

Remarks of Governor Jim Florio
Inaugural Address
Trenton, New Jersey
Tuesday, January 16, 1990

It's been said that, the longer the voyage, the better it feels to reach land. Lucinda and I both know how true that is.

Reverend Clergy, Mr. Chief Justice, my distinguished predecessors, family, friends, and fellow citizens of New Jersey:

This day is a homecoming for me. After 15 years in Washington, I return to New Jersey, to the county where I earned my college degree, to the city where I began my career in public service 20 years ago. As I look out on this vast audience, let me simply say, it's good to be home.

Those who have stood here before me know well the challenges and obstacles that await me. Governors, Hughes, Cahill, Byrne and Kean -- I thank you for the advice and wisdom you have offered. On a personal level, I want to thank Tom Kean for his grace and courtesy during these past few weeks.

And as a citizen of New Jersey, I want to thank you Tom for all you've done to help bring our state's pride out of the shadows.

It may be presumptuous for me to begin my talking about what I want to be remembered for, when my time as Governor is finished. But I believe in setting goals, and meeting them. I believe in keeping my promises. I've done that all my life. So, let me tell you now that my goal is a simple one: When I leave here, I want to be remembered as the Governor who brought new ideas to preserve old ideals.

As I stand here in the first month of the last decade of the 20th century, I say that if we succeed, we will make sure that we leave our grandchildren a state that is better, healthier, cleaner and greener, more prosperous, more full of opportunity, than the state we found. A state our children will be proud to inherit and prepared to improve.

Before I speak more about the ideals and the ideas, there is a promise I must keep. After the election I received a letter from a woman from Trenton. The letter sums up why I have to keep this promise.

She wrote about how she worked nine years to put herself through college. And now she can't buy the car she needs for her job, because she can't afford car insurance.

I said during the campaign that bringing down car insurance rates would be one of the first things I do. It will be. We will bring back fairness to a system that has abused the drivers of New Jersey for too long.

So I have asked the leaders of the Legislature, and they have agreed, to call a joint session of the Legislature for next Monday to hear my proposals for bringing down the unfair tax we call car insurance.

We've all been taught that keeping promises is a deeply-held ideal -- like the ideals I want to talk about today. The ideals -- the values -- that lie deep within all of us have contributed so much to what this state is, and who we are as people. It isn't just because these ideals are old that we want to hold onto them. It is because of what they mean to us. These are the ideals that you and I grew up with, that are woven into our fabric as a society. They are what move us ahead. They enable us to go further than our parents, and they will enable our children to go further than us.

I'm talking about old ideal like: Opportunity.
Community. Security. Family. Leadership.

These ideals rise and fall on the realities of our daily lives. Those realities are changing in a way that threatens these ideals.

As Lucinda and I travel around the state, as we get letters from people from all over New Jersey, we hear the frequent refrain that things are different; that life is changing. And not always for the better.

We hear that something at the core of life in New Jersey is a cause of concern.

For many people, life in New Jersey brings fond memories of taking the kids down to the shore for a day of fun. But the kids have moved away, trying to find a place where they can afford a home. And the shore, well, you know what's been happening. All too often, the irresponsible deeds of a few polluters spoil our beaches for everyone.

For countless other people, life always meant living on a street where the kids could go out and play the games of childhood. But we heard from a young mother in Camden who spoke for so many others when she told us she won't let her youngsters outside, for fear they will be gunned down in the crossfire of rival drug gangs.

Those people are reacting to the reality of change. Let's face it, you don't have to travel to the Berlin Wall to see people fighting for their hopes and dreams.

Change brings choices.

We can ignore change, if we want to, and surely be swept aside by its force, left adrift on the backwaters of history.

Or, we can be passive and do nothing in the face of change, hoping some invisible hand will guide us to land.

But you and I know better. We know that's not the New Jersey way. The people of this state want -- no, they demand -- action. This is what built this state and made it great. And it is what will keep it that way. We are a state that is willing to work, to struggle, to even fight for the ideals we know are right.

Our task is to find the new ideas to preserve old ideals.

Opportunity -- that's one of those ideals. Like many in this state, New Jersey was not my first home. Like nearly half our fellow citizens, I came here from somewhere else. I crossed a river to get here, just as my grandparents crossed an ocean to find a place where hard work was rewarded; where the future could be carved with your own hands, your own will.

I was, to borrow a phrase, a "fortunate pilgrim." But the flame of opportunity must be kindled anew. If the ideal is opportunity, and the reality for some is that there is no opportunity, then the ideal, for them, is dead.

By the year 2000, about three out of four jobs will require training beyond high school. And for many workers, that future is already here. Today, to be an auto mechanic, you have to speak the language of computers, and understand complex technical manuals.

Even with training, young couples find they have to run at full speed just to stay in place. Two incomes aren't enough to buy a home. I won't forget hearing from a young couple from Bergen County who told me how they stared in disbelief at the real estate prices in the newspaper, wondering how it is they got written out of the American dream.

So what, then, is to become of the old ideals of a good job and home of your own? Do we cast them aside because they are too hard to reach? That's not the New Jersey way. We find new ideas, new ways to get where we want to go -- and we will.

Community -- that's another ideal. I'll bet a lot of you grew up in a place like I did. Back in Brooklyn in the 40's and 50's, if you left the door open, or if your light stayed on all night, someone came over to see if you were alright. We were neighbors, not strangers who happened to live nearby. We cared about each other.

It's been said by some that I am a frustrated school teacher. Well, guilty as charged. So, I'm not going to let a captive audience get away without just a little bit of, shall we say, lecturing.

There is a word in our language that, by itself, carries no special glow. "Common" is the word. But as the root of other words it is rich in meaning. It helps form the word "community" and another important word -- "commonwealth" -- a word our ancestors used to speak of something greater than any one person; a whole that doesn't mean much unless all the parts contribute.

A commonwealth is a place where people share a commitment to what Thomas Jefferson called "tempered liberty," a sense of self-restraint, mutual respect, and personal responsibility.

For New Jersey to be truly a commonwealth, we simply cannot have two New Jerseys. One where youngsters go off on a road to college, and another where youngsters go off on a road to despair.

One with towns that flourish with the rewards of prosperity, and another with decaying cities, littered with abandoned cars and abandoned hopes. Practical wisdom dictates there has to be one New Jersey. Simple justice demands it.

How, then, can we make sense of community, sense of commonwealth real today? With new ideas that will emerge from partnerships where business, labor, non-profits, everyone with a stake in this state works together as never before. Remember the barn-raising of yesterday? Where people from miles around came together to drive nails, cook food and shed their sweat for the neighbors' prosperity. That spirit will live again here in New Jersey, to rebuild the cities and reclaim lives.

Security -- that's another ideal. It means a lot of things.

It means going to the shore, knowing that you can enjoy its majesty, its beauty, its power without worrying about needles and garbage. Our Jersey shore defines us, inspires us, renews us. And we need new ideas -- like an environmental prosecutor -- to make sure it stays that way,

I don't want our grandchildren to know the shore by faded photographs. I want them to live it.

Throughout my career, I have fought hard for clean water, for clean air, for the Jersey shore. That will continue to be true.

Security also means freedom from drugs. A safe, secure childhood is a cherished ideal we share -- for the earliest years to be a time of nurturing, protection, learning, all aimed at creating proud, self-reliant adults. But we don't have to look far to see that ideal fighting for its very life.

There was a time when the word "drugs" simply meant something we used to improve our health. Now drugs are an

escape, a form of self-destruction for too many of our youngsters, the grim spoils of criminal warfare.

So what do we do? Do we write off our children? Of course not. We must fund new ideas so we can teach people about drugs at a younger age; so we can find ways to treat more people; so we can make our laws work better. To give our children -- all of our children -- a chance. And we will.

Family. That's another ideal.

Many have fond memories of growing up in a family modeled after a Norman Rockwell painting. The painting has changed. today, it isn't just Dad going off to work and Mom staying home. It's both parents going to work; or only having one parent, who works two jobs.

I talked to a young mother from Newark who races home from work every day, so she can get there before her child gets back from school, so he won't have to be alone in the house.

What do we do in the face of that challenge? Do we tell our youngsters that childhood has been cancelled? That they are on their own? No, we put ourselves in the vanguard of daycare, family leave and flexible work schedules. We meet the challenges with new ideas to preserve old ideals.

Leadership is another old ideal that must take center stage. Leadership that is disciplined, tough, persistent, and honest. I've made a point of letting you know that I'm going to listen closely to you -- and I will. But, that's not enough. I believe if that's all I do, I haven't done the whole job.

Being a leader is being a spark, a catalyst that sets forces in motion; that makes things happen. It means keeping commitments -- like car insurance -- making tough decisions and following through.

I don't have all the new ideas. But I know where to go to find them. You see, to me, New Jersey is more than history and geography; more than the accomplishments of our heroes, grand as they are. New Jersey is people. I talk to you in diners and on college campuses. In factories and corporate centers. You are my inspiration and always have been.

Your hopes and dreams put me here today. You will be the source of tomorrow's new ideas.

I need your ideas and I need your support.

I need your praise -- and your criticism.

I need your patience -- and I need your prayers.

My work is your work too, and I'm asking for your help. We have a real chance to shape the future, not only for the next decade, but clear into a new century. As parents, as grandparents, as citizens of New Jersey, our job is always to find a better way. To preserve the old ideals that have brought us to this place and time.

Thank you, and God bless you all.