Governor Murphy Delivers His Fifth State of the State Address

Jan 11, 2023

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For the first time since 2020, Governor Murphy delivered his State of the State address yesterday in person at a joint session of the New Jersey Legislature. Unlike his prior State of the State addresses, which focused on his first-term theme of a "stronger and fairer" New Jersey, this fifth address brought a new refrain – New Jersey as a State of Opportunity.

A significant portion of the Governor's speech focused on the areas where the state is providing opportunities or leading. He identified areas such as economic development, criminal justice reform, reproductive freedom, youth mental health, opioid use recovery, and clean energy as major policy initiatives in this regard.

The Governor painted New Jersey as a "business friendly" state, highlighting New Jersey's job growth over the past two years and the current unemployment rate, which is below the national average. The Governor also touted New Jersey's growing gross domestic product, asserting that the state's third quarter 2022 growth was the highest in the northeast region and 10th highest in the nation.

Governor Murphy stated that New Jersey is a leader in new and emerging industries, such as wind energy, cannabis, online gaming, and financial technology, while continuing to cultivate legacy industries, such as life sciences, that have long had a presence here. In his speech, he noted the burgeoning TV and film production industry in New Jersey as an example of the state's growing economy and underscored recently announced investments from Lionsgate Studio and Netflix.

Governor Murphy further stressed affordability and property tax relief as a key to opportunity. He highlighted the ANCHOR property tax relief program and announced his administration's intent to support Main Street restaurants by proposing reforms to New Jersey's liquor licensing system in order to make licenses less expensive.

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The Governor also focused on infrastructure by highlighting the Gateway Program (which will replace the Portal North Bridge and eventually result in a new train tunnel from New Jersey to Manhattan), new green spaces and urban parks, and the establishment of a new Boardwalk Fund for shore towns.

The Governor did acknowledge areas for improvement. He cited the continuing battle with opioid addiction, increasing rate of car thefts (though these numbers are trending down), and remaining public health concerns stemming from COVID-19, influenza, and RSV. It is likely that new policies and programs on these topics will be announced as part of the State Fiscal Year 2024 budget address the Governor will deliver to the Legislature next month.

Following the speech, Senate Republican Leader Steven Oroho offered a rebuttal to the Governor's message. Leader Oroho focused his remarks on New Jersey's taxes remaining among some of the highest in the nation and presented a counterfactual regarding the state's business climate.

The full text of the Governor's State of the State address can be found here. The speech kicks off the second half of the two-year legislative cycle, with the Senate and General Assembly holding their first sets of committee hearings for the new year on Thursday, January 12.

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