



From the Governor's Desk...

By Jim Florio

It's starting to be clear that 1991 isn't going to be a routine year.

Our country is at war. And we're in a national recession.

New Jersey can't help but be affected by these developments.

But we shouldn't let pessimism cloud our vision of the future. There is a lot happening in New Jersey that should make us feel optimistic about what lies in store for us and our children.

First of all, we in New Jersey have a firm foundation for growth.

Our economy is diversified. We've got the know-how to build parts of the Patriot Missile and the muscle to build new highways and airports.

We're the strongest state in the region. Our unemployment rate continues to be below the national average. A record number of firms last year left New York City for New Jersey. And our Wall Street credit rating is number one in the nation.

And this is the year we'll start getting the dividends from investments we began making last year -- investments that will mean jobs today and a future of opportunity for our children.

That's the promise we've made to the people of this state. And, 1991 is all about keeping promises.

You'll be able to keep track of how well we're doing at keeping our promises. Mark these dates on your calendar.

On March 17th, we keep the promise of clean water. That's the date when the long-time practice of dumping sludge in our ocean will finally come to an end.

Last year, we had great success at keeping our beaches clean. Despite New Jersey's extremely high clean water standards -- the toughest in the nation -- there were very few beach closings at the Jersey Shore last summer. This year, we're going to work to do even better. By putting an end to ocean dumping we're renewing our commitment to preserving for our children the Garden State's most precious resource -- the Jersey Shore.

On April 1st, we keep the promise of lower car insurance bills.

No, it isn't an April Fools joke. After that date, every policy written or renewed in New Jersey will have something missing: the \$222 per car JUA surcharge that we've all been paying to clean up a mess made by the insurance companies. For families with two cars, that will mean a savings of \$444.

We're able to provide those savings to you because last year we finally drove a stake through New Jersey's old bad-driver fund, the JUA. New Jersey drivers will no longer have to pay to keep that fund afloat.

By July 1st, we'll enact a balanced budget.

I've submitted my proposed budget to the Legislature. It's the property tax relief budget. It represents a real break from our past patterns of spending. Direct aid to people is up by close to \$2 billion. Money spent on state bureaucracy is down by \$130 million.

This budget proposal fully funds the largest property tax relief program in our state's history. It also provides increased aid to local and county governments to help them pay for schools and social services that otherwise would be paid by local homeowners' property taxes.

There are likely to be some changes as people all across this state debate what should be in our budget. But whatever the details of the final budget happen to be, I'm confident it will keep New Jersey's future secure and keep the promise we made last year that, no matter what happened to the national economy, we wouldn't raise taxes again.

When that final budget is approved, we'll publish a concise, easy-to-follow "People's Budget." It will contain information about how the state gets money and where those taxpayer dollars are spent. People want information so they can participate in the debate about New Jersey's future. The "People's Budget" will be something to which people can refer for the entire budget year.

Another important date: July 31st. We're proposing that by that day you receive your homestead rebate checks.

This is the year that the state's largest-ever property tax relief program goes into effect. Under this new program the most money -- up to \$500 -- goes to the middle class families who need it the most. For one million homeowners, this year's rebate will add up to more than they received under the old system of rebates and income tax deductions.

This year is also the first time that tenants can get as much as homeowners.

And those are not the only promises we're going to keep this year. Our budget proposal calls for a renewed commitment to our state's commuters by not increasing New Jersey Transit bus and rail fares. We're going to keep our commitment to our young people by fully funding the largest school aid package in our state's history. And we're going to help college students by offering more for tuition assistance.

And we won't forget that we're committed to making government smaller. We've already proposed eliminating three departments in state government and combining scores of agencies and divisions that do the same thing.

By taking these steps will save taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. And by getting rid of the waste and duplication that we all know is there, we'll go a long way toward making our state work better.

The people of New Jersey have made it clear that when it comes to government, "Smaller is better."

It's time for those in government to start saying, "We hear you. And, we're acting."

I'm optimistic that this year we will do the things we need to do, so that when the thousands of fighting men and women from New Jersey come home again they'll find a secure state filled with opportunity. Because as they do their job overseas, we're getting ready at home by sounding a battlecry of our own: New Jersey Works.