

We are also working to reform our outdated laws related to liquor licenses which will increase the number of licenses allowed per number of residents.

These wide-ranging policy efforts have, at their heart, the same commitment to expanding opportunities for every New Jerseyan to prosper and to making our state more affordable at the same time.

**How important is it for New Jersey to build a clean energy economy with good-paying green jobs?**

There can no longer be any question – climate change is here and it is an existential threat to our planet. In New Jersey, we have so much to protect and so much to gain by moving full speed toward a green economy.

The success of New Jersey's green economy is an integral part of our plan to create the Next New Jersey. We view this new industry as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create wealth, jobs, healthier communities, and equity for communities that have historically been disadvantaged. To achieve this, we created the New Jersey Council on the Green Economy, and brought together leaders from all different fields including innovation, sustainability, labor, and more, to help guide our work.

As our state transitions to a 100 percent clean energy economy by 2035, we want to promote economic growth that builds wealth for every community.

Three years ago, I revealed our Energy Master Plan to move New Jersey rapidly and effectively toward a clean energy economy. We are currently updating our climate mitigation strategy to continue cultivating resilient and sustainable communities. New Jersey is already leading the nation in creating a clean energy future, and it is my mission to continue to accelerate the development of renewable energy sources by jump-starting our offshore wind industry. The increasing opportunities in the offshore wind and clean energy sectors afford workers of all incomes and backgrounds the prospect of developing specialized, in-demand skills and talent, like construction, manufacturing, and maintenance.

**What steps is your administration taking to improve education in New Jersey and reforming K-12 education?**

We are blessed to have some of the best educators and public schools in the country, but there are disparities that are unacceptable. We are on track to fully fund our State's progressive school funding formula to make sure districts and students have the resources they need.

We have dramatically expanded pre-K in New Jersey and created new programs to expand access to computer science education and implement climate change related standards. I am very proud of the media literacy bill that I recently signed into law. It is extremely important that our kids have the necessary tools to identify when they are being manipulated. This is the first law of its kind across the nation, but I hope it will not be the last.

I also want to share a bit about our College Promise programs, which significantly reduce the costs of pursuing higher education. Money should never prevent students from getting their



*Governor Murphy delivers the 2023 State of the State address at the Assembly Chambers in Trenton on Tuesday, January 10, 2023*

degree, and access and completion are our top priorities. With each budget we've invested in programs like Community College Opportunity Grants and the Garden State Guarantee.

**How critical is a strong public/private partnership in New Jersey and will you highlight your working relationship with the business community?**

I have a great relationship with our businesses here in New Jersey. We are constantly creating more jobs and investing in different areas that will help our hard-working residents. With the Legislature's help we overhauled the State's incentives programs to make them better and more targeted tools for economic development. New Jersey has one of the best-trained labor forces around, and we understand the importance of strong workforce training both to businesses and workers, which is why I am in support of on-the-job training, upskilling, and apprenticeship programs. With these opportunities, workers will be better prepared to meet the requirements of employers and to find the best fits for them and their families.

**As you look to attract new industries and businesses to New Jersey, how do you define the New Jersey advantage?**

I'll be the first to say it – nothing beats the Garden State. It is the best state to live, work, and raise a family.

We are committed to helping our Main Streets and vibrant communities thrive by supporting our small businesses.

We lead the nation in public education, and we continue to make enormous investments into our pre-K-12 system and academic supports. Our residents are a natural resource for top talent, with 40 percent of our residents holding a bachelor's degree or higher.

And location, location, location. A business located in central New Jersey can reach more than 37 million consumers within a two-hour drive. We're in the center of the Boston-New York City-Washington DC corridor, with access to 33 percent of the United States population within a day's drive from any location in the state.

With the third largest public transit system, the highest railroad density, and the second busiest seaport in the country, our world-class infrastructure can get New Jerseyans anywhere and everywhere fast.

It's no wonder why Fortune 500 companies, startups, and small businesses succeed in New Jersey. That is what the NJ Advantage is all about.

**With so much gridlock and partisanship in Washington DC, what do you see as the key ingredients in getting action and achieving results?**

People take a lot of pride in identifying themselves as Democrat or Republican and these labels reflect our personal beliefs and values. At the same time, it's important that we see each other as neighbors and Americans first. We've seen that hyper-partisanship only brings division.

The National Governors Association is one of very few bipartisan organizations that works together to address national concerns, and I'm proud to be serving as the Chair for 2022-2023. The Vice-Chair is Governor Spencer Cox, Republican of Utah, whom I've come to respect not just as a colleague, but as a friend. Getting action and achieving results starts with us, as elected leaders, serving as examples to our constituents and focusing on the challenges we all face. That doesn't mean we don't take pride in our political affiliation, but that pride shouldn't come before commonsense solutions.

I work directly with Governors on both sides of the aisle to pass legislation that benefits the American people, regardless of their political party. My chosen initiative for this year is Strengthening Youth Mental Health, which has received broad support from governors across the country. In my office we remain focused on improving this great state for the good of all who reside in New Jersey.

**What attracted you to public service?**

I grew up in a family that struggled to make ends meet – I often say we were middle class on a good day. But even without having achieved higher education themselves, my parents, and especially my mother, always instilled the importance of education in my siblings and me. They were also enthusiastic supporters of President John F. Kennedy and my mother even volunteered on his senate campaign. Over family dinners, my parents would engage us in discussions on the state of the nation, and how things were going for working-class folks like us. These conversations were formative for me and made me reflect on the effect elected leaders have on our daily lives.

Decades later, after establishing a career in finance and working my way from the very bottom to leading global offices in international business, my belief in the power of good government remained. Eventually, I was honored to be appointed as the United States Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany by Barack Obama, which was a transformative experience for me and my family.

When we returned to New Jersey, we saw our home state facing crushing debt, a high unemployment rate, and slow economic growth. This reality just did not fit the potential of the state we loved and had chosen as our family's home. Running for Governor was a big decision for our family, but ultimately we felt there was work to be done and hoped to be able to steer New Jersey back in the right direction, guided by the values that I first learned around my family dinner table.

**With the success that your administration has achieved for New Jersey, are you able to enjoy the process and take moments to celebrate the wins?**

Any elected official will tell you that good leadership is serious business. With every policy decision – even the right ones – there can be unintended consequences, there are voices which disagree vehemently, and there are necessary compromises one must make in order to make progress. Despite the challenges, the ability to make people's lives easier and the honor of being able to serve my state brings joy to every day's work.

Most of all, I am a people person and I love being Governor because it allows me to meet and interact with so many different people and communities from all over New Jersey. That is the most rewarding part of the job. ●