2022 STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS
AND NEW LEGISLATIVE LEADERSHIP FOR 2022 SESSION

Tuesday, January 11th, marked a new beginning. Governor Murphy, although he won’t be sworn into office until two weeks from now for his second term, delivered his State of the State Address talking about the achievements and difficulties of his first four years and the unfinished business for the coming years. It was also a new beginning in the legislature as the 219th Legislative Session began and new leadership took control.

The State of the State Address

A little more than an hour before the pre-recorded State of the State Address aired, Governor Murphy signed Executive Orders 280 and 281. The Orders respectively reinstated the Public Health Emergency and continued eight other Executive Orders previously issued in response to the pandemic. In the days leading up to the end of the legislative session, Governor Murphy requested that the legislature extend his pandemic related powers for an additional 90 days, that request was denied by leadership. In fact, outgoing Senate President Sweeney commented that people were tired and collectively wanted and needed to learn to move forward with the virus. Most prognosticators believe the Orders were in direct response to the denial.

When the State of the State Address aired, the Governor said he was both humbled and honored to be re-elected. He delivered a 37 minute speech titled “Resilient and Moving Forward” in which he spoke of the need to continue the fight against Covid, touted the achievements of his first four years, and outlined unfinished business.

As to the pandemic, he said reinstating the Public Health Emergency was a needed step to access resources in the battle against the surging Omicron variant. Although couched as an effort to keep schools and businesses open, the whispers about going backwards came quickly and saying we must “hold together just a little longer” sounded tired. Tweets after the Address aired stressed that the Public Health Emergency does not mean additional restrictions.
In a more upbeat tone, the Governor spoke of where New Jersey was four years ago and where it is now. He claimed we are ranked as the best state to raise children and as the best rated public education system. He said we moved from 47th to 4th in economic growth and unlike other states, people and businesses were moving to us. He talked about improvements in the pension and transit systems, affordable and accessible healthcare, property taxes, and a living wage. As an aside, our minimum wage increased this year to $13/hr. and will increase to $15/hr. by 2024.

As to the future, he promised to sign the Freedom of Reproductive Choice Act this week and this year to push unfinished issues like gun safety, affordable prescription drugs, and job growth in innovation, renewable energy, and the cannabis industries.

In the end, he said he was tired of the hyper-partisanship of Washington and called us all to put away our “D’s” and “R’s” and work together. Of course, some prognosticators suggest the close races in November, shocking loses, and diminished majorities all combined to create a realization and need for cooperation. We shall see.

Links to the Address text and video:
https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=ypXYErICybo

Changes in Legislative Leadership

The Legislative Session has begun and with slimmer Democratic majorities and big changes in the Leadership. Only, Craig Coughlin (D) and Lou Greenwald (D) retained their respective and long standing roles as General Assembly Speaker and Majority Leader, but that is our only constant. Otherwise, truly decades of leadership are leaving.

Senate Democratic Leadership is a well know story by now. After 20 years in the Senate and 12 as Senate President, Steve Sweeney (D) is no longer in office. In what seems like the political underdog story of all times in New Jersey, Edward Durr (R), a truck driver with little, if any, political experience, spent just a few thousand dollars and unseated the second most powerful person in our state. Couple this surprise with the planned retirement of long standing Majority Leader and once Lt. Governor candidate, Loretta Weinberg (D), and Senate Democrats needed new leadership.

Senator Nicholas Scutari will be our new Senate President. Since 2004, he has been the Senator for District 22 (parts of Middlesex, Somerset, and Union Counties) and for many years he has served as the Chair to the powerful Judiciary Committee. He is a certified civil trial attorney and previously served as a municipal prosecutor.

2022 LEADERSHIP

Governor
Phil Murphy (D)

Senate President
Nick Scutari (D)

Senate Majority Leader
Teresa Ruiz (D)

Senate Minority Leader
Steve Oroho (R)

Assembly Speaker
Craig Coughlin (D)

Assembly Majority Leader
Lou Greenwald (D)

Assembly Minority Leader
John DiMaio (R)
Senator Teresa Ruiz will be the new Senate Majority Leader. She has, since 2008, been the sitting Senator for District 29 (part of Newark and Belleville). She chairs the Education Committee and sits on the Budget Committee. Prior to ascending to Majority Leader, she served as Senate President Pro Tempore. It is worthy to note, she was the first Puerto Rican elected to the Senate when first elected and now the first Latina to serve in leadership. She ran unopposed in November.

Also of interest with this new leadership is the break from our unwritten tradition of North Jersey and South Jersey having equal representation among leaders. This gets to geography and a visual might help, so see the map to the right. Steve Sweeney was all in a south guy (Salem County and parts of the two adjacent counties) and Loretta Weinberg hails from up north (Bergen County), but now Nick Scutari is from Union County and Teresa Ruiz is from Essex County. We know we forced you to look at a map of the counties, but those are both in the north. This may foretell future power struggles or simply reflect Democrat power receding in the south. We will see.

**Senate Republican Leadership** also sees a long time leader leave. Tom Kean, Jr. did not seek re-election after a recent unsuccessful Congressional race. He was elected to the Senate in 2003 and became the Minority Leader in 2008. As such, he and Steve Sweeney together ruled over the New Jersey Senate for the last 12 years.

Steve Oroho (R) will be our new Senate Minority Leader. Since 2008, he has represented the 24th District (Sussex County and parts of Morris and Warren). He is a financial planner by profession and a long serving member of the Budget Committee.

**Assembly Republican Leadership** sees yet another longstanding leader leave but for a different reason. Jon Bramnick is ascending to the Senate to fill the senate seat vacate by Tom Kean, Jr. Originally appointed in 2003 and then elected ever since to the Assembly, he became the Minority Leader in 2012. He shared power with Kean and Sweeney for the last decade.

John DiMaio (R) will be the new Assembly Minority Leader. Since 2009, he has represented the 23rd District (parts of Hunterdon, Somerset, and Warren counties). He worked his way up from local politics in the 1980’s, through County Government, and now State Government. He has served on the Budget and Commerce and Economic Development Committees.

Collectively, Sweeney, Kean, and Bramnick held leadership positions for 36 years and led together for the last decade. If nothing else, we have to believe new leadership brings change.
Should you have any questions, let us know. As always, we will keep you posted.