A Look Ahead: The 221st Legislature and State of the State Address

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Legislative Reorganization

On Tuesday, the 221st Legislature commenced in Trenton. The Senate welcomed 10 new Senators to the chamber, namely: Sen. Carmen Amato, Jr. (LD9); Sen. John Burzichelli (LD3); Sen. Owen Henry (LD12); Sen. John McKeon (LD27); Sen. Angela McKnight (LD31); Sen. Paul Moriarty (LD4); Sen. Raj Mukherji (LD32); Sen. Parker Space (LD24); Sen. Britnee Timberlake (LD34); and Sen. Latham Tiver (LD8). Senators McKeon, McKnight, Moriarty, Mukherji, Space, and Timberlake each moved over to the Senate after serving in the General Assembly during the last session. Sen. Nick Scutari, of Union County, was elected to continue as Senate President, and Sen. M. Teresa Ruiz, of Essex County, will continue as the Senate Majority Leader. Sen. Shirley Turner, of Mercer County, has been named President Pro Tempore, a position she previously held twice, and Sen. Anthony Bucco, of Morris County, will continue as the Senate Minority Leader.

The Assembly also welcomed new members. Asw. Tennille McCoy (LD14) was sworn in on January 8th, to occupy the seat that former Asm. Dan Benson, who is now the Mercer County Executive, vacated on taking his oath on January 4th. The following 25 members of the new class took their oaths of office at the War Memorial yesterday: Asw. Heather Simmons (LD3); Asm. David Bailey, Jr. (LD3); Asm. Dan Hutchison (LD4); Asm. Cody Miller (LD4); Asm. Gregory Myhre (LD9); Asm. Paul Kanitra (LD10); Asw. Margie Donlon (LD11); Asw. Luanne Peterpaul (LD11); Asm. Kevin Egan (LD17); Asw. Dawn Fantasia (LD24); Asm. Michael Inganamort (LD24); Asw. Rosy Bagolie (LD27); Asw. Alixon Collazos-Gill (LD27); Asw. Garnet Hall (LD28); Asm. Alexander Schnall (LD30); Asw. Barbara McCann Stamato (LD31); Asw. Jessica Ramirez (LD32); Asm. John Allen (LD32); Asm. Gabriel Rodriguez (LD33); Asm. Julio Marenco (LD33); Asm. Michael Venezia (LD34); Asw. Carmen Morales (LD34); Asm. John Azzariti, Jr. (LD39); and Asm. Al Barlas (LD40). Speaker Craig Coughlin, of Middlesex County, will continue as Speaker of the Assembly and now has the

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distinction of being the longest-serving Speaker of the Assembly. Asm. Lou Greenwald, of Burlington County, will continue as the Assembly Majority Leader, and Asm. John DiMaio, of Warren County, will continue as the Assembly Minority Leader.

The Legislature's reorganization will also impact the leadership of various committees. The General Assembly announced its new Committee assignments yesterday. Numerous committees will be led by a new chairperson this term, including: Asw. Shanique Speight (new Aging and Human Services Committee); Asw. Shavonda Sumter (new Community Development and Women's Affairs Committee); Asm. William Spearman (Commerce, Economic Development, and Agriculture); Asm. Roy Freiman (Financial Institutions); Asm. Sterley Stanley (Regulated Professions); Asw. Ellen Park (Judiciary); Asm. Anthony Verrelli (Labor); Asw. Linda Carter (Higher Education); Asm. William Sampson IV (Consumer Affairs Committee); Asm. Clinton Calabrese (Transportation and Independent Authorities); Asm. Joe Danielsen (new Public Safety and Preparedness Committee); and Asm. Moen (Tourism, Gaming, and the Arts).

In their respective remarks ahead of the Governor's address, Senate President Scutari, Majority Leader Ruiz, and Speaker Coughlin each underscored some of the Legislature's priorities this term, including: improving mental health; ensuring businesses thrive; bettering transportation; addressing food insecurity; improving childhood literacy; and closing the achievement gap between students in our public schools.

Democrats will retain control of both houses in the new Legislature with margins of 25-15 in the Senate and 52-28 in the Assembly.

Governor Murphy's Priorities

Governor Phil Murphy delivered his penultimate State of the State address yesterday afternoon. In years past, he has invoked themes of a "stronger and fairer" New Jersey and "New Jersey as a State of Opportunity." Both themes were present during the Governor's sixth address since he took office. In his remarks, Governor Murphy looked ahead to the new legislative session and underscored the following priorities that his Administration will focus on: affordability,

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job creation, education, healthcare, the protection of fundamental rights, and the expansion of new sectors such as renewable energy, cannabis, and artificial intelligence (AI) in the coming year.

The Governor raised the following areas of focus:

- Achieving greater affordability for New Jersey residents of all ages. To that end, the Governor highlighted programs such as StayNJ and ANCHOR (each geared toward property tax relief).
- Creating jobs and accelerating New Jersey's economic growth rate by increasing the unionized workforce and the number of apprenticeship program offerings.
- Taking action to combat increased costs for groceries and critical healthcare services.
- Enacting a new package that will help families avoid being caught in a medical debt trap and require every medical bill to be clear and transparent to avoid predatory debt collection practices. The Governor called on the Legislature to enact a legislative package, called The Louisa Carman Medical Debt Relief Act, in memory of a late member of the Office of Healthcare Affordability and Transparency.
- Expanding affordable housing and making home ownership attainable for all New Jerseyans. To that end, Governor Murphy said that he will sign legislation recently introduced to help accomplish this goal, which Senate President Scutari, Speaker Coughlin, Sen. Troy Singleton, and Asw. Yvonne Lopez sponsored.
- Redoubling efforts to support aspiring educators and expand universal Pre-K offerings in the State.
- Investing in transportation and infrastructure, including improving the State's railway systems and proceeding with tunnel projects such as the Hudson Tunnel Rail project.
- Protecting fundamental rights such as voting rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, and reproductive healthcare rights. Governor Murphy called on the Legislature to pass a bill, sponsored by Sen. Ruiz and Asw. Speight, that would remove out-of-pocket costs for abortion procedures and protect patients and providers.

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- Focusing on improved public safety, including gun safety laws and rebuilding trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve. The Governor announced that he will introduce a new clemency initiative.
- Announcing an AI moonshot that would position New Jersey to pioneer a series of AI-powered breakthroughs over the next decade.

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