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Christie assumes office in era of economic turmoil

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Change has arrived in New Jersey, as Gov. Chris Christie took his oath of office at the Trenton War Memorial to become the 55th governor of the state — the first Republican elected to statewide office since 1997.

In his inaugural address at the swearing-in ceremony, which followed a morning mass at the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Newark, the former U.S. attorney emphasized the state's economic troubles, the need to work together to make a positive change and his faith in progress.

"To all those with hope in their heart, with determination in their soul and a willingness to pitch in and work together, I say keep going, have faith, for today, change has arrived," Christie said.

The inaugural celebrations honored the state, as the theme was "Rebuilding New Jersey Together: Pride Through Service and Community," and Christie called on the necessity to use the hard work of New Jerseyans as an example for the new administration.

"You, the people, have shown us the path to change," he said.

Some of the changes Christie pledged in his speech include ending bipartisanship tactics in the legislature and increasing accountability.

"To all the people of our state, whether you voted for me or not, whether we have agreed or disagreed in the past, today, I am your governor," he said. "Young or old, Republican or Democrat, rich or poor, regardless of color or heritage, I promise you this: I will work every waking hour of every day to build a better life for every one of our citizens."

In his speech, Christie asked Senator Stephen Sweeney and Assemblywoman Sheila Oliver, both Democrats, to join him at the podium to shake hands as a promise to never abandon their commitment of service to the people.

Christie also pledged to stop excessive spending, lower taxes and stimulate growth, as the state has the highest budget deficit per person in the nation, the highest property taxes in the nation and a high unemployment rate.

"I say to the people of New Jersey, while the economic hour is dark, there are brighter days ahead," he said.

Donald Linky, a senior policy fellow at the University's Eagleton Institute of Politics, said much of Christie's speech relayed the difficult tasks before him.

"[Christie] obviously is pointing toward sacrifice and toward difficult choices in terms of how the state governs itself in the next four years," he said. "I think both nationally and in New Jersey, there's a fairly somber mood about the status of the economy and about the ability to afford some of the government programs we've been accustomed to in the past."

Linky said Christie ran on a platform of fiscal conservatism and low taxes, which could prove to be troublesome for his administration.

"It's difficult with the pledge he's made that he's not going to increase taxes or seek other revenue-raising measures to see how he's going to meet all his campaign promises," Linky said, adding it is a difficult task for all new governors.

He also said it is difficult for governors to change a state's economy drastically. Most states are affected by national and international trends.

"[Governors] can signal that they're receptive to new investment through such tools as lowering taxes and so forth, but in the larger sense, there aren't a lot of things governors can do in terms of the economy," Linky said.

The new governor said these problems will not fix themselves overnight, as they were years in the making, but he has confidence the state has the tools and resources to rebuild.

"Many have commented that our problems are large, some say that they are insurmountable. I disagree," he said.

New Jersey has one-fifth of the researchers and scientists in the nation along with some of the largest ports in the world, one of the largest airports in the nation and an extensive network of highways, giving the state more opportunities to rebuild, Christie said.

The state's diversity is also essential to growth, Christie said. It is home to mountains, beaches, cities, farms and people of every background and creed.

"This diversity is our strength," he said.

Yesterday also marked a historic change, as Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno, former Monmouth County Sheriff, became the first to swear into the newly created office for the state.

Linky said Guadagno's role in office will depend a lot on Christie's interpretation on it.

"She's obviously the first person to hold that office, and to some extent, she can shape it as a model for the people who follow her in the office," he said, but typically, lieutenant governors in other states follow the lead of the governor.

Lonnie Affrime, a member of the nonpartisan student political group, the Roosevelt Institute, said he thinks Christie's speech was typical of many incoming governors and it showed Christie's desire to differ from former Gov. Jon S. Corzine, but it did show that he cares about the state.

"I don't think anyone can fulfill all their campaign promises, but I think he's going to try, and I think that's going to make him stand out among other politicians today, Democrat or Republican," said Affrime, a School of Arts and Sciences senior.

School of Environmental and Biological Sciences sophomore Zaid Abuhouran was present at Christie's swearing-in ceremony and said the experience was once-in-a-lifetime.

"You don't get to see a governor get sworn in every day ... You could definitely feel the enthusiasm in the room," he said.

Abuhouran said he appreciated Christie's desire to improve education and accountability.

"His speech was definitely inspirational," Abuhouran said. "He said a lot of things that people have been hearing a lot, but he seemed to mean what he said."

Affrime said Christie has often visited the University and has support for higher education.

"He's said a lot in regards to support for education and school, and I think the economy getting better will definitely play into a more positive role and a more positive future for Rutgers as a whole," he said.



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