

Promises, Promises: How Did Murphy Really Do in Year 1?

NJ Spotlight gathered a list of Murphy's promises from his inaugural address, as well as significant campaign pledges, to gauge exactly what he has and has not done.

The theme of his inaugural address was a "stronger and fairer New Jersey." These are the specific promises he made and whether he met them:

- **Fund public schools.** Murphy increased K-12 school funding by \$351 million, but is still a long way from fully funding the state's school aid formula.
- **Provide property tax relief.** The administration increased the income tax deduction for property taxes by \$5,000 and restored the Homestead Benefit, but continues to calculate rebates from 2006 tax bills and did not provide a cost-of-living increase for Senior Freeze rebates.
- **Make four-year college more affordable.** Murphy increased Tuition Aid Grants and the Educational Opportunity Fund, which help thousands of low-income and disadvantaged students better afford college, but he made campaign promise to lower college tuition and increase state aid to colleges and did neither.
- **Free access to community college.** Murphy has begun this program, which 13,000 students are expected to qualify for this spring, but it is only for students with incomes of less than \$45,000.
- **New training programs for jobs in an innovation-driven economy.** The administration has begun a number of initiatives, including apprenticeship programs and an education model that allows students to more quickly earn a degree and get a job in the tech industry.
- **Tools to help small businesses thrive.** Murphy has created new lending opportunities and pilot programs, as well as a unit within the Economic Development Authority dedicated to helping small businesses.
- **The wealthiest pay their fair share in taxes.** Murphy signed into law a tax increase for those with \$5 million or more in income, but he was really looking for — and had promised during the campaign — a tax on all millionaires but could not get lawmakers to agree.
- **Legalize marijuana as part of comprehensive criminal justice reform.** While Murphy has reconstituted a commission to reexamine sentencing and committed to continuing the bail reform law, the governor and legislators have been unable to agree on the details for legalizing marijuana for adult recreational use.

- **Create affordable housing.** The administration has funded some affordable housing construction and proposed tax credits that it estimates will result in about 2,000 new low-income units, but Murphy also broke a promise he made to stop raiding the state's Affordable Housing Trust Fund to pay for other programs.
- **Create housing that is safe from the dangers of lead.** Remediating lead contamination is a costly problem that Murphy has yet to find a funding source for.
- **Protect hard-working immigrant families.** The administration has allocated \$2.1 million to help provide legal representation for those facing immigration problems and issued rules that curtail voluntary cooperation between law enforcement and federal immigration officials in most cases. Still, the undocumented cannot legally drive in New Jersey.
- **Accept the reality of climate change and invest aggressively in renewables.** Murphy believes climate change is real and has taken steps toward trying to limit New Jersey's contribution to it, including a commitment to have half of the state's power come from clean energy by 2030.
- **Uphold the goals of the Paris Climate Accord.** New Jersey has joined the U.S. Climate Alliance, which is a group of states committed to achieving the accord's goals. These include limiting the increase in global temperature to less than 2 degree Celsius.
- **Have a cabinet and leadership team in place that looks like the state.** Murphy's cabinet is the most diverse in state history and includes a female majority and the state's first Sikh and Muslim members. The governor also appointed the state's first full-time chief diversity officer.
- **Balance the budget fiscally and morally.** On paper, the budget is balanced. But it does not make the full required pension contribution and the latest revenue projections indicate that its 7.5 percent increase may have been overly optimistic.
- **Support for women's health and Planned Parenthood.** Murphy is spending \$7.45 million for Planned Parenthood and other services, which had been cut by Gov. Chris Christie, and has made it easier for women to get contraception.
- **Raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour.** The governor has repeatedly called for the higher wage, but he and lawmakers have not yet agreed on how to phase in an increase.
- **Promote equal pay for women.** Murphy signed a law guaranteeing equal pay for comparable work last April.

- **Give every worker earned sick leave.** The governor enacted a requirement that employers give full-time workers essentially five sick days a year.
- **Tear down barriers to voting.** Murphy signed legislation that automatically registers people to vote when they do business at Motor Vehicle Commission offices. But during the campaign he supported other measures that have not yet passed. These include implementing online and same-day registration, letting 17-year olds vote in a primary if they will turn 18 by Election Day, and expanding early voting during the 15 days before an election.
- **Strengthen gun laws.** The governor has signed a host of bills further toughening the state's laws, including several he backed while campaigning. These include allowing for the court-ordered seizure of the weapons from a person deemed mentally ill and a ban on untraceable "ghost" guns.

A final pledge was to "resist every move from President Trump" in a host of areas that would be detrimental to New Jerseyans, including those that would hurt undocumented young adults brought to the United States as children (known as "Dreamers"), gut healthcare, or allow offshore drilling. The administration, largely through the efforts of Attorney General Gurbir Grewal, has gotten involved in numerous lawsuits against these and other actions by the Trump administration. In addition, Murphy has criticized Trump's actions on such issues as eliminating the ability to deduct property taxes on federal income taxes.

In addition to promises made a year ago, several of Murphy's campaign pledges are noteworthy because of the emphasis he placed on them while stumping for votes. The governor has three more years in office to work on the ones he has yet to complete.

Here are some of the governor's biggest accomplishments:

- Forgiving students loans for graduates in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), developing a K-12 STEM-oriented curriculum.
- Expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit and creating a child -and dependent-care tax credit.
- Stabilizing the state's individual health insurance market, which led to an average 9 percent decrease in the price of premiums.

These pledges are in progress:

- End annual high-stakes PARCC testing of students: The state has taken steps to move away from the controversial exams.

- Improve NJ Transit and its cooperation with Amtrak and other transit agencies: Murphy more than doubled funding for the agency and NJT has taken numerous steps to improve customer service and work with other agencies, although not all of the specific reforms Murphy had promised have been completed.
- Ban fracking in the Delaware River and elsewhere, as well as the storage of fracking waste: Murphy has joined with other states to support a fracking ban, but the Delaware River Basin Commission still does not have a complete ban in place.

Probably the biggest pledge that Murphy has not acted on was his promise to create a public bank that would use state deposits to finance local investments in infrastructure, small businesses, and student loans. Publicly, there has been no talk of creating the bank for months, but administration officials say it is something staff has been working on and the governor remains committed to this promise.