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2017 RETROSPECTIVE



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Verona, NJ 07044
insidernj@gmail.com
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Max Pizarro
Editor-in-Chief
Max@InsiderNJ.com



Pete Oneglia
General Manager
Pete@InsiderNJ.com

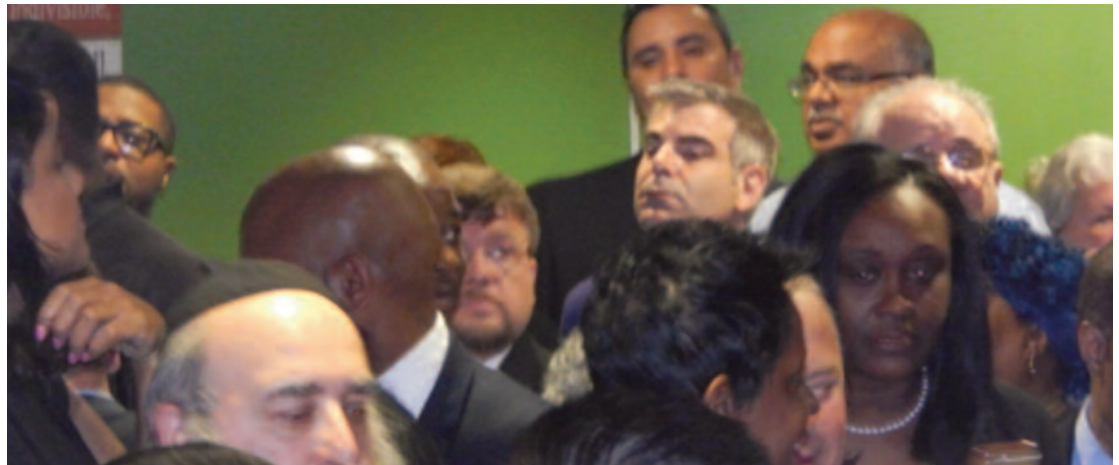
Michael Graham
CEO

John F.X. Graham
Publisher

Ryan Graham
Associate Publisher

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RETROSPECTIVE **2017**



IT WAS A HORRIBLE YEAR!

For Republicans not named Chris Brown.

If you were a Democrat, you probably thought 2017 was great.
If you're a whopping 65% of the registered voting population of New Jersey,
you don't care...You're bored.

You wanted the general election to look like *The Ten Commandments* and
instead it had the feeling of *Exodus: Gods and Kings*.

To the extent that the state simply stagnated, or even sank dismally in on itself like the banks of a swamp collapsing and the ensuing chemical reaction produced a gaseous haze that blanketed our condition, we could count 2017 a success. Otherwise, it was another dismal 12 months in New Jersey politics.

To start with, we have a state pension system that is underfunded by \$50 billion.

Freed from having to worry about how his actions impact New Hampshire, Governor Chris Christie crash landed back in Jersey after his 2016 presidential run and signed – amid train wrecks, commuter bedlam and crumbling infrastructure – a gas tax hike for estate tax disintegration – to infuse the Transportation Trust Fund (TTF) with cash. That sparked a brawl in an already badly damaged and capsized Republican Party. Watching the GOP fight one another was like observing a scuba dive fight in a black and white movie:

murky, ugly and finally irrelevant. Despite 101.5 radio shock jock Bill Spadea's best efforts to turn the 2016 vote into a 2017 rebellion, none of the incumbent Republicans who backed the gas tax, among them state Senator Steve Oroho (R-24), who co-authored the bill, and Assemblywoman Betty Lou DeCrose (R-26), had any real trouble getting back into office.

If the Republicans saved their best pushing and shoving for the primary before at least trying to project some (soft) party unity for November, establishment Democrats contented themselves with having secured all 21 primary lines for their gubernatorial candidate and mostly snoozing through doomed challenges from John Wisniewski, Jim Johnson and Ray Lesniak, before going to war with themselves in the general – and ultimately winning comfortably. In a developing post-primary statewide leadership food fight, the South

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bullied the North, using Middlesex as a cudgel to torment Speaker Vincent Prieto (D-32), who fought back by refusing to enable a South-stamped Christie plan to raid the reserves of Horizon Blue Cross-Blue Shield. Having sat out a primary and the opportunity to recruit someone who actually believes in what they stand for, the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) went all in with a Republican factory worker from Salem County (a big Christie and Donald Trump supporter) in an effort to trip up Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-3). Hanging on for dear life as Assemblyman Craig Coughlin (D-19) continued to harass him for caucus votes, Prieto set his sights on new frontiers of Democratic Party conquest – LD25, LD39 and (to a lesser extent) LD40 – not because he necessarily had a beef with any of the Republicans in those districts, but because he wanted to put down the establishment Democratic Party plan hatched in South Jersey to get rid of him.

The main drama of the general election contest consisted of Lieutenant Governor Kim Guadagno, the Republican nominee for governor, warning the state about the resurrection of another Goldman Sachs lib, even as few seemed to care, with the face of Christie failure more obvious and easy to scapegoat than the dozens of mostly unknown Christie-enabling Democrats who made up the legislative majority. The first Murphy-Guadagno debate made Christie-Corzine 2009 look like the Lincoln-Douglas debates. The second one was like a replay of the Burr-Hamilton duel at Weehawken, with an apparently mortally wounded Murphy nonetheless ultimately prevailing on Election Day. Armed with NRA gun money and dumbed down atmospherics, Guadagno sounded the higher taxes alarm bell, “taxes, taxes, taxes,” while Murphy in response simply dutifully hit the Christie-Guadagno-Bridgegate gong over and over and over again to bolt across the finish line by double digits. Nearly everyone in the establish-



ment got back into office on the strength of a combination of public apathy, backroom deal-making, and the easy angle of being able to blame the lame duck Christie rather than examine the deeper foundations of New Jersey dysfunction.

So here we go, into the post-Christie era with a new captain on the bridge of the Enterprise (Don't worry, Cory, you're still our first choice to play Captain Kirk), minus Wisniewski, Lesniak and Jack Ciattarelli, and with Donald Trump still in the White House. We're looking forward to it, kind of the way those noble Romans must have looked forward to the end of their civilization while Emperor Nero fiddled away on the charred ramparts. But amid the upheaval and political heartache and heartbreak, in a thicket of rapidly increasing illiteracy, and overall civic disengage-

ment, ignorance and insistence on incivility as a replacement for discussion, war as an alternative to debate, and signs everywhere of an ailing political system increasingly supplanted by shadow sources of unending financial wealth, remember this, state Senator Brian P. Stack still knows how to get the organization vote out in Union City, women had a good year and so did South Asians – signs of life on otherwise mostly moribund terrain – and we will still have InsiderNJ; and wherever it is in this Jersey Devil is in the Details land – you will find us in *Tough Guys Don't Dance* mode, committed to the political cause – of politics itself.

Max Pizarro

Max Pizarro

Editor, InsiderNJ

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LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR: JIM WHELAN

We regret that we must administer this award posthumously, but we do so with a sense of pride in the service of a real New Jerseyan and man's man, an educator and athlete who distinguished himself as a champion of his home city of Atlantic City – and particularly of the youth of the city. We feel lucky to have known Senator Whelan, a guy who dedicated his life to young people. You couldn't walk the streets of that town in Whelan's company without running into his former students, who invariably had a kind and respectful word for coach. In a world of backslapping idiocy, Whelan was cool: that tall and lanky, shoulders-stooping-in-a-small-room perennial jock who refused to adopt a phony demeanor simply to suit what-

ever constituency was at hand. The first time we met Whelan, in fact, he was helping to commemorate a street to the memory of an Iraq War veteran killed in the line of duty. "Do you think the state senate can stand to have another Irish guy up there with Codey?" we asked the assemblyman and former mayor as he prepared to run for the state senate. "I think so," he said, unsmilingly enduring the tedium of banter. "That's what it had for years when Gormley served." That was Whelan. Matter of fact. He also seldom shied away from a fight, for years going toe to toe with the Callaways and later Lorenzo Langford. And then all those general election fistfights with the GOP. "I think the

Land," he said in 2007, in response to a policy question, when the GOP opened their campaign headquarters near the children's amusement park. But it was never mean-spirited with Whelan. You just got the sense, even through the worst of Atlantic City's travails, that he cared about the people he served, and ached for better days. If he was going to try like hell to improve the quality of life for all in Atlantic City but never get there, he was at least along the way going to inspire the coming age with a life of public service and a presence forged in dignity.





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POLITICIAN OF THE YEAR: PHIL MURPHY



Look, you may not be thrilled that yet another Goldman Sachs dude will be the next governor of New Jersey. It's irritating, but then – so is life in New Jersey. The place is roughly divided into two camps: those enduring life here while they bank as much money as they can in order to get the hell out of here, and those whose lives were such a living hell before they got here that they think this high taxed, litter-strewn highway is actually the promised land. Murphy's a little like Corzine in the sense that he appears eager to atone for a Gordon Gecko life by reaching back to embody a life that inspired him as a kid: in his case, a Kennedy-like commitment to public service. Bobby Kennedy bucked up the Boston-born Murphy, just as

Teddy Kennedy bookended Corzine, a confession the lame duck governor made in his final budget address. At least in Murphy's case it seems a little more regionally consistent - that is if he were the governor-elect of Massachusetts. But give the guy his due. He campaigned hard – even if he had no real opposition. Honestly, he could've retired to his Italian bungalow prior to Nov. 7th and he still would've won comfortably. At least we know he won't be going to that bungalow anytime soon now that he'll be governor of the intractably ungovernable New Jersey. He'll need to hit the national campaign trail early if indeed he's going to be president in 2020. All right. We'll stop. Look. Murphy did a good job, and he

showed a knack for good political timing. The late great Ray Durkin always used to say about politics, "Find the parade and jump in front." That's what Murphy did, and by the way, Durkin always said Murphy was going to be the next governor. The gov-elect seized hold of the public's agony over Christie's second term, mashed it together with unease over Trump, and walked in – with a Usain Bolt-like flourish from the Asbury Park stage to finish the job.



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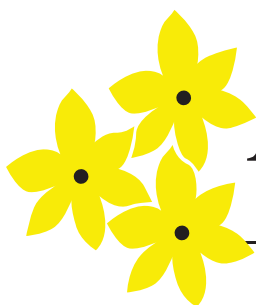
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WINNER OF THE YEAR: VIN GOPAL



We respect Senator Jen Beck, which is why we can't overstate Gopal's 4,000-plus (31K to 27K) victory in the battleground contest of the year. Had Beck beaten Gopal, we would have made her the winner of the year.

In the end, it had to go to Gopal.

Not since Cory Booker became mayor of Newark have we watched a star quite this bright hatch out of the dreadful swamp-scape of New Jersey. The wonder of it all (to quote fellow Jersey native John Pizzarelli) is that Gopal is actually from here, elevating – in his own humble way – the state's profile beyond the realm of predictable fat bumpkin to sophisticated screen idol. Keep your eye on this sena-

tor-elect from LD11, who could run for governor someday (if we believe again someday that the state senate is a proving ground for our gubernatorial prospects and not a dumping ground for transactional rejects).

The son of doctors, the magnetic Gopal spent years building his own businesses – a publishing house and clothes manufacturing – while simultaneously building the Monmouth County Democratic Committee, which he inherited from one of his mentors, Vic Scudieri. He built successful campaigns from the ground up, resolving party conflicts in places like Asbury Park, while strengthening alliances both in-county with powerhouses like U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone, Belmar Mayor Matt Do-

herty and Marlboro Mayor Jon Hornik; and beyond, with the likes of Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-3), Middlesex County, and Senator Nick Scutari (D-22).

He ran an excellent race, and made history on Election Day as the first South Asian American to win a senate seat in the history of the New Jersey Legislature.



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Winner of the Year: Runner-up Chris Brown



It was not a Republican year – a mild understatement – the South Jersey Democratic machine threw significant resources against him, and Brown – a Desert Storm war hero and retired judge – still won the general election against Senator Colin Bell.

The unofficial count was Brown's 24,170 votes to Bell's 20,528.

No other Republican (arguably with the exception of Kip Bateman in LD16, who did not face a well-funded challenger) running in a so-called battleground could buck the tide.

Significantly, Beck couldn't do it in LD11. But Brown could, and did.

Winner of the Year: Runner-up Andrew Zwicker



Not only did the assemblyman from the 16th District – a plasma physicist turned lawmaker – squash a come-backing former Assemblywoman Donna Simon and

her running mate (33,000 to Simon's 29,000 votes), after barely beating her by fewer than 100 votes in 2015, he pulled in running mate Roy Freiman.

Winner of the Year: Runner-up Shelley Brindle



The former HBO executive stung the old GOP boys network in Westfield by playing on Christie agony and an untapped women's rage in the Trump era to depose the GOP incumbent in a classically GOP Union County town.

Winner of the Year: Runner-up Ravi Bhalla



Endorsed by retiring Mayor Dawn Zimmer, the Hoboken Council President bested a thorny field of adversaries in the

most competitive local election of the year, in the process nuclearizing Council President Jen Giattino with Trump association on the strength of her membership in the Republican Party. Bhalla made history as the first Sikh American elected mayor of an American town.

Winner of the Year: Runner-up Women in Politics

Come swearing-in time, a record 41 women will stand among the ranks of New Jersey's Board of Chosen Freeholders, according to research prepared by the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University-New Brunswick. The center tallied a total of 15 women winners of 2017 elections who will join 26 holdovers, for a total of 30 percent of all freeholders serving in 2018. CAWP finds that a total of 14 women of color will serve as freeholders in 2018, also a record; including six Black women, five Latinas, and three Asian-American women. The previous peak number of women of color was 12, set in 2017.

"Newcomers to the Atlantic County Board of Chosen Freeholders include two women who ran in response to a Facebook post by Freeholder John Carman making fun of the Women's March in January. Ashley Bennett defeated Carman, and Caren Fitzpatrick also took the march itself, and Carman's post, as motivation to run," according to CAWP.

The results included a freeholder win by Middlesex County's Shanti Narra, who pulverized her Republican opponent 92K-60K votes; and Brindle's storied local victory in the Westfield mayor's race.





**Best of luck to our friends
and colleagues in 2018!**

Sean M. Darcy, President

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Loser of the Year: Chris Christie



It was bad enough that he spent a year slogging through dreadful job approval numbers, one reading as low as 16%. But then he had to go and sit on a closed Island Beach State Park during the state government shutdown. Almost every successful Democrat this year used Christie optics to wound the opposing Republican. You know it's bad when Republicans tried to gain traction by making the argument that incumbent Democrats had closer ties than they did to the GOP governor. Maybe most significantly, Senator-elect Vin Gopal poured \$2.5 million into late ads showing Republican incumbent Jen Beck's head repeatedly morphing into that of Christie. It was a late and devastating attack.

Losers Runner-up: The NJGOP



It wasn't Team Guadagno's fault that they sat in a car driven by the same guy who chauffeured

Sonny Corleone. Christie offed them. Then Trump kicked dirt on the grave.

It was a bad year for Republicans in the state of New Jersey, with a few exceptions. The candidacy of Assemblyman Jack Ciattarelli (R-16) got people's attention. It's hard to believe Jack won't come back.

Senator-elect Chris Brown (R-2), too, distinguished himself in his beat-down of the South Jersey Democratic machine. And then, of course, there's Senator-elect Declan O'Scanlon emergent as the successor to retiring Senator Joe Kyrillos in LD13. In a way, if you consider those three – in addition to Monmouth County Sheriff Shaun Golden and U.S. Rep. Tom MacArthur (R-3) – you can see the GOP developing a strong and relevant bench of players. If Murphy stumbles, anyone of the aforementioned elected officials could prove formidable opponents.

But for the time being, based on the way Christie limped out of office, Trump tweeted a year's worth of idiocy, and Guadagno arrived at the dance without a chance, the NJ Republican Party needs to do some serious rebuilding.

Don't lose hope.

It's not quite as bad as the Hindenburg.



Losers Second Runner-up: The NJEA

Ok, so they showed some guts. No one else in recent times has taken a run at the South Jersey Democratic nerve center with the kind of head-down, go for broke attitude demonstrated this year in the general election by the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA).

But the strategy to upend Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-3) prompted puzzlement and finally real derision by the political class.

Rather than recruiting a Democrat for the primary, the leaders of the teachers' union dredged up a Salem County Republican factory worker to give general election voice to their gripes about Sweeney, producing the most expensive contest in the history of the New Jersey Legislature but finally a lopsided 31.5K to 22.2K Sweeney win.

Losers Second Runner-up: Vincent Prieto



Again, give credit to the outgoing speaker for trying to hang on, which he didn't ultimately, as his at-

tempts to play in LD25 and LD39 resulted in Republican wins – and did nothing to prevent the inevitable, namely Assemblyman Craig Coughlin's (D-19) ascent to the speakership.

Losers Second Runner-up: Tom Kean, Jr.



The Senate Republican Leader did little to help defeated Senator Jennifer Beck, while pumping late cash to the candidacy of Kelly Langschultz in LD38. Ultimately, Kean got weaker, his caucus sliding from 16 to 15, and Democrats bulking up to 25-strong. The Republican mayor also went down in Kean's home town of Westfield.



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Comeback of the Year: Bob Menendez



When ten of 12 jurors expressed their belief last week that the senior senator from New Jersey had not broken the law, against two who held out against them, Menendez declared “Resurrection Day.” The jurors’ collision following a lunatic nine-week trial, including eight nail-biting days of deliberations, produced a hung jury result in the Menendez Corruption case and a win for the embattled senator. “The presumption of innocence held on each and every one of the 18 counts,” veteran defense attorney Joe Hayden told InsiderNJ. Although unresolved depending on what the federal government does next, the trial outcome indeed sparked new life in the senator, who’s up for reelection in 2018. As of this moment in time, Menendez has the backing – at the very least - of Governor-elect Phil Murphy and Democratic organizations in Hudson, Essex, Bergen, Passaic and Middlesex counties. “I made my share of mistakes, but my mistakes never constituted a crime,” he told reporters outside the federal building in Newark. Not bad for a guy who looked DOA at the beginning of the year.

Comeback of the Year Runner-up: Sheila Oliver



Usually the title “emerita” or “emeritus” in New Jersey politics amounts to the equivalent of an epitaph, but not in the case of Speaker Emerita Oliver. Not that the title of lieutenant governor by itself amounts to much, but Oliver – victorious on Election Day as Phil Murphy’s running mate – subsequently scored the job of commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs, a powerful position in state government.



The Diner Booth Endless Cup of Coffee Award: Brendan Gill



This really amounts to “operative of the year,” which Gill – Campaign Manager for Murphy – deserves. No, it wasn’t the perfect campaign. Far from it. And maybe Gill specializes in chewing people’s heads off behind the scenes, but in public he’s always the same lowkey, moderately intellectually curious presence: that turtle-necked college professor who just as easily might be teaching a course on the collected works of James Joyce as plotting to lower the guillotine on a Murphy rival. Did Gill have any real William Wallace-sized moments on the campaign trail? Probably not. Organizationally, it was cruise control from the time the northern chairs backed Murphy all the way back in

2016, and in a sense, that had to have been the most boring two years in recent political memory. It would be like Pete Carroll knowing he could bag a Super Bowl ring two seasons hence, if he just made his quarterback run around on the field without really advancing the ball or taking any chances. Now, of course, Murphy did get sacked a few times. But it turned out he was never really in danger of losing the game, and he ended up winning with the margin he needed (13 to 14%) to swagger triumphantly into Trenton. He can assume the oath of office with some real allies – not just in the northern counties initially secured in large measure by Gill – but in suburban battleground districts occupied by the likes of Assemblyman Andrew Zwicker (D-16) and Senator-elect Vin Gopal (D-11).



The Jerry Lewis Nutty Professor Award: Joe Piscopo



Now it’s less likely than ever that Joe will ever be governor. But he got his Dick Codey-like dangle of a statewide flirtation out there and the media lapped it up long enough to make his endorsement of Kim Guadagno a news headline. It was fun while it lasted – kind of the same way the Honeymooner’s Rap was fun – while it lasted.

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**The Jerry Lewis Nutty Professor Award
Runner Up: Andrew Zwicker**



That ad by Totten Communications made the LD16 assemblyman look like he was ready to transmogrify into Buddy Love.



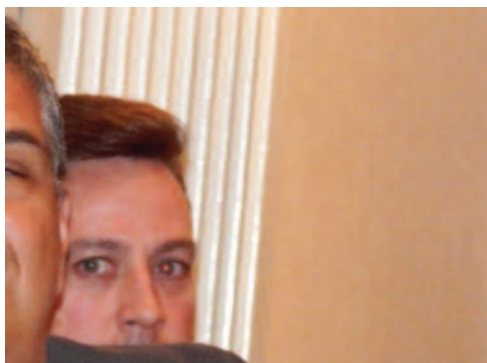
2017:

The Year of the Murphys

Phil and Peter Murphy indomitably proved the doubting thomases wrong as the pair of Irish American politicians from opposing parties rode mutually to the fore in 2017, with the former bucking the Goldman Sachs tag to become governor and the latter shaking off the stigma of striped pajamas to position himself as the most powerful field general of the Republican Party in Passaic County.



**The GN3 Training Wheels Award:
Middlesex County Democratic
Chairman Kevin McCabe**



The Upside: Ok, we saw no master strategy in effect this year. We're not dusting off the bicorn hat so McCabe can strut around Edison like Napoleon. But in the vacuum of political strategizing everywhere else except South Jersey, the Middlesex Democratic Chairman steered the rickety handcart of his delegation into the well-worn ruts that lead straight to Trenton by way of Camden County. For that he was easily the chair of the year.

The Downside: Judging by the way Essex's Sheila Oliver and Hudson's Vinny Prieto crashed out of the leadership seat like a pair of bowling pin spares, McCabe has about two years on the clock to stand there in the lane with Craig Coughlin – four years tops – before the very sight of him offends GN3 and company and they shop for a new northern county. Maybe Bergen next time? Senator Paul Sarlo (D-36) has maintained very polished relations with the South, even as sitting Chairman Lou Stellato has stubbornly resisted.



**Star Trek Red Shirt of the Year Award:
Matthew S. Seymour**



In 2017 it was Seymour, who ran for an assembly seat in the 38th District, beaming down with the crew as a Republican, only to eat an alien phaser blast and turn into a Democrat.



**The 11th Hour Gutcheck Award:
Steve Lonegan**



After losing four straight elections, including one in an adopted (and fast discarded) 3rd District, the former Mayor of Bogota has a good feeling about his fifth try up there in that 5th Congressional District. But is he sure he wants to stay there? Maybe it would be easier for him to take a crack at the seat LoBo leaves behind in retirement down in the 2nd District? There's always the old beach house argument to snow the press while seamlessly relocating from up north to (yet another) shore district.



**Political Animal of the Year:
Stonewall Jackson**



We've had pigs and pig crates in New Jersey, elephants and tusks and the horses of harness racing. But this was the year when the groundhog finally saw his political shadow, as that lovable woodchuck belonging to Assemblyman Parker Space (R-24) drew a target on his back from politically correct libtards equally scandalized by his master's Confederate Flag tattoo.



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The 2017 Copperhead Award: Parker Space



Don't worry, we wouldn't allow Stonewall Jackson to steal all the glory. It wasn't enough that the LD24 assemblyman stood in front of a Confederate Flag at a Hank Williams, Jr. concert. He also had to go and get one emblazoned on his forearm. Oh, yeah, and then he has that groundhog named Stonewall. What's next, his insistence on brandishing a replica of the saber used by General Armistead at the Battle of Gettysburg at the next legislative ice cream social?



Best Joke at the Microphone Award: Cardinal Tobin



"I thought getting elevated to cardinal was the peak experience of my life...And then there was the train."

Spoken at Marriott Wardman in Washington, D.C. after the cardinal had ridden the notoriously drunken Chamber Train.

Local Ad of the Year: Fulop for Mayor's "Day at the Beach"



We always liked Fulop's "Some things are not meant to be easy" ad, when he dives off the wharf and swims the Hudson River. This one was as good – in its own way. Charming. Engaging. Socially sophisticated. More prone to talk to people one on one than play with a phone. Kind of like Fulop. Word is old pro Menendez loved it!



Legislative Ad of the Year: "Dice"



The Republican State Leadership Committee's casino-themed attack ad against state Senator Colin Bell made the incumbent look like a tool not only of South Jersey – but of North Jersey.



Statewide Ad of the Year: The Guadagno Campaign's "Murphy's Law"



Guadagno's lesser known media buy was actually her best ad, where a teacher asked a group of school children to give examples of how Phil Murphy's encounters with taxes he couldn't resist hiking, otherwise known as Murphy's Law. How much impact did it have? None. Guadagno still lost by double digits. When you keep your mouth shut for eight years then run like you've got something to say, you lose. It's Murphy's Law.



Rock Star of the Year: Jon Bon Jovi



The big-haired rock and roll hero and New Jersey native asserted his influence by very early getting behind the gubernatorial candidacy of his friend and fellow Middletown resident Phil Murphy. Never an apolitical type to begin with, Jon Bon worked successfully with Christie and state Senator Joe Vitale on the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose bill, and forged an alliance with U.S. Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) when Booker served as Mayor of Newark.

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The 2017 Version of Stender is a Spender: "Jack it Up"



A Republican insider who supported Jack Ciattarelli for governor confessed that he couldn't look at a Ciattarelli for Governor sign without hearing the branding job Kim Guadagno's campaign did early on her Republican Primary rival: "Jack it Up!" Working with a difficult narrative, GOP message maker Larry Weitzner deserves credit for giving Guadagno every chance to win.



The William Henry Harrison Award: Ruby Cotton



Cotton didn't even last a week as Mayor of Paterson before the ravenously ambitious city council turned her out and replaced her with the politically non-threatening business administrator otherwise known as Acting Mayor What's Her Name?

The William Henry Harrison Award Runner-up: Colin Bell



Bell was in the senate seat long enough to get choked up at the swearing-in ceremony.



Unofficial High Vote-Getter Among New Jersey's 40 State Senators: Dick Codey



The former acting governor and 27th District State Senator unofficially produced the highest vote totals in the Nov. 7th General Election, but it was close enough to probably warrant a recount.

The top eleven finishers, according to the State Division of Elections:

- 40,989: Codey
- 40,927: Chris Connors
- 40,737: Jim Beach
- 40,200: Troy Singleton
- 39,379: Jim Holzapfel
- 38,376: Fred Madden
- 35,631: Thomas Kean
- 35,420: Mike Doherty
- 35,364: Steve Oroho
- 35,171: Jeff Van Drew
- 34,218: Brian Stack

The Marty Barnes Corruption Award: Jose "Joey" Torres



People said they saw it coming. Certainly, Torres never looked like he was auditioning to get the Peter Rodino Lifetime Achievement Award. But he went down hard, and it hurt to watch Paterson once again have to limp out of the ruins of yet another handcuffed "public servant." Didn't we already watch this movie with Barnes, with Anthony Davis, with Rigo Rodriguez, and on and on? For his part, Torres apparently thought it would be cool to have city workers fulfill private projects for himself on the public overtime dime. He'll have five years in the can to think about it.



The Roberto Duran III-Advised Comeback Award



Kristin Corrado ended up beating Bergen County Republican Chairman Paul DiGaetano by 4-1. We don't begrudge Paulie the shot, but at this point, let's face it, "People should know when they're conquered."



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The Carl Bernstein Studmuffin Award: Jonathan Dienst



The NBC News reporter did all the investigative legwork that resulted in his breaking the story open on Paterson Mayor Jose “Joey” Torres’ misdeeds. Dienst is no Ernest Hemingway, who hunted big game in Africa, but having a stuffed mayoral wall mount from the state’s third largest city in his archives is no small feat for the sharp-elbowed network newsman.



The Uncomfortable Caucus Colleague Award: Ronald L. Rice



During that competitive LD11 general election, worried about the expanded influence of GN3, Rice routinely tried to buck up the candidacy of incumbent Senator Jen Beck. It didn’t work, and when Senator-elect Vin Gopal caucused with his Democratic colleagues, including Rice and the similarly South Jersey-despising Senator Dick Codey, he made certain to point out that he was his own man, with a profusion of monies from multiple sources, who had not received considerable Norcross funds on his way to beating not only Beck – but Rice and Codey.



The 2017 Chickens Have Come Home to Roost Award



Were they really effective surrogates for Phil Murphy? The former Secretary of State surprised party members at a Leroy Jones breakfast when he announced, out of nowhere, “I actually did vote for the \$1.3 billion, before I voted against it.” Then there was former Vice President Al Gore, who at an event in Monmouth County told Murphy – at that point riding a 14-point margin of victory - “Phil, I’ll put Kim Guadagno and Carlos Rendo in a lock box.” That’s good stuff, John and Al. You put Phil over the top here, don’t let anyone else tell you otherwise.



The Hudson Organizational Roots Award: Mark Razzoli



In Middlesex, the local Democratic Chairman in Old Bridge had a single seat before the election, and added two more, continuing to turn heads with the political organizing skills the Jersey City cop picked up in Hudson.



Oration of the Year: Ras Baraka



The eloquent speech the Newark Mayor gave at his campaign kick-off made people in attendance feel so uncomfortable, one wag was heard to remark, “Doesn’t Ras get it, this is New Jersey, people aren’t supposed to speak in full sentences.”

Oration of the Year Runner-Up Leroy Jones



When he endorsed Ted Green for Mayor of East Orange, the Essex County Democratic Committee Chairman appeared to channel Martin Luther King, Jr. That’s a lot to live up to, Ted.



Rising Star of the Year: Hector Lora



The good news is the Passaic Mayor buried his opponent in May’s local non-partisan election. The bad news is the last four out of five mayors ended up behind bars.

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Young Operative of the Year Award:
Axel Owen



The campaign manager for Gopal for Senate in the 11th District proved a calm and competent presence as his candidate ended up winning the election by more than 4,000 votes.



Veteran Operative the Year:
Alison Murphy



The 1st District used to be Republican, then it used to be competitive: then Jeff Van Drew came along and cemented his position as the senator. He beat Mary Gruccio this year: 35K to 18K. For ten years he has had the organizational smarts of Murphy, the consummate pro, who now appears poised to help her boss make the transition from state senate to congress with the retirement of U.S. Rep. Frank LoBiondo (R-2).

Best Losing Candidate of the Year:
Jack Ciattarelli



“Well, Jack, at least we tried,” reads the inscription on the framed photo in the classic movie *The In-laws*, and that might just as easily apply to the gubernatorial campaign of the retiring Assemblyman from Hillsborough. It turned out that Ciattarelli was never really in the Republican Primary for Governor, as Kim Guadagno beat him handily: 47-31%. But the Somerset County businessman ran a gutsy, shoestring campaign and more than anything showed himself to be a game and smart candidate. Hopefully he comes back.



“The Proudest F of My Life”



After throwing that quote out there when he received a failing grade from the National Rifle Association (NRA), Phil Murphy nearly issued an apology to those bewildered New Jersey politicians who heard the first note of discord in an otherwise pitch-perfect populist message from the Democratic candidate for Governor. “You mean he wasn’t proud of all

his other Fs? I freakin’ got straight Fs in freakin’ high school and flunked out of freakin’ college, and look at me, I’m a freakin’ success! What does Phil MEAN by that? I thought he was one of us!”



The Play for Trump Love Award:
Tom MacArthur



He came into office looking like a future senator or governor. But the wealthy and likeable Congressman from the 3rd District arguably hampered his statewide aspirations when he trotted out the MacArthur Amendment and attempted to lifeline President Donald J. Trump on Obamacare repeal. Then he voted aye on a budget that tomahawks New Jersey, the only member of the New Jersey Congressional delegation to do so, leaving the political class wondering whether he was angling for governor, or a Trump Administration cabinet position.



The Cowardly Lion Award:
Rodney Frelinghuysen



His life is a town hall! That was the lame excuse the veteran congressman’s allies gave as Frelinghuysen pulled a Stonewall Jackson (the groundhog, not the general) and burrowed in underground rather than face the public at an actual town hall event.



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Cold Sweat Award: Kip Bateman



The unknown Lauren Poppe hardly looked like the Democrats' best choice to go up against LD16 battleground occupant Bateman, which we reckon was by design. But the down-ballot assembly war, coupled with polls showing Murphy destroying Guadagno, had to have made Bateman nervous more than a few times throughout the 2017 general election season. He ended up winning by 600 votes, hardly a comfortable margin.



If You Can't Beat 'Em, Join 'Em: Dick Codey



People loved Dick Codey when he was acting governor, but he couldn't compete with the cynically-connected money of a Goldman Sachs guy named Jon Corzine. So he didn't run. This time, rather than waste anyone's time with talk of a projected statewide campaign, he got behind the Goldman Sachs candidate early.



Stonewall Jackson Award: Parker Space



Senator Steve Oroho (R-24) is a patient man, but it is said he put his foot down when slate mate Space apparently requested that the Republican incumbents in LD24 use Waylon Jennings' Dukes of Hazzard theme and reenact the opening credits as their first campaign commercial of the 2017 season. Space settled on receiving the endorsements of Enos, Uncle Jesse, Roscoe, and Cooter.



Profiles in Opportunity: Joey Muniz



Vinny Prieto's human albatross stacked so many jobs, we lost count when he took the board appointment to Horizon. Anyway, great job, Joey, the taxpayers of New Jersey feel so much more comfortable knowing you're on the case



Debate Performance of the Year: Wiz




We'll miss Wiz. He was smart and well prepared and always put the people – not his own business interests – first. Well, ok, two out of three ain't bad. He showed real mettle when he squared off against Phil Murphy in the NJTV debate. Best line of the evening: "You've bought the Democratic Party, but they haven't bought you."



Grandfather of the Year: Catalino Guerrero



An undocumented home owner and taxpayer from Union City, the Mexican native, a grandfather of four, in March received a President Donald J. Trump-directed federal deportation order to report to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office in Newark. U.S. Senators Bob Menendez and Cory Booker subsequently celebrated ICE's approval of a stay of removal application in the case. But it's not over. Although allowed to stay in the U.S. for another year, grandfather Guerrero still faces deportation under President Trump's aggressive immigration policies...



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George Norcross III Versus the NJEA



In 2015, the South Jersey Democratic Party powerhouse and the big teacher's union combined financial forces to rid the 11th District of the two incumbent Republicans. But in 2017, GN3 and the teacher's union trained their fire on each other in LD3.



Ginning up the Base Award: Phil Murphy



Murphy appeared to give a big Hail Mary opening to Kim Guadagno in their first debate when he said he would turn New Jersey into a sanctuary state if he had to in order to resist President Donald J. Trump's efforts to rescind DACA. She took it, which was a mistake. New Jerseyans didn't want Willie Horton redux.



Statue of the Year: Richard Stockton



We're pretty sure Joe D. won't be commissioning a statue of slave owner Stockton for the Essex County Courthouse grounds.

Working Stiff of the Year Award



The unnamed guy that you see driving a moon buggy across the perfectly manicured green lawns of that Trump Golf Course in Bedminster, who you know just knows where the bodies are buried.



The Willie Horton Revolving Turnstile Award: Guadagno's Sanctuary State Ad



Down to Phil Murphy and in desperation mode, Guadagno chucked up a Willie Horton Hail Mary that all but attempted to brand Murphy as an MS-13 gang lord. It's a good thing the Democrat stayed away from getting in a tank to prove his tough guy cred, like that other Massachusetts liberal. But just the same, on the strength of the Sanctuary State Ad, somewhere, Lee Atwater must have been proud.



The Vince Mazzeo Award for Debate Excellence: Assemblyman Eric Houghtaling



Houghtaling almost had his "the thing about the white-out" moment when he received a question about where he stands on a sanctuary state. "I don't know," said the Monmouth County assemblyman, prompting gasps and giggles from his Republican rivals.



Vegetable and Fruit of the Year: Broccoli and Grapefruit



Guadagno thought she had scored a knockout blow – and the governorship – on the strength of Murphy's bungled answer to his favorite vegetable and fruit question in their second debate.



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The Moves like Jagger Award: Brian P. Stack



Looking like the ultimate Rolling Stones road show, Hudson rock star Stack showed up in South Jersey in mid-October with busload after busload of campaign workers determined to swamp Republican Fran Grenier in defense of Stack pal Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-3).



The Exceeding Expectations Award: Kim Guadagno



The Republican candidate for governor did better than Barbara Buono did in 2013, arguably getting the better of Murphy in both debates and leaving the GOP with a question: might we give her another chance? Fighting Christie and the GOP as much as Murphy and the Democrats, Guadagno by the end of it did not look like a victim ready to slink away to lick her wounds, but an empowered statewide candidate who had – after eight years of rubber chicken circuit Christie madness – at last found her voice. Even if the NJGOP passes her over, there's still hope. Guadagno can always fill in for Kellyanne Conaway as Donald Trump's spokesperson.

Slogan of the Year: "The wealthiest among us"



If Murphy's favorite line last year was "Middle Class on a good day," the 2017 debate season enabled the Goldman Sachs millionaire to trot out the assurance that he would protect New Jersey from "the wealthiest among us." Brendan Gill, it is said, was shocked, when Murphy then announced that he would be aborting his own campaign for governor to live up to his pledge.



Word of the Year: Mittelklasse

It's the German word for Middle Class (on a good day!).



Quote of the Year: Menendez



"To those who were digging my political grave so they could jump into my seat... I know who you are and I won't forget you,"



The Oliver Reed Trenton Welcomes You Award: Phil Murphy



Having been elected governor of New Jersey, in the days after the election Phil Murphy showed up at the Statehouse for a gubernatorial training exercise. There, in a sandpit and attired in swords and sandals, he encountered George Norcross III, Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-3) and Oliver Reed as Proximo, recreating his monologues from the early scenes in Gladiator, and directing them at the governor-elect. As he spoke, and Murphy digested the words against the backdrop of a stirring Hans Zimmer soundtrack, Sweeney and Norcross doubled over in stitches.



The Getting Weinberg and Goodfellas into One Blurb Award



Sweeney, Norcross and Murphy showed up at Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg's (D-37) house in the dead of night and the feisty Jewish grandmother jawed with the three of them over dinner before directly addressing the governor-elect, "You, what's the matter with you, you don't talk much, you don't eat much." "I'm just listening," Murphy said.

The Rodeo Return of the Year Award:
Joe Cryan



The former Democratic State Party chairman and progressive legislator from the 20th District (a former assembly majority leader) took two years off to serve as Union County Sheriff, then made his move on the senate seat with the retirement at the end of this year of state Senator Ray Lesniak.

Breakout 2017 Star:
Senator-elect Troy Singleton (D-7)



Once the Chief of Staff to Assembly Speaker Joe Roberts, Singleton muscled his way into a senate seat vacancy this year to move from the assembly to the Senate.

Breakout 2017 Star:
Senator-elect Declan O'Scanlon (R-13)



We've said it before. Republicans didn't have much to celebrate this year, and the loss of Senators Kevin O'Toole, Diana Allen, Jen Beck and Joe Kyrillos only enhanced the misery. But O'Scanlon, ten years an assemblyman and a budget expert, moves up at just the right time to provide some upper chamber gravitas.

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GATEWAY MEDIA

POLITICAL STORY OF THE YEAR
Walls of Sound: The Menendez
Corruption Trial and Hung Jury
Outcome



Gov. Chris Christie and U.S. Senator Cory Booker routinely received national-sized headlines, but U.S. Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ), New Jersey's only true government centaur, more than any other New Jersey politician embodied the hybrid public service assets of politics and policy.

If there were show horses and work horses, Menendez was a work horse lugging a mounted howitzer with extra shells. But it was more than that. If most New Jersey politicians skate by with a flabby tough guy persona learned from repeated viewings of *The Godfather*, Menendez was James Caan with accompanying book smarts. As chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee he could deliver an exhaustive policy speech on the hazards of the Iraq Nuclear deal or his reasons for opposing the Iraq War, or South Korea or Russia, then – without skipping a beat – just as easily make the case for why Mark Smith should no longer be mayor of Bayonne, and influence the street people who counted to deposit Smith on the sidewalk. When a politician engages in multiple fights as a matter of professional obligation, he inevitably gets knocked down, so it never boggled the mind that the hard-boiled Menendez should eat an indict-

ment. The Hudson Democrat who started off as a school board secretary testifying against a legendary war hero mayor in a corruption case, wearing a bullet proof vest in case of retributions, found himself 35 years later on trial for corruption. Day after day in that federal courtroom in Newark, his life's work as a social progressive with pragmatic foreign policy chops, who never shied away from a fight, teetered at the brink of being minimized as the blow-up of a political boss fatally tethered to his own boss, otherwise known as Dr. Salomon Melgen.

"There is no doubt this is a tough man, who can hold his ground," said veteran defense attorney (and Democratic State Committeeman) Joe Hayden, who first met Menendez when he cross-examined for two days back in 1982 in the Union City Mayor Bill Musto corruption trial. From the start, Hayden has maintained that Menendez has a fifty-fifty chance of walking unscathed out of that federal sweathouse.

"The case pushes the outer boundaries of what constitutes bribery," Hayden told InsiderNJ. "The senator has a longstanding friendship with someone of his heritage [Melgen], a friend who is wealthy; and we have the precedent of the [Virginia Governor Bob] McDonnell decision about what constitutes gifts. This will be important. It's a 50-50 case partially because the government does not have someone like a David Wildstein in the Bridgegate case, for example, who claims this was a corrupt deal. The government must connect the dots circumstantially." During deliberations, Hayden maintained the feds did not adequately make the case that Melgen's gifts to Menendez crossed the bribery border line, leaving – arguably – their best shot hanging on his having snubbed federal disclosure laws.

Unresolved, Menendez's case, tasked to Judge William Walls, sent terror through the ranks of Hudson politicians who always counted on Bob being smarter than anyone else. If Menendez could allow himself to get jammed up, who among them could withstand a random cavity search? His indictment already arguably swung the tide of the 2017 gubernatorial election away from Jersey City Mayor Steve Fulop (said to have been Menendez's original first choice). With the boss up on blocks, Fulop lacked the political heft in Essex and Bergen, and bowed out of the contest to eventual Democratic Party nominee Phil Murphy. But the consequences of the trial reached far beyond the clouded waters of the Hackensack and Passaic rivers, as President Donald J. Trump rattled Congress on the repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). If a jury found Menendez guilty and forced him to resign his seat, a Republican replacement would surely have chipped the President a needed vote to seesaw the senate closer to a repeal verdict. The timing factor in the trial resounded every day in D.C. as the state of New Jersey neared a January 2018 of a likely Democratic governor.

In a sense, the healthcare debate represented Menendez's last stand to make a national-sized statement, even in defeat, to fall on his grenade for the cause of his party, the political equivalent of his old late nemesis Musto, who did WWII duty with Patton, if only defense attorneys Abbe Lowell and Ray Brown could delay and delay. Not that he was ever seeking it in an all-consuming way, but the senior senator from New Jersey missed his chance at a national-sized spotlight when his old friend, Hillary Clinton, finally became the party's nominee for president last year. Menendez would have been a naturally super-sized surrogate for a Latino vote-scouring Clinton. And yet, al-

Continued on Page 38



GET THE RIGHT PLAYERS ON THE FIELD.

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ready embroiled in the pre-season of his corruption trial, Menendez occupied the shadows of that 2016 Democratic National Convention, and its campaign aftermath, ceding the bright lights to Booker and others, his dreams of succeeding John Kerry as Secretary of State quashed amid the developing and now tediously and (calculatedly?) ongoing trial. The bright lights might not have held too much allure for the substance over style, fairly stage-hog averse Menendez. But – live or die in Newark – just as he reveled in those house-to-house political fistfights with Musto and the late Glenn Cunningham and Fulop and Gerry McCann – he would have liked a secretary-of-state-sized crack at a muscular adversary like Putin, as a political, intellectual and patriotic exercise – and as a global balance to his enduring local political preoccupations and habitations.

In the end, the jury hung itself, most of the jurors unconvinced of Menendez's guilt, and yet two hold-outs preventing the return of a verdict of innocence. It would go on, evidently, but Menendez the fighter endured and appeared, at the end of the year, poised to win.



Story of the Year Runner-Up: The Political Classes Jockey Toward a Transition of Power



Julius Caesar thrilled to the concept of divide and conquer, and so did Chris Christie, what the New Jersey governor lacked in a fine print reading of the War Commentaries maybe more than made

up for by an admixture of Sicilian and British Isles blood, Essex County-honed political instincts, and all those trips to Atlantic City and an unconscious proximity to that casino entrance statue of the togaed Roman ruler.

But now Christie's on his way out of office, crossing the Rubicon of eight years reminiscent of the opening scene in *Gladiator*, back to the leafy confines of sleepy Mendham, New Jersey. In his wake he leaves a toothless Republican Party, weakened by a leader who loved the sound of his own chariot wheels more than that of the horde, and a thoroughly divided and chaos-filled Democratic Party, half of whom did his dance, and the other of whom seethed while he ruled, all of them now wriggling like centipede sections, fighting one another as Christie lame-duck-waddles stage right.

Others came and went, but three big pieces of the opposition party suction-cupped themselves to Christie while he served as governor: South Jersey Democrats, Essex County Executive Joe DiVincenzo, and Union City Mayor (and Senator) Brian P. Stack. Now the public party manifestation of that alliance, Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-3) labors with a target on his back put there by his closeness to Christie, his November reelection rendered the most expensive contest in New Jersey legislative campaign history owing to the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) attempting to do to him what it could never do to Christie. The blowback on Sweeney came on the heels of the four northern Democratic chairs pulling together to endorse Phil Murphy for governor rather than empower "Christie-crats," as U.S. Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ) once called them, by awarding a leg-up on the nomination to Sweeney.

One of those chairs, Essex County Democratic Committee Chairman Leroy Jones, would break company with his

northern brethren when he subsequently felt the weight of South Jersey pressure on the subject of legislative leadership. "We'll have you know that little stunt did not go unnoticed, Mr. Jones," was the message coming out of the South concerning his gubernatorial pick of Murphy over Sweeney. If he wanted to carry on, he could start by at least reupping Sweeney as Senate President, which would require him – in the name of bicameral power sharing – to pony up his legislative delegation for Assemblyman Craig Coughlin (D-19) as speaker.

Sweeney didn't get governor, thanks to Jones, chair of the biggest Democratic county in the state.

But thanks to Jones, Sweeney would retain the senate presidency.

All Jones had to do was deliver his delegation to Coughlin of Middlesex, whose leaders had struck the deal with South Jersey for Sweeney.

But the other northern chairs wanted a return to the throne of Speaker Vincent Prieto (D-32). So did most of the public sector unions, apparently including the NJEA, that had warred with Christie for eight years and regarded the Building Trades private union friendly Sweeney as a traitor to the House of Labor. This was a war that had gone on for over a decade, well before Christie. At the 2007 AFL-CIO Conference in Atlantic City, public sector labor reps sought a formal rebuke of Sweeney after he had made his initial, pre-Republican Governor legislative effort to overhaul public pensions and benefits.

AFL-CIO delegates rushed to Sweeney's defense on the argument that labor could not be divided, but Christie – once in office – knew that show of solidarity was skin deep at best, and united his self-interested allies by keeping public sector and private sector labor at war.

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Sweeney, South Jersey, DiVincenzo and Stack wanted that template enforced, and Jones – having ratified the very public sector-friendly Murphy – appeared eager to smooth matters over by re-empowering Sweeney.

That was fine by Middlesex County Democratic Chairman Kevin McCabe, who would get Coughlin on the speaker's throne out of the deal to back Sweeney. But the three other northern chairs, three-fourths of the so-called quad-county alliance that included Jones - John Currie of Passaic, Lou Stellato of Bergen, and Prieto himself, chairman of the Hudson County Democratic Organization (HCDO) resisted, the rough outlines of the NJEA and other public sector unions behind them. Those same organizations backed Prieto against their old adversaries Christie and Sweeney during the 2017 government shutdown. The general election found Sweeney denying Currie a clear shot at the Passaic County clerkship he coveted, and the NJEA undertaking an enormous effort to take Sweeney out of office by throwing millions behind Republican factory worker Fran Grenier.

The northern chairs had made Murphy, so the divide between north and south put the south on suspicious ground with the gubernatorial nominee, whose pro-public sector worker platform appeared to undo all the best attempts at bipartisan reform undertaken by Christie and Sweeney. People could speak in broad terms about Democrat and Republican, but those terms lacked meaning in an atmosphere that defense attorney Michael Critchley once characterized as a single party system of political opportunism. Stung by Christie's efforts to campaign

around Sweeney in a show of 2013 friendship, Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean (R-21) forged his own opportunity to bounce the sitting senate president by partnering with the NJEA.

Sweeney fought with Currie (who was also chair of the Democratic State Committee in addition to serving as chair of the Passaic Party), and the NJEA attempted to annihilate Sweeney.

Urban areas versus suburbs.

Prieto versus Coughlin.

Christie-crats Part II versus public sector unions.

Building Trades versus teachers and janitors.

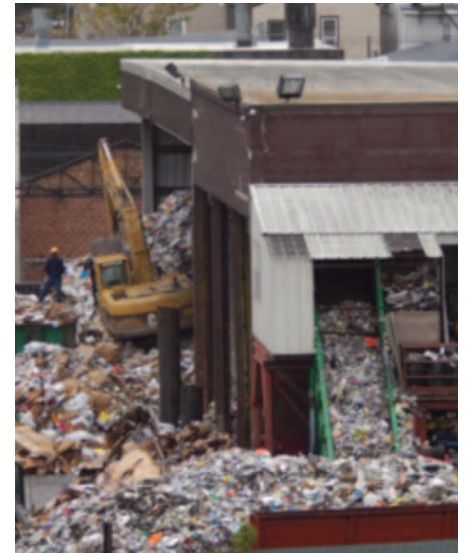
Not to mention 11 credit downgrades, crippling property taxes, and a state at the brink.

That was what Christie left behind, and what Murphy was stepping into in Trenton: a house grotesquely divided against itself, with the GOP mostly demoralized or forced into NJEA servitude, as Democrats entangled in the biggest intra-party food fight in recent political memory attempted to regroup by publicly each pointing, even a little half-heartedly, one of their nine fingers at President Donald J. Trump – while continuing to frenetically grapple, in the best tradition of leaders already long divided and conquered.

Julius Caesar would have been proud.



Political Stories of the Years: Runners-Up



Coughlin versus Prieto

The State Government Shutdown

Christie Sitting on the Beach During the Shutdown

Bridgegate Sentencing

Sweeney Versus the NJEA and the Most Expensive Legislative Contest in History

The Summer Transportation Nightmare

The GOP Primary Aftermath of the Gas Tax Hike for Estate Tax Free-out Swap to Pay for TTF

National Democrats Welcome Murphy

The Lame Duck Twilight of Chris Christie

Progressives Rise Up: Wisniewski and Johnson get over 200,000 votes off the line

Guadagno's Sanctuary State Hail Mary
Murphy Defeats Guadagno by almost 14 Points





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InsiderNJ's Favorite 2017 Rivalries, Collisions and Feuds:

Vincent Prieto versus Craig Coughlin



Prior to the government shutdown, Coughlin told the sitting speaker he would start kicking the tires on a run for speaker. Then he came out with a list of assembly people he said supported him, forcing Prieto into cover-up mode. The collision came to a head when the speaker took over the financial and organizing arm of the Assembly Majority Office, otherwise known as the Democratic Assembly Campaign Committee (DACC), and turned his attention to LD39 and LD25 in a quest to build a new majority. But Coughlin had South Jersey and a unified Middlesex.

John Currie versus Steve Sweeney



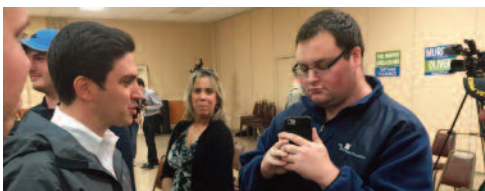
The Democrats headed toward a general election showdown with the Republicans on Nov. 7th, so they did what Democrats do: they started a fight with themselves, the Democratic State Party chairman on one side and the Senate President on the other. It boiled down to this: you're not going to make me governor, ok, I'm not going to let you be Passaic County Clerk.

Woodrow Wilson Versus Chris Christie



Having assumed office as New Jersey's Governor in 1911, Wilson was out of there before the end of his first term and in the White House in March of 2013. Then there's the Christie model: wait and get reelected and... spiral into the abyss. Now, if indeed he wants to take a crack at the presidency, Phil Murphy must decide whether he wants to be the next Wilson or the next Christie.

Kevin Tober Versus the Democratic Senate candidates



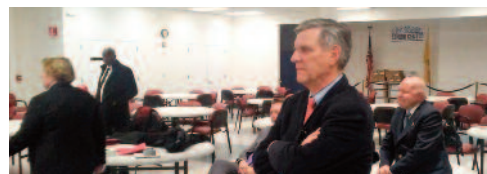
Camera in tow, the Senate Minority Leader staffer looked like a low-budget horror film director as he tramped from district to district and tried to get a Democrat to say something stupid. Senator Bob Gordon found the exercise so irritating, he filed a harassment report with the state police.

The NJEA Versus Sweeney



In apparently the most expensive legislative district contest of all time, the New Jersey Education Association backed Salem factory worker Fran Greiner in a futile attempt to dethrone the Senate President as payment for past Sweeney transgressions.

George Gilmore Versus Bill Layton-Al Gaburo-Al Barlas



During the Republican Primary, the old wounded lion, chair of the Ocean GOP, fought a trio of Republican chairs respectively from Burlington, Somerset and Essex counties. In the end, Gilmore won when his choice for governor, LG Kim Guadagno, defeated Somerset County's Ciattarelli.

Sam Thompson Versus Art Haney



What the hell is going on over there in Old Bridge? The place makes Bayonne look like a Buckingham Palace tea and crumpets social. Anyway, veteran GOP Senator Thompson beat Haney, and then diminutive Old Bridge GOP Chair Lucille Panos beat up one of Haney's council-seeking allies.

Steve Lonegan Versus John McCann



They're both apparently all in on trying to win the nomination to run against U.S. Rep. Josh Gottheimer in CD5. In order to avoid just what the Bergen GOP needs: another Bergen GOP bloodbath, the peace-seeking Lonegan vowed to move into the Warren County portion of the 5th District.



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Ras Baraka Versus Gayle Chaneyfield Jenkins



This got ugly when Phil Murphy showed up at Newark Mayor Baraka's kickoff. Chaneyfield Jenkins had been an early Murphy for Governor backer, an alliance Murphy evidently threw out the window when Joe D. and nearly everyone else in Essex County signaled their commitment to Ras.

Anthony E. Monroe Versus Joyce Harley



Monroe, the new President of Essex County College, warred with a Board of Trustees that throughout the summer appeared intent on dumping him in favor of Joe D. ally Harley. The scrap appeared far from resolved when in September the board – under considerable public pressure – took Monroe's recommendation of placing Harley on administrative leave with pay.

Rodney Frelinghuysen Versus Tom MacArthur



The pair of Republicans both voted in favor of Obamacare repeal. But they handled the aftermath very differently. The veteran congressman shied away from town hall events, while the newcomer went into enemy territory to hold a marathon encounter with the public in Willingboro.

Nick Chiaravalloti Versus Jason O'Donnell



Camera in tow, the Senate Minority Leader staffer looked like a low-budget horror film director as he tramped from district to district and tried to get a Democrat to say something stupid. Senator Bob Gordon found the exercise so irritating, he filed a harassment report with the state police.

John Bartlett Versus Keith Kazmark



The Passaic County Freeholder and Woodland Park Mayor both appeared interested in a CD11 run. Bartlett ultimately declared his candidacy, while Kazmark – who seemed to have more party support in his home county than Bartlett – backed Mike Sherrill.

Linda Weber versus Lisa Mandleblatt



Both women declared their intentions early in the Democratic pre-primary scramble to take on U.S. Rep. Leonard Lance (R-7). The party won't be able to sustain both of them.

Linda Weber Versus Saily Avelenda



They're both bankers or ex-bankers and they both want to be leaders in the progressive movement. Earth to Weber and Avelenda: banking and progressive politics add up to one thing: an oxymoron. But it's New Jersey, so at this rate, watch for either one of them to emerge as a Democratic governor with the support of the New Jersey progressive movement, just like Phil Murphy.

Phil Swibinski Versus Caseen Gaines



Insiders forgot the names of the people running in Hackensack as the nonpartisan contest turned into a full-blown operatives' mud fight, with Swibinski finally outwrestling the relentless Gaines. During the brutal fracas, the Hudson operative insisted that the contest was about the people of Hackensack, and not himself. But then immediately following his team's win, and to Gaines' horror, Swibinski prevailed on the mayor to officially change the name of Hackensack to Secaucus, and convinced him to move to reincorporate the Bergen county seat as a satellite Hudson municipality.



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Rich Goldberg vs. Frank Giglio



The veteran Republican mayor of Hawthorne, now entering his third full term, fended off a spirited challenge by political newcomer Frank Giglio in a June primary and managed to escape a primary fate that haunted his predecessors: defeat. Goldberg dug in and pulled out a victory, becoming the first mayor in Hawthorne history to survive a third-term primary challenge.

Bill Spadea Versus Chris Christie



The radio shock jock tormented the sitting Governor on the gas tax hike, the multi-million dollar renovation of the Statehouse, and myriad other issues, prompting an ever-vicious 16% job approval rating-mired Christie to threaten to endorse Spadea for Governor.

Mike DeFusco Versus the World



The other three “top tier” candidates in this year’s Hoboken mayoral contest at least agreed on one thing: their hatred of DeFusco.

Kevin O’Toole Versus Paul DiGaetano



Where did they go wrong? Probably around the time the Chairman of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey said the Bergen County GOP Chairman told him he would kill him. DiGaetano denies saying it, but did not deny attempting it.

Marty Small Versus Frank Gilliam



In a bruising Democratic Primary contest for Atlantic City Mayor, Small charged his at-large council rival with being too close to Sweeney-Norcross-Christie. An outraged Gilliam cried bullshit, then threatened a state takeover of the election results.

Shariq Ahmad Versus Keith Hahn



In a raging war for the sacred values of the Democratic Party in Edison, Ahmad defeated Hahn to become the local Democratic chair, just before Hahn switched parties and ran for mayor as a Republican.

Phil Murphy Versus Chris Christie



The outgoing Republican Governor in private conversations told anyone who would listen that he missed his chance by rejecting the Woodrow Wilson strategy and not running for president before his first term was through in 2012. Now here comes Murphy, who has the advantage of seeing how Christie cracked up by sticking around, but the disadvantage of a public fed up with having a governor who wanted to be president. There is, of course, an easy rational to justify a prez run: look at what having a governor around in 2017 did for the state.

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Mike Doherty Versus Donald Trump



Give credit to the 23rd District state Senator, a retired Army captain who doesn't back down from anyone, including the man for whom he served as the 2016 New Jersey State Director. Fed up with the unwise use of unilateral military force, Doherty called out the President when Trump ordered a Tomahawk Missile strike on Syria.

Stack Versus Sacco



Trying to assert himself as the future of Hudson County politics, while currying favor with Murphy, the 33rd District senator outdid himself with a 20K vote total in the Democratic Primary, more than doubling the total registered by North Hudson lion Senator Nick Sacco (D-32).

Abbe Lowell Versus William Walls



During the corruption trial of the year, the lead defense attorney for Bob Menendez routinely got into it with the judge in charge of ruling on the case.

The Yankees Versus Murphy v. Guadagno



Tanaka and Judge beat up on Murphy and Guadagno while shutting out the Houston Astros in Game 5 of the ACLS. InsiderNJ called chairs in both parties who admitted to not watching the debate in favor of baseball.

Saying Goodbye, Jersey-style: In Honor of Frank Vincent



At an unnamed dive bar in North Jersey Christie partied with some pals, among them Jeff Chiesa, Mike DuHaime and Bill Palatucci, when Steve Sweeney walked in and joined Craig Coughlin and George Norcross at the other end.

"Hey, look at Stevie, all dressed up," Christie said and Sweeney ignored him, which prompted Christie to pull himself off the bar. "Hey. Hey. Hey!"

He turned to his pals.

"Down at the statehouse Steve could give you a shine that would make your shoes look like f'ing mirrors," Christie said.

Sweeney bristled.

"No more shines, Christie," the senate president said.

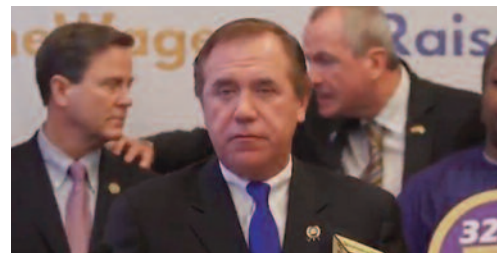
There was a brief uproar, some profanities exchanged, and badly mangled feelings, just before Coughlin calmed down both parties and everyone appeared to have let the matter go – just before Christie said, "Now go home and get your shine box."

Sweeney looked at Coughlin and said, "Keep him here. Keep him here."

Somebody cued Donovan doing the speaking part of Atlantis...



Keeping Diversity Alive in the Great Garden State



(A sneak-peak at Trenton leadership in the era of Phil Murphy)

Governor: Phil Murphy

Senate President: Steve Sweeney

Speaker: Craig Coughlin

Chief of Staff: Brendan Gill

Attorney General: John McKeon

Department of Labor Commissioner: Tom Giblin

Assembly Majority Office ED: Laurie McCabe

Asked to comment, Spokesperson Fergus O'Shaughnessy said, "We're not all from Dublin."



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2017:

A Year of Inspiration



Phil Murphy loves the Kennedys, but some in his camp feared the first drafts of his Nov. 7th victory speech borrowed too heavily from Ted Kennedy's stirring 1980 Democratic National Convention oration. By the time Murphy delivered his New Jersey-centric address, however, he made those necessary adjustments to strike the perfect balance between dream and reality:

"May it be said of us that in dark passages and bright days, 2017 was the year we found our Jon Corzine narrative again. For all those whose cares have been our concern, the work goes on, the cause endures, the hope still lives – and Goldman Sachs will never die!"



A camera caught up with Gov. Chris Christie outside his home in Mendham after the election. He didn't say much, but did offer the reporter this quote about his newfound lifestyle: "I have to wait around like everyone else. Can't even get decent food. I'm an average nobody. I get to live the rest of my life like a schnook."

Passages



Union County Democratic Committee (and Hillside Municipal) Chair Charlotte DeFilippo

Jamie Fox, Chief of staff to Senator Bob Torricelli and chief of staff to Governor James McGreevey and later Commissioner of the Department of Transportation for Governor Chris Christie

Jersey City Historian, and Author Thomas Fleming

State Senator Jim Whelan of Atlantic City

Hamilton Democratic Chair Eileen Thornton

Times of Trenton reporter Jim Goodman

Jersey City Councilman Bill Gaughan

Senate President John F. Russo

Republican Operative Rick Rosenberg

Marlene L. Teixeira, wife of Tony Teixeira, chief of staff to state Senator Ray Lesniak

Mary Patricia (Pat) Blevens McFadden, mother of GOP Gubernatorial candidate Kim Guadagno

Richard "Dick" Coffee, former Mercer County Democratic Party chairman, New Jersey State Democratic chairman, campaign chairman for Brendan Byrne, and executive director of the New Jersey General Assembly

Westfield Mayor Allen Chin

Edison Democratic Committee Chairman Thomas "Doc" Paterniti
Mercer County Democratic Committee Chairman Richard McClellan

Caren Franzini, Former CEO of N.J. Economic Development Authority

Tough guy actor Frank Vincent of Jersey City

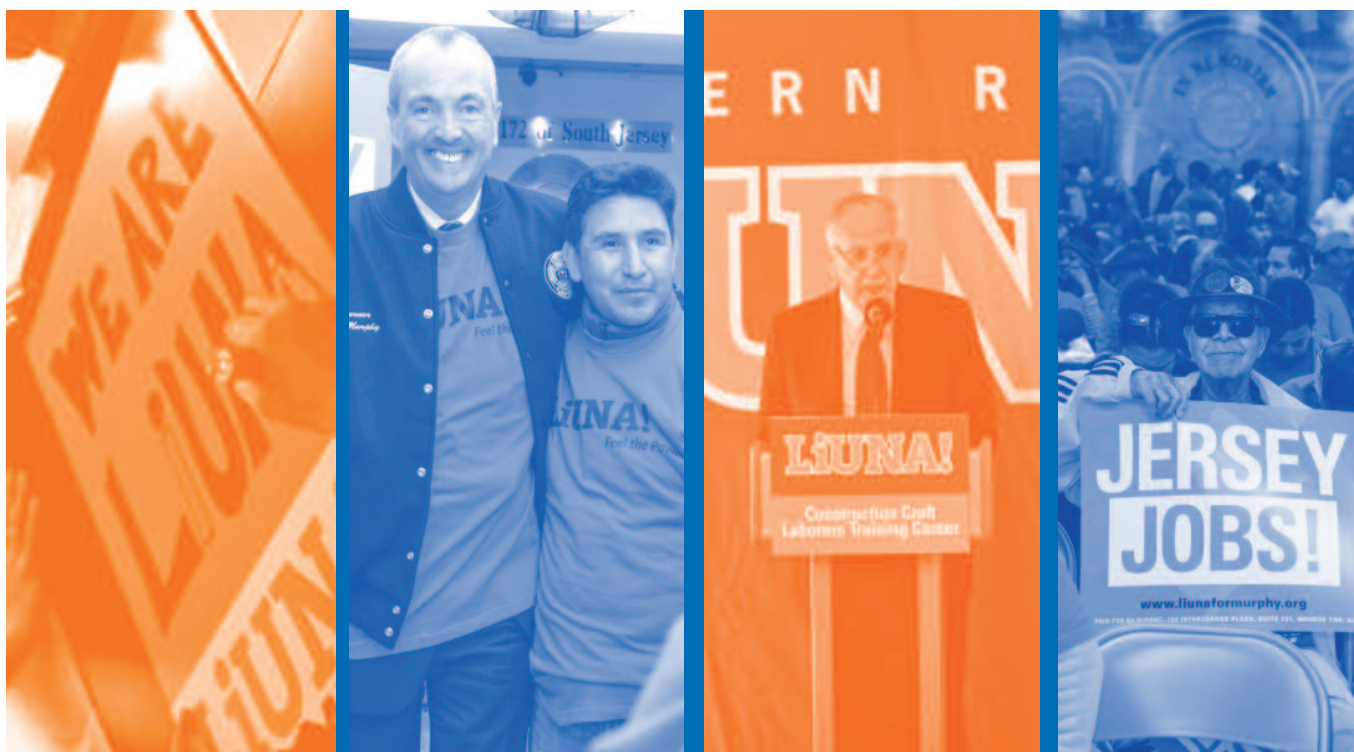
Veteran Boxing Training (and regular participant in former Senator John Gargenti's Brownstone Beefsteak Dinners) Lou Duva



Ode to Jim Whelan



*Driving around the towns down here at sea's edge
Thinking about the lanky way he walked the boardwalk
And felt more at home among the sort that salts the ledge
Of falloff above the sea, or in the sea itself
Like chalk, the skyline cuts casino crags
A light drizzle falls on Atlantic City
He walked across the sand to where they'd beached the big rescue rowboats, those hauls
As foreign to most as a Viking pier, a Queequeg stare
Marked ocean distance, over the heads of the come hither City
In politics or life, you stood out, strong swimmer.*



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"If Betty Lou asks, just tell her we're splitting up the two legislative district offices to save taxpayer dollars."



"If Vinny goes down as speaker and Shavonda goes down as LG, and John goes down as state party chair, I still think I might be able to land the next head coaching job for Big Blue."



"Look, frankly, I'm worried about Phil Murphy's proposal of a sanctuary state and how that might impact us. We're a proud sanctuary city and I don't want the state stepping on our preferred status. Let those people in the suburbs fight for their identity. We've worked hard here to be a sanctuary city, and I'm not willing to just give that away. I'm concerned. And anyway, we voted for Christie last time, isn't Kim a Republican, too, Brian?"



"Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, could you please get out of the way so we can get a clear shot of Dog the Bounty Hunter?"

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Phil Murphy (left) and NRCC Executive Secretary-Treasurer John Ballantyne (right) at picket of Park and Shore development in Jersey City.



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Al Komjathy

agk@komjathykean.com

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“Ladies and gentlemen, NJ Transit is in great shape.”



“And now that everyone is settled, I have a very special announcement. I actually am going to be a candidate for governor of New Jersey!”



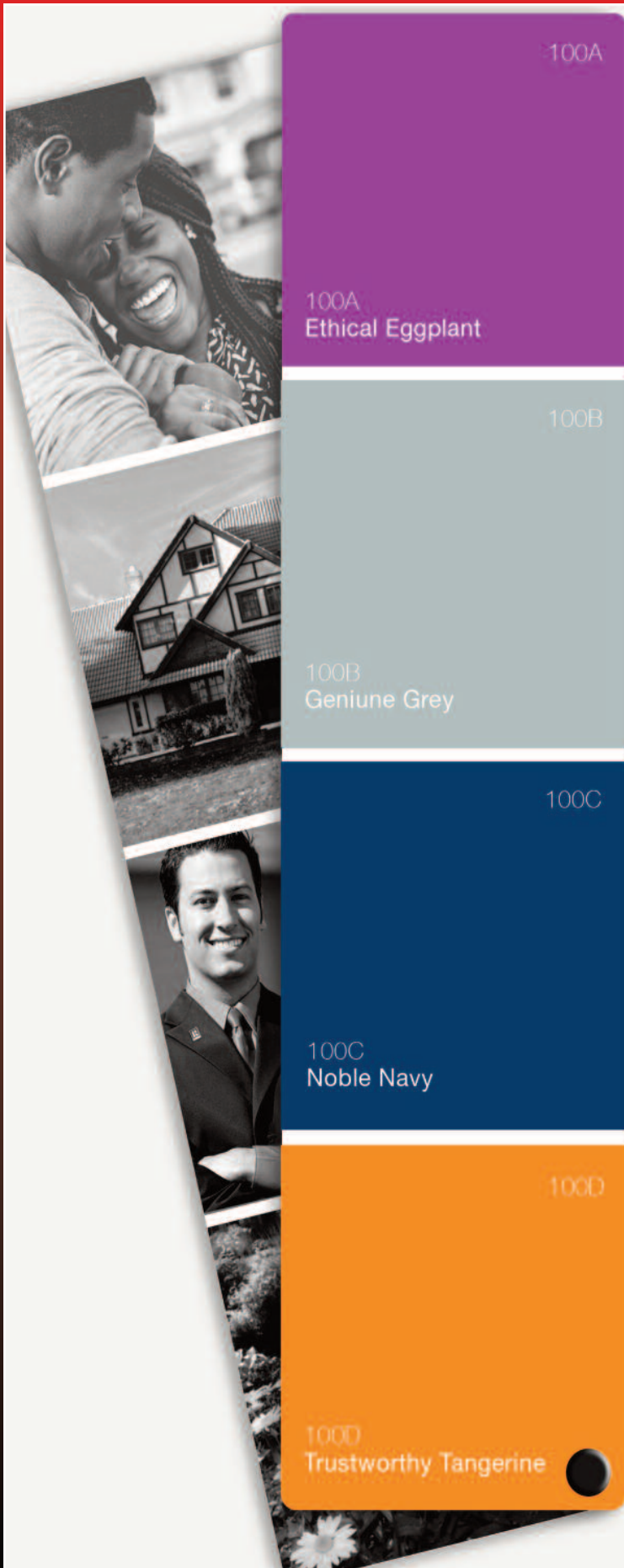
“If anyone messes with Junior, he’s got to go through me.”



“And now I’d like to introduce Democratic State Party Chairman John Kerry.”



“No one just saw me put that ‘kick me one’ sign on the back of the governor.”



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"Phil is texting me to ask if he was inspiring just now. Thoughts, Bill?"



"Say George!"



"I can't talk now, I'm at the Statehouse. I'll call you later from my other cell."



"Hello, John, it's Jon. Look, it ain't complicated. Just vote no."

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