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**ANOTHER YEAR, ANOTHER UNSETTLING SENSATION OF
TEETERING ON THE BRINK, WITH THE COUNTRY SQUEEZED
DOWN TO THE SIZE OF A TV PERSONALITY'S MASSIVE,
LITTLE EGO, SURROUNDED BY FAWNING FIDDLERS WHO MOST
EASILY GET ON HIS GOOD SIDE BY SINGING HIS PRAISES.**

It's terribly sad that the country of Kit Carson, Geronimo, George Washington, John F. Kennedy and any number of other legitimate tough guys should have to listen to a whining gold paint can spewing narcissist like the guy in there now. What a disgrace.

So, as he tries to ramrod another federal budget injurious to New Jersey, tramples over Habeas Corpus in his ongoing effort to scapegoat the vulnerable and the weak and further alienates gullible enablers who put him in there, let's get down to the business of 2026.

First things first.

Following the forced resignation of Trump's U.S. Attorney for N.J., illegally installed after ignoring senatorial courtesy, the Third Circuit Panel could rectify another

travesty by tossing those appalling 2025 charges brought by Trump's Justice Department against U.S. Rep. LaMonica McIver (D-10).

The charges against the Newark-based Congresswoman stem from a lawful oversight visit last May to ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) detention center Delaney Hall. McIver faces up to 17 years in federal prison.

"From the beginning, I've fought back against this administration's cruelty and attempts to silence dissent—this appeal is the next step in the fight. The Trump administration's case is dangerous, baseless, and designed to stop me from doing my job. I won't," said McIver. "This appeal is for everyone who is standing up to this administration as they try to operate without oversight, silence



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the people who oppose them, and shut down those who protect the vulnerable. They want to make an example out of me, but I will not let them. I will not be bullied out of doing my job and protecting our communities. Not now, not ever."

Since McIver's fact-finding mission, 41-year-old Jean Wilson Brutus, died in Delaney Hall one day after federal authorities arrested him, according to ICE. The detainee entered ICE custody on Dec. 11 and died after experiencing a "medical emergency."

"In an exclusive interview with NBC New York, Jean Wilson Brutus' cousin [said] Mr. Brutus didn't have any medical concerns before being taken into custody. 'We haven't had some kind of closure surrounding his death,' Evans Belony told News 4's Axel Turcios. It's something Belony says he and his family

are still trying to process. 'He was like a loved one, that we all loved, he was like a brother.'"

We can immediately make right this dreadful and compounded breach of justice. That starts with the precise details of Mr. Brutus' death, while the court rips up the preposterous case against the Congresswoman. In addition, let's make certain United States Senators Cory Booker and Andy Kim undertake the constitutional exercise of their legal authority – as they did previously with the law-flouting Alina Habba – to oversee the President's next choice for U.S. Attorney of New Jersey.

Regrettably, in January the Third Circuit did not shred McIver's case.

But as the country plunges into more evidence of ICE overreach with the developing case in Minneapolis, we're

waiting for her full exoneration.

We're also simultaneously diving with abandon into this year's political action, including the formation of a new gubernatorial administration, local elections, and – best of all – numerous significant congressional contests, which will ultimately, in the general elections later this year, impact the shape and direction – and legal fitness and hopefully legal fortitude – of the country.

New Jersey played a substantial role last year, as we pointed out in the 2025 InsiderNJ Retrospective, and the people of the great Garden State stand poised once again to make a statement, informed by the rule of law, the Constitution, and the great ideas and ideals central to the United States of America.

See you on the trail, New Jersey.



Max Diziarro
Editor-in-Chief



Wishing you continued success as you move forward into 2026.



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ALL ROADS LEAD TO KEAN AND CD-7



The consummate son of privilege, Tom Kean does what sons of privilege do: let others get their hands dirty – people like the President, populist colleagues, and the grubby underlings of discontent, while he disappears, apparently pleading dignity, princely dignity, in the end, if ever encountered, for after all, while others lose their heads, a prince must possess himself.

There is a certain historical enchantment to Kean's ways, especially if one believes the American Revolution was a bloody waste of time. Kean "serves" the 7th District the

way the British hoped to run America: remotely and absent accountability.

He adds contemporary flourishes that reflect a transition to these times. His face on the website, for example. It's there. This gives Kean the impression of being present. The British didn't have that advantage.

The word "serves" above requires quotes because the notion of service here pertains to a decidedly old-world variety, which essentially amounts to public disservice, or a fundamental detachment in the name of eliminating the po-

tential for public discord. It's a suburban, conservative district, filled with candy canes, fire hoses, and neat, efficient people, created for Kean. Let it operate on autopilot. To interfere would be to show a certain departure from the core patrician virtue of disinterestedness.

Very likely the handlers around Kean keep him sufficiently apprised of how great he's doing, probably rolling their eyes at the slightest perceived criticism, shaking their heads profoundly at the sight of protesters – "poor things, holding aloft signs, Congressman" –



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and sighing loudly whenever any asks a question which might distract the slumbering Kean from his “work.”

Again, “work” in this case requires some explanation.

The little scruffy hobgoblins did the work already when they shook hands after the 2020 census on a map that hit the eject button on U.S. Rep. Tom Malinowski and shoveled an additional 20,000 Republican votes into the 7th Congressional District. That was work, secured the way a lord dispatches a horde of beastly gardeners to prepare the grounds for an Easter Egg hunt or to receive junior and his fellow riders to dine outside by candlelight on pheasant. Work is what the kitchen chefs did to prepare that bird.

Kean didn’t break a sweat to beat Malinowski. Or rather he did, once, when the incumbent ripped the young man to pieces in their only debate, at a convening of the area Chamber of Commerce. Kean looked like he would melt onstage. But that was really his only public appearance, so it hardly signified anything other than rascally proles improperly adjusting the air conditioning. No matter. The establishment had already designed the district for Junior.

If Kean had been absent on the campaign trail, in office Kean dematerialized. There’s a difference. In the case of the former, he might have only been missed. At a parade, for example, the dashing state senator “was here a moment ago.”

“Oh, you missed Tom?”

“Tom will be sure to get back to you. Or someone will get back to you.”



“Tom loved the game. He had to leave during the seventh inning stretch.”

But from the time Joe Biden malfunctioned out of office and Donald Trump’s return, Kean dissolved in front of everyone’s very eyes. The congressman’s otherworldly vanishing prompted a fascinating opportunity to examine not Kean, not precisely, but, in fact, the very underpinnings of

power in this country and the intersecting currents of power going back to America’s beginning.

The very essence of vulgarity – the kind of publicly pigheaded opposite of Kean and his ilk, a juvenile delinquent unleashed with a gold spray paint can in the White House, Trump could be assessed by nervous aristocratic chucklers in his own party as the right’s inevitable distressed overcorrection or overreaction to the chronic democratic excesses of the country.

Democrats like to act as though Trump rammed new decibel levels of incivility and wretchedness. The thrashing sulfuric acid bath on wheels that is the president is a scandal to “good and decent folks.”

But we could make the case that those same “good and decent folks” – grimy, uncouth, loud, obnoxious, who came, not sedately aboard the Mayflower, but cramped in the dingiest of circumstances, escaping the maladies of their own ill-run cultures or “shithole countries,” to quote our beloved leader - represent a genuine threat to tasteful aristocracy. From the perspective of gated nobles who pay handlers to harness and muzzle and run their Dobermans,



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the people are the problem.

Now, this is the thinking, you understand. These communist orcs at heart produced poor Donald, who might have had all the best intentions as a businessman, but in trying to be one of them, in trying to be popular, became like them: a populist affront to good manners and mindless now, of course, as mindless as a hatter, but...

"We need him, by God.

"Let the crazy loon go.

"Hide underground if anyone asks.

"We can do that.

"We are made to do that.

"Have the help park around the block.

"Lower the gates.

"Raise the drawbridge.

"But let Trump be Trump.

"Trump calls all those people what they are, by God, or by Jove – filthy socialist rabble.

"Of course, we can't say that.
"But he can.

"He does.

"He will.

"We need him to fight the scourge of the world bubbling like a stinking cauldron at the ivy-covered walls of our modernist Frank Lloyd Wright-contracted estates.

"Once delightfully gauche, 'how very garish now of Donald,' who went the way of Colonel Kurtz, to overly-gild the White House lily, as it were.
"Yet this is but a trifle, old boy, as he rightly rids the world of ghastly illegal aliens."

And so this is why the partnership of Kean – delicately giving the appearance of tacking away from The Donald with his ACA vote – and Trump works so brilliantly for the invisible congressman. In the same way the help furnished an advantageous map, or sharpens the shears to cut the hedges, or handles the rat dogs at the end of another evening pit rumble, so the monstrous creation conceived by the left, for there could be no other explanation for such a Goya-like grotesquery, Trump sorts through the grubby remains of the country to spare the likes of Junior.

Trump is present.

This society is Trump, after all. Kean lives on a Tralfamadore,

of sorts, outside the wretched press of history.

Just shut up and let Trump do the district's – and the country's – dirty work.

It's like the kid on the baseball team back in Little League at the bottom of the batting order, with two outs and men on base and the team down and the coach whispering, "Tommy, don't swing. Let the bum throw balls and walk. And we'll get the top of the order up there and we'll cleat the heart out of the bastards. All you have to do is stand there."

The kid stands like a statue, praying the pitcher doesn't bring accurate heat.

That might have been embarrassing to that kid.

But things like games are for the rabble.

Kean doesn't even need to show up. He doesn't need to select a bat. Or take a few warmup swings. He has other people doing that for him, handling the X's and O's, the sweat, and the dirt, all their craven circuses, while employing a simple strategy: Let Donald go crazy – to preserve that daintiest, highest, and most remote of proper societies.



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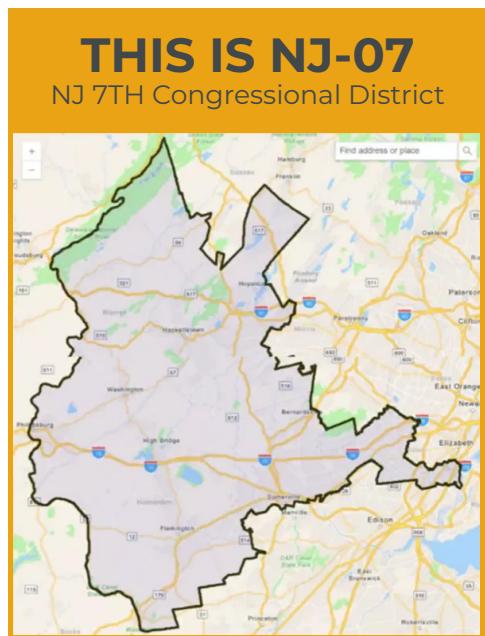
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THE EMERGING CD-7 FIELD AMONG COMPETING (AND VERY ENERGIZED) DEMOCRATS



In the widening income gulf between rich and poor, the duct tape mouthed Kean left absolutely zero doubt about where he stands. If he had one priority it was this: may we never unhand our wealth.

Now, the district had indeed changed over the years, from vast polo pony jumping grounds to wall-to-wall suburbia, overdeveloped, of course, crammed with affordable housing units, highway corridors and parking lots, at-

tempts at mountaintop retreats from it all, yes, but on the whole, simply a tribute to the bulldozed burdens of modern life, or the barely breathing remains of civility.

Democrats couldn't believe that even the district designed for Tom Kean could any longer bear his quirky noblesse oblige, charming maybe 50 years ago, but now more than an oddity, and certainly more than just eccentric with Trump ravaging the countryside, throwing out due process and bombing boats. The President present, no less, with a golf course in Bedminster, underscored, in Kean's case, the smarmy uselessness of power protecting itself at the expense of a pretty complicated – and smart – place called Central New Jersey. The precious and complicit Kean had become, in a word, ruinous.

They looked at the numbers and found that Mikie Sherrill, the 2025 Democratic candi-

date for governor, defeated Republican Jack Ciattarelli, in the 7th District, by one percentage point. Among those pawing at the turf to run against Junior, the reasoning ran thus: Ciattarelli is more popular and better liked than Kean, therefore, he should be an easier out than Jack.

Trump had simply become too much for the district to tolerate a voiceless Trump enabler, as the world veered toward unprecedented income inequality and Trump – like a wretchedly vulgar 18th Century duke – scrambled to empower his own family.

A successful 2024 legal challenge by Andy Kim to the state's arcane ballot bracketing rules that – of all things – allow power to protect itself against that nettlesome invasive species otherwise known as the people, changed the law governing a Democratic Primary. The new ballots weaken the stranglehold of



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party organizations by throwing out the so-called county lines, thereby giving individual contenders greater potential to connect directly with voters.

"Thanks, Andy," harrumphed an ill-humored insider, beset with an unleashed field of candidates smelling blood, as hungry as hounds, who want to be the one to unseat the catatonic master, and occupy the 7th Congressional seat on behalf of – strange concept coming up – the people, instead of that awful confluence of Mayflower and golf course power.

Leading the charge in a big and interesting field was Rebecca Bennett of Bridgewater. If Sherrill had beaten Ciattarelli in the 7th, and Democrats would be wise to pay attention to the why, Bennett offered the most obvious duplication of that type of candidate, right down to the flight suit, helmet and preferred method of travel.



Bennett is a retired military helicopter pilot. Family. Kids. Husband. House. Taxes. By all appearances normal. Extraordinarily normal, and with a twist: the submission of a resume that includes public service. Now, for Kean, again, the thinking on that concept roughly runs as follows: my people allow you to be in the country, so I occupy a seat to protect me, to keep the structure in place that requires me to maintain appearances, which is the preservation of wealth and prestige from one generation to the next, against the backdrop of a very public disinterestedness, or, if you will, sufficient cultivated remoteness, which allows me to withdraw as needed, with a certain constancy, which, in the Trump era, means constantly.

Now, with a military resume, Bennett brings concreteness of public presence. There's little guesswork that goes into unpacking the kind of bum-fluffery and gibberish the GOP must fashion between flat silences to justify obscenity, which, of course, is the crude and hateful preference of their presidency. Or so assess those members of the Democratic establishment who see in Bennett something similar to what they saw in Sherrill.

Let's get back to basics.

Most people don't want the Fall of the House of Usher, runs the logic.

They just want some basic competency and the assurance that if a maniac is destroying the country, the district representative won't be somewhere demurely and – of course – privately explaining why he's always preferred riding with a dressage saddle.

As mentioned earlier, Bennett's not the only Democrat in this developing fox hunt. There are others, many others, in fact, all sallying forth with the mangled bugle blown from the general direction of Trump's Bedminster address, nostrils twitching, each offering another perspective from a party suddenly overcrowded with them. There's the populist, the good government guy, the expert in flipping seats, the one with no government experience and a penchant for throwing out the bums, the local elected official, the countywide elected official, and on and on, as the clerk tries to process the field and keep them all at least somewhat in line. Each has a handle on some level of contemporary relevancy indiscernible in the incumbent. Each contains an awareness of horror – not retreat – in the face of Trump, his administra-



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tion, and his direction for the country.

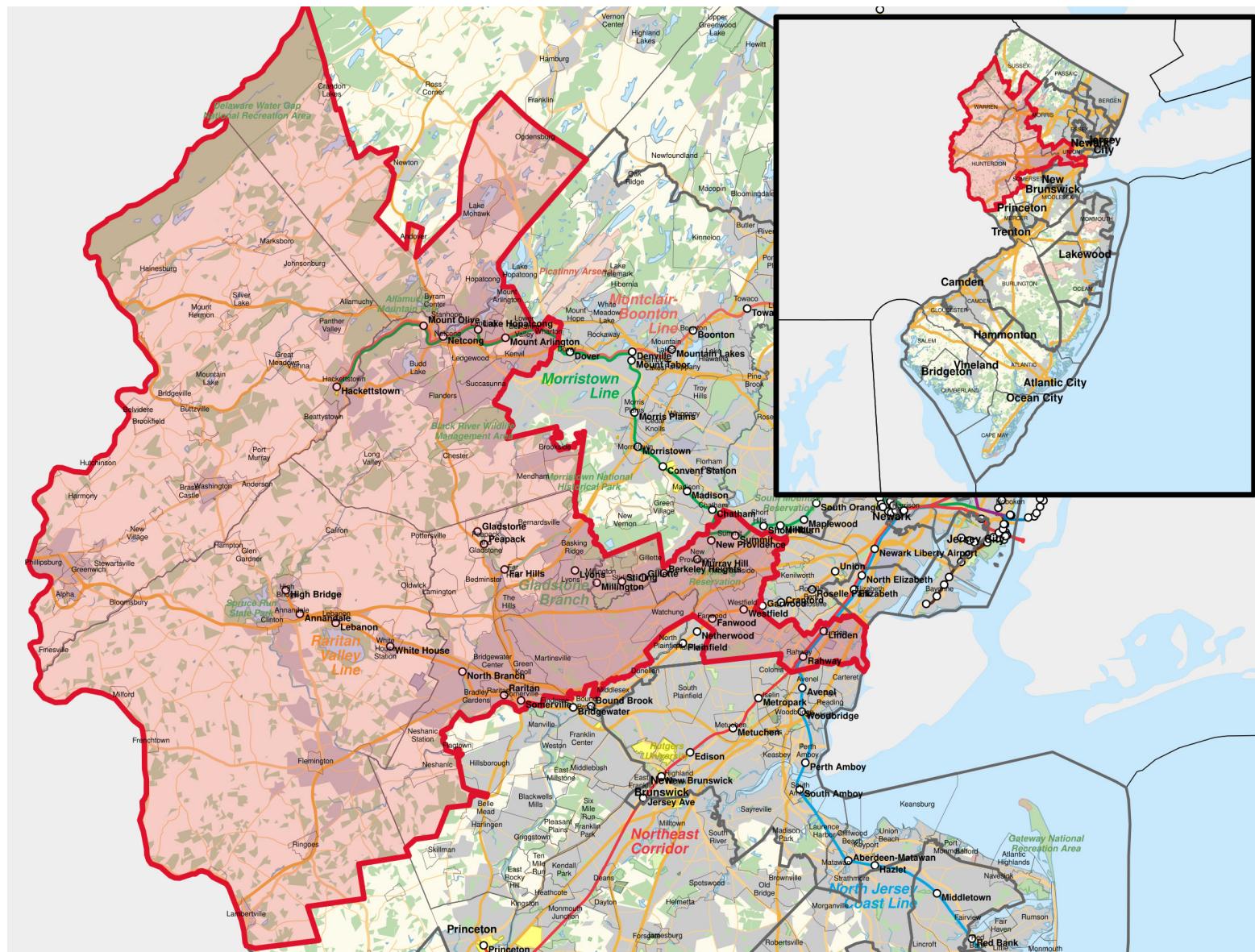
For those who might have hoped for a Kantian trajectory of history, and some evidence of society's evolution, 2026 feels like a prevailing read by Nietzsche, which is to say, cyclic. Trying to stay upright on the tightrope with some dignity, Leonard Lance in 2018 found himself the unwitting victim of Trump's presidency,

blown out of office by a newcomer named Tom Malinowski (more on him in a minute). Kean learned from Lance, who had bucked Trump when he could, to try to put some distance on the White House in a swing district. Refashion the district to avoid Leonard's fate, and just as importantly, don't get cute and appear to be Trump's enemy in the name of serving the district. Glue yourself to Trump (yes, pivot on

Obamacare to prescription drugs, but no frontal assaults, no preposterous demagogery, nothing to ruffle the mercurial boss) and maybe no one will notice out there among the masses in the packed and mindlessly screaming suburban sports bars.

For after all, no one pays attention to politics anymore.

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THE POST-SHERRILL WORLD OF CD-11 AND THE URGENT PRIMARY RUNWAY



Governor-elect Mikie Sherrill had left a blueprint for the 11th Congressional District and it was basically: be Mikie Sherrill. Failing that, try to be Han Solo in a sea of C-3POs, and, failing that, and because this is 2025 and not 1977, try to be C-3PO in a sea of Han Solos.

Sherrill's exit from the district that covers part of Essex, Passaic and Morris counties, set up a special primary election on Feb 5, followed by an April 16th general election tilt. In a sign of what could only be

construed as contrasting party enthusiasms: 13 Democrats fell all over themselves trying to get a shot at the seat that superstar Sherrill turned from solemn red to vibrant blue back in 2018. On the other side of the divide, exactly one Republican raised his hand.

Given the amount of passion among Democrats, and the peculiar political landscape defined by party politics – not to mention all kinds of excess emotion, given the obvious lack of determination by the

GOP on the other side, Democrats didn't mind the seep-in of Titus Andronicus. In other words, especially given the truncated timeline, insiders expected the contest to get ugly early.

Some basic dimensions emerged right away. First, Brendan Gill summoned the backing of – for lack of a better word – the Essex County Democratic Party *establishment*. The Montclair Democratic Committee Chairman, Gill now prepared to leap from local to federal, not overnight, but over two decades of relationship-building, with a tenure that included affiliation with U.S. Senator Cory Booker, the late U.S. Rep. Bill Pascrell, and the late U.S. Senator Frank Lautenberg, among many others. Basically mild-mannered, Gill sprang to a new stratosphere of political prominence as the minder of Phil Murphy, who, by the way, dashed off a CD-11 endorsement for Gill.

At the same time, former U.S. Rep. Tom Malinowski – defeat-

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ed in a 2022 reelection bid by Tom Kean, Jr. – first reanimated as the former Hunterdon County Democratic chairman, then rematerialized as a have-congressional-seat-will-travel candidate, available for service in CD-11, with good government ally Senator Andy Kim staunchly at his side.

Simultaneously, former Working Families director and former Bernie Sanders political director Analilia Mejia took the field. Early, she rolled out the endorsement not only of Sanders but of Newark Mayor Ras Baraka, who defeated Sherrill Essex countywide in the 2025 Democratic Primary and in the process of running a celebrated statewide gubernatorial candidacy, established a level of progressive credibility. In an early muscular demonstration following the Essex Democrats' formal endorsement of Gill, Mejia collected the support of Marc Chaaban, who crashed out of the contest.

Tahesha Way had also gotten in the race. Close to Passaic County Democratic Committee Chairman John Currie, the Lieutenant Governor possessed a level of gravitas and a calm demeanor, which suggested the capacity to delicately remove herself from the heart of an expected demoli-

tion derby mostly involving Malinowski and Gill.

Other candidates included Passaic County Commissioner John Bartlett, who bifurcated Passaic's endorsement between himself and Way; and others, including at least two soldiers, with impeccable service records, local elected officials, and multiple concerned citizens, projecting varying degrees of impassioned goodwill and societal situational awareness.

Gill. Malinowski, Mejia. Jockeying at the head of the pack. Right now, they seemed more obvious than anyone else. Still, Democrats examined the other candidates as well, to see if any one of them had ineffable qualities that would totally change the game.

On the Republican side, Randolph Mayor Joe Hathaway stood in an environment seemingly devoid of drama, but for the fact that he occupies a party defined and directed – like a cruelly absurdist circus orchestra – by the ever-self-absorbed President Donald J. Trump.

It would oversimplify Gill to call him a project of the Essex

County Democratic Committee, but the fastening of Baraka to Mejia perhaps gave the organization added incentive to prove itself, after Baraka cold-cocked them last June. Essex County Democratic Committee Chairman LeRoy Jones (who doubles as chair of the statewide party) might look to reassert county power behind a worker bee like Gill, partly in the name of making a case for – if not the primacy than the extraordinary efficacy of - a party, as opposed to the beginnings of anarchy.

Or he might not, not to any extraordinary degree, for after all this was a Democratic Primary, better to maintain friends than make enemies, especially when the candidate is named Brendan Gill and not Mikie Sherrill.

Amid questions of the organization's power in the aftermath of Andy Kim's successful line challenge, signs of some complacency (enough to sink the establishment candidate by association on an abbreviated runway? No.), and motivated progressives, Malinowski would do his best in a short time frame to annihilate Gill. Would Mejia have consolidated sufficient momentum to take advantage if Malinowski failed to secure a role as chief alternative? Early, the former

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congressman appeared credible, by winning the endorsement of the Morris County Democrats.

Gill. Malinowski, Mejia. Jockeying at the head of the pack. Right now, they seemed more obvious than anyone else. Still, Democrats examined the other candidates as well, to see if any one of them

had ineffable qualities that would totally change the game.

But time ticked down.

Less a strategically eloquent attempt to prepare for a general election, the primary presented a unique opportunity for Dems – letting it all hang out with Trump killing Re-

publicans – to – once again – realize themselves amid myriad influences and issues, with the runway appearing (by design, of course) to give Gill an edge, if he could survive an incoming blizzard of (mostly) Malinowski-generated negativity (and campaign smarts) and Mejia's consummate grassroots progressive operational strengths.



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THE PROSPECT OF LIFE POST CONGRESSWOMAN WATSON COLEMAN



The announced retirement of U.S. Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman in District 12 reminded people who love politics – and larger-than-life political personalities – of the ephemeral nature of this most human of businesses, and let's just say it, humankind itself.

Never shirking from a fight, indeed, present in Newark on the day ICE agents outrageously arrested Newark Mayor Ras Baraka, present at every significant fight in New Jersey politics over the past 20 years (and more), and never acquiescent to party bossism, Watson Coleman imminently absent created a moment.

This was a moment.

Right now is a moment.

A significant person would soon no longer hold elected office here.

Significant substance would go with her, no matter the finer qualities of whomever stepped forward to serve.

The woman who fought cancer, showing up in public after chemotherapy left her hairless, but smiling toughly, with renewed resolve for the job, who stood with Barbara Buono when the bosses rolled over and backed the reelection of Chris Christie, who took the fight to other districts when Donald Trump's budget hatefully cut Medicare, who spoke her mind and never left you guessing about her conviction, a leader, who won the seat back in 2016 when she wasn't supposed to, would soon leave the field.

In terms of achievement, which in politics is finally nothing

more than integrity, and the sum of communicating conviction, she had, by God, earned the right, to wave her finger in the air, like Joe Namath, an image so powerful after all these years, leaving after winning the Super Bowl, and applicable to the career of Watson Coleman.

A Democratic-leaning district clearly defined by the retiring congresswoman's progressive politics and strong leadership record, the 12th sized up (at least) seven candidates:

Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds Jackson

Somerset County Commissioner Director
Shanel Robinson

East Brunswick Mayor
Brad Cohen

Plainfield Mayor Adrian Mapp Millstone Mayor
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Formed by pieces of Mercer, Middlesex, Somerset and Union counties, the district contains two New Jersey cities (Trenton and Plainfield) separated by a vast suburban galaxy of gas stations, residential and commercial development, and Einstein Alley, New Jersey's Silicon Valley for science, innovation, and research.

The only legislator in the contest, Reynolds Jackson had a record in the general assembly of working on voter access issues. A social worker by trade and a former Trenton council-woman, she specialized in constituent service.

U.S. Air Force veteran, Robinson came into office in the first Trump term, at the spear-point of turning Somerset County from red to blue.

Cohen possessed a local record of stabilizing taxes and focusing on building diversity within East Brunswick's Route 18 corridor. A doctor by trade, he made the case for his candidacy by contrasting his real-world professional experience with people with an out-of-touch and cruelly remote Republican Party.

Plainfield Mayor Mapp fought an unforgiving political machine for years, survived in exile, then led the deposed New

Democrats back to power in Plainfield. Born in Barbados, he remembers what it was like to be beaten for trying to feed himself as a child and prides himself on a hardnosed compassion.



A cop by profession and local mayor of a small town, Heck serves as a PBA representative and wants to remind Democrats of the critical crossroads of first response, local leadership, and labor.

An attorney from Mercer County, Servance is the only prospective candidate in the race who does not hold elected office.

An early atmosphere distinguished CD-12 from, say CD-11, which appeared to be devolving by the hour into a mud

fest. A free-for-all, wherein everyone appeared animated by the idea of his or her own unique gifts, the 11th would more likely produce embittered contestants by the end. By contrast, the 12th contained candidates who appeared to like one another, who knew another through the work of government and their membership in various organizations, who expressed a certain stability gained through the sustained demands of public office. No one would walk across the stage in the 12th to poke someone else in the eye. Of course, it could get spirited. But it seemed, among the main developing Democratic Primary contests of the 2026 season, to be the one most likely to maintain a certain civility.

That fit, in a way.

For all her fighting pluck, and for all the battles waged, and time spent never withering from the glare of the stage, Watson Coleman, too, excelled at civil discourse, and at cultivating a certain pragmatism, the mark of a political survivor perhaps, but also a sign of attaining the deft touch of a balancing act, for progressive ideas never exist without that grounded, street-level reality, which is the special province of a leader.



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THOUGHTS ON CD-2 AND VAN DREW



The ghastly stink of Trump emanating throughout North and Central Jersey hardly penetrates similarly in the piney realms of the south. Trump's biggest backer in New Jersey, always the most recognizable member of a welcoming committee whenever the prez or his champions descend on Wildwood, U.S. Rep. Jeff Van Drew (R-2) could do an endzone dance on the death of wind energy, which he long opposed.

But that doesn't mean Van Drew won't get a pass in the 2026 election season. Although it doesn't appear likely that Democrats will get their dream candidate: former Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-3) and a reasser-

tion of Building Trades labor on the federal front, others have stepped forward.

Twice unsuccessful in challenges to the Republican congressman from Cape May, civil rights attorney (and former cop) Tim Alexander will take another shot. Also, Bayley Winder, formerly of the state department (under Presidents Obama and Trump), is running for the nomination, among others.

Will the survivor of the primary have enough to go up against Van Drew in as convincing a fashion as, say, Amy Kennedy did back in a 2020 loss?

Not sure.

But very probably, the nominee will have to compete with dollars and attention whomever prevails in the CD-7 Democratic Primary, where party leaders are likely to concentrate resources in an attempt to humiliate Trump in the district that is home to his golf course, itself an ongoing source of humiliation for those who find his leadership of the country not just alarming but nauseating.

Will Van Drew be begging for wind turbines to air out what Trump leaves behind by the time it's all over? Probably not.

But he could get his hair mussed at the very least, in the interim.



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WATCHING KIM'S DEVELOPING OPPOSITION TO (DEMOCRATS) 'WHO FUEL CORRUPTION'



After a dustup in the Legislature with state Senator James Beach, U.S. Senator Andy Kim this announced his intention to oppose Beach in the 2027 primary.

The Senator's Facebook message:

"I'll be supporting challengers against State Senator James Beach and other elected officials who continue to fuel corrupt machine politics in NJ. Last week's shameful hearing and vote to gut anti-corruption efforts showed the need for more accountability. We halted the bill but need to keep our feet on the gas. We need leaders who represent the people,

not powerful interests; and we need a grassroots army to build an anti-corruption movement. I'm putting out a call for people to step up. It won't be easy, but I hope you'll join me in stepping up to build a true democracy for the people."

Kim was referring to a bill (ultimately put down by Senate President Nick Scutari), which would have weakened the power of the state comptroller, which looks into things like the *"misuse of Covid funding, the failure of a Mercer County government official to pay payroll taxes, police allowing suspected drunk drivers to go free because they had PBA cards and government handing out "no show or low-show jobs,"* according to InsiderNJ columnist Fred Snowflake.

Kim alighted in Trenton during the lame duck session to oppose the Scutari-backed bill. The subsequent collision with Beach, who tried to ridicule

Kim, prompted the U.S. Senator to issue his statement about challenging the senator, a fixture in the George Norcross political constellation.

The Senator – riding a progressive wave of energy created by his 2024 challenge of the party lines – suggests his interest in opposing the wider dimensions of corruption. Without impugning horrors on Scutari, the line between Beach and Scutari appears clear and the legislative leadership question heading into 2026 is whether the sitting state senate president can withstand the prospect of becoming political roadkill in the breakup of a party that will need to resolve itself between the polls of an energized Kim and wobbly – but still semi strong organizations in places, trying to stay relevant. Those county party establishments may have no choice but to stay relevant by becoming – of all things – good.

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Caught between New York City and Philadelphia in a netherworld of dysfunction, misery, and the air-conditioned affectations of a suburban landed gentry, New Jersey suffers a unique set of troubles even in the best of circumstances, simultaneously beset by paroxysms of parochialism and the semi-illusion of civilization afforded by big urban center proximity.

It's probably no accident that the eccentric – putting it in the most generous way – Donald Trump owns a golf course here, and that NJ politicians in fact contributed substantially to the power concentration of their uncaged tormentor in-chief. Those offended by the sight of Chris Christie offended by the sight of Donald Trump likely forget their own complicity in furnishing Trump with tax abatements to build his casinos and extend the myth of himself beyond the forlorn shores of Atlantic City. The same fat cats who forked Trump tax abatements so they could – presumably – sit ring-side and watch Iron Mike Tyson demolish Micheal Spinks inside of one round, who grimly signed off on tax hikes perpetually saddling working-class New Jerseyans, at least still have The Donald to kick around. "See!" they – or their sons or grandsons who inherited their seats - say.

"Look at the mess he created." But the working class got wise to the game, leapfrogged the unctuous middlemen, and simply attached themselves to the strong man, who promptly went after the weakest among us. The problem, Trump rails, is not the long-demonized working stiff, fooled by the "Democrat" Party, but "illegal aliens," and the woke agenda enabled by eggheads.

Confronted with the deflating fact that consumers pay 55% of the cost of Trump's tariffs, the President's MAGA followers are more inclined to discredit the source – Goldman Sachs. "Isn't that a training ground for Democrat Governors from New Jersey? – or simply repackage this convenient talking point from the White House:

"The President and Administration's position has always been clear: while Americans

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may face a transition period from tariffs upending a broken status quo that has put America Last, the cost of tariffs will ultimately be borne by foreign exporters. Companies are already shifting and diversifying their supply chains in response to tariffs, including by onshoring production to the United States. Americans can rest assured that the Administration will continue to deliver economic relief from Joe Biden's inflation crisis while laying the groundwork for a long-term restoration of American Greatness." (Kush Desai).

What about the federal budget?

Money in there to put masked men – boots on the God damned ground – in democrat-run cities to kick ass, round up illegals and ship them to Alligator Alley. Plus, he's got an ally who knows how to wield a chainsaw.

Well, he did.

What about the rest of it?

What rest of it?

Well, priorities in the bill giving tax breaks to billionaires and (again) shifting costs to consumers, critically in the areas of energy, education, and healthcare; and, if you live in

New Jersey, punching a gigantic hole in the federal portion of the state budget.

A tough helicopter pilot, disconnected from the political symbioses of an old boys network here, U.S. Rep. Mikie Sherrill – the Governor-elect – would fight Trump, not be his lapdog, (while freezing utility rates for New Jerseyans to drive down homeowners' overall costs, protecting union jobs against Trump's doublespeak).



Defeated by Sherrill on Nov. 4th, Republican Jack Ciattarelli talked about property taxes. He talked about the state budget under Democrats going from \$35 billion to \$60 billion. And he talked about solutions. He wanted to overhaul the schools funding formula to follow the student not the zip code and expand school choice. He wanted to empower energy sources across the board to make up for the blun-

ders of the Murphy Administration, which bet the state's energy future on wind. And, Ciattarelli said, he wanted to extricate New Jersey from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI).

Even the most impassioned backers of the GOP nominee could only wish it were that simple.

First of all, the governor, like everyone else, must operate within a state within the larger framework of the country and the nation's economy. People have their doubts on this front, as inflation persists and worsens, unemployment rises, consumers absorb the shift of costs from the President's tariffs, and vulnerable communities faces limited – or no – access to Medicaid.

Trump ran on the economy in 2024.

And now, the Center Square Voters' Voice Poll, conducted by Noble Predictive Insights, which surveyed 2,565 registered voters from Oct. 2-6, 2025, found that 51% of voters disapproved or strongly disapproved of Trump's handling of the U.S. economy. About 47% of voters approve or strongly approve of Trump's handling of the economy. About 3% of voters said they weren't sure.

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Republicans were more likely to view Trump's economic record favorably. About 80% of Republican voters said they approved of Trump's economy. However, Democrats and independents don't see it that way. Among Democrats, 83% disapprove. Among independents, 57% disapprove.



Income level also affected the results. People with more money were more likely to view Trump's handling of the economy positively. Among registered voters with less than \$50,000 in household income, Trump's economic approval rating was 39%. Among voters with household incomes between \$50,000 and \$100,000, that approval rating climbed to 46%, while 59% of households earning more than \$100,000 viewed Trump's handling of the economy favorably.

Worse: people don't need a poll to know it hurts. As he navigated New Jersey on the campaign trail, Ciattarelli had to acquiesce to the White House's line about the

future beneficial impact of Trump's tariffs.

Finally, it cost him.

A day after a new Bureau of Labor Statistics jobs report showed meager post-President Donald Trump tariff job growth, the Republican gubernatorial nominee – on record in support of the tariffs, told InsiderNJ, "They're not going to have the impact that people think. More than anything it's a big negotiation."

Then Trump upped the ante on a trade war with China, this from the BBC:

New US tariffs on imported kitchen cabinets, vanities, lumber, timber and certain upholstered furniture have come into effect. Under a proclamation signed by President Donald Trump last month, a 10% tariff on softwood lumber and timber imports will apply as of Tuesday. A 25% tariff will also apply to imported kitchen cabinets and vanities - rising to 50% on 1 January - and a 25% tariff on upholstered wooden furniture will increase to 30%, unless new trade agreements are reached.

But again, the complexity of New Jersey endures.

Democrats and, in particular,

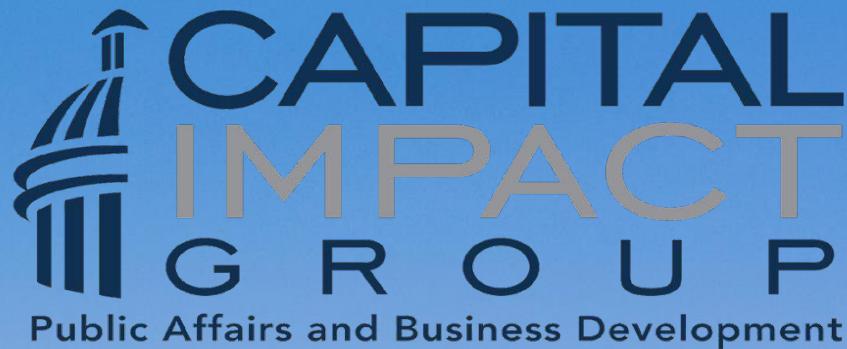
Sherrill, want to blame Trump for the economy. For everything. But it was Murphy's failed wind gambit, after all, that drove up utility costs here, and even the beleaguered Murphy says Sherrill's promise to freeze utility costs makes no sense. The state doesn't ultimately have the power to impose those controls.

The Republican wanted to overhaul the schools funding formula, but his plan lacked credibility. First of all, it would defy a Supreme Court ruling. Second, it would put the brakes on a fix implemented by state Senator Troy Singleton (D-7). Moreover, Ciattarelli's plan would revisit the same strategy attempted by Christie, a politically shrewd operator, who couldn't get it done. Not only did Ciattarelli fail with this message in the statewide general election, but the GOP lost five seats in the assembly, handing Democrats a super-majority.



Ultimately Trump's economy will prevail, argue downcast

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Republicans, but even they are beginning to express doubts ahead of the midterm elections.

No one can read the economic future with certainty. Embroiled in trade wars – or trade skirmishes – worldwide, the United States find itself in an especially volatile economic situation.

But this is about New Jersey – not the planet.

Okay.

New Jersey.

Too many people. Not enough affordable housing. The enormous neighboring financial sector always creates the market incentive for contractors to build (and build!) luxury housing for commuters – not workers. Substantial portions of the state are protected and environmentally sensitive. Undevelopable. New public demands as a consequence of AI – and population – overburden the energy grid. Investments by the Murphy Administration in transportation – to complement federal funding of the Gateway Tunnel – and pension payments, merely contribute to the public perception of expanding government. Programs meant to defray costs for seniors like StayNJ and

ANCHOR get lost in the cacophony or contribute to the appearance of government overreach.

Maybe.

Said an economist, looking at the bottom of an empty glass on a barstool beside InsiderNJ, not even paying attention to the governor's race with less than a month remaining:

***Trump
singlehandedly
contributes the most
uncertainty, and
the most volatility.
“He,” said the source,
referring to the
President with
inevitable NJ ties,
“is the most crucial
element of this
problem.***

“The primary operating principle for any policy is you must pay for what you want and nobody wants to pay for all this. Yes, healthcare costs will rise for a lot of people – but there needs to be a longer term look at how you pay for it, without deviating from the core principle. It’s not just costs going up. The U.S. deficit increased by 8

percent in 2024 is unsustainable. Make the healthcare subsidies permanent but find a way to pay for them. People don’t have confidence in currency. They put it into metals. This is what happens when you debase a currency by not paying for things.”

At the federal level and internationally, Trump – in political retaliation mode – creates more volatility and uncertainty. At the state level, lawmakers angle to get a bead on the FY2027 budget, trying to figure out how to negotiate cuts to education and energy – the impact to public pensions and, yes, general healthcare, not to mention the implications of the federal shutdown (This just in!).

Marc Pfeiffer, Faculty Researcher, Bloustein Local Government, Center for Urban Policy Research at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, told InsiderNJ - whoever the next governor is, given all the uncertainty, an economy with the potential to lapse into a recession, New Jersey’s own ages old troubles augmented, “That person will have to do some fancy footwork.”

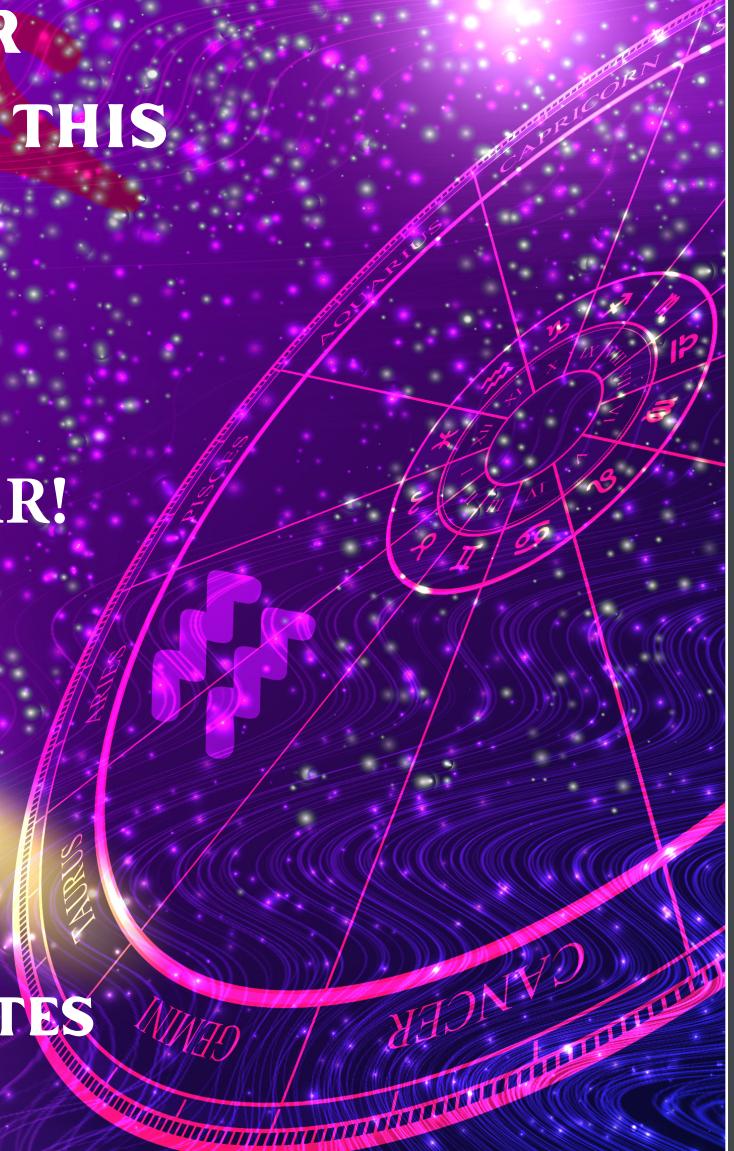
That person now is Sherrill.

For all the fervor, for all the at-

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tempts by candidates in both parties to offer partial solutions, talk around intractable problems, or try to sound rational and reasonable, a source, an economist by trade, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Trump singlehandedly contributes the most uncertainty, and the most volatility. "He," said the source, referring to the President with inevitable NJ ties, "is the most crucial element of this problem."

Was it Jersey? Was it Trump? Was it Trump in Jersey?

Or Jersey in Trump?

Wearing the leadership mantle of her home state, Sherrill was poised to step forward.

Anxious, with the breaks going against them, and against the country, all of New Jersey watched a moment of gravity.





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A GENUINE PEOPLE-PERSON WHO LOVED HIS HOME STATE AND ABLY STEPPED UP TO TAKE THE EXECUTIVE HELM IN A CRISIS, NEW JERSEY GOVERNOR RICHARD J. CODEY OF ESSEX COUNTY – THE STATE’S LONGEST-SERVING STATE LAWMAKER – HAS DIED.



He was 79.

A proud son of the City of Orange, a political professional with a twinkle in his eye and populist demeanor, Richard Codey, Democrat, restored trust to the office when he served as the 53rd Governor of New Jersey for 14 months following the resignation of James McGreevey.

His kind and personable manner touched many lives. While naturally disposed to work with others and look for common ground, Governor Codey routinely stood up to powerful figures, both in his own party and across the

aisle. In 2008, he bucked the Democratic Party establishment when he joined the Obama Presidential movement. A compromiser and dealmaker, he was also courageous in his pursuit of justice, especially for the weak and the vulnerable.

From his statewide perch, Governor Codey led New Jersey in the area of mental health research and awareness. Throughout the years subsequent, he consistently advocated for mentally ill and mentally at-risk New Jerseyans.

Governor Codey and his wife,

former First Lady Mary Jo Codey, in 2012 founded the Codey Fund for Mental Health.

“Throughout my 50 years in public service, I’ve witnessed the transformative power of compassionate mental health care,” Governor Codey said. “Far too many families struggle in silence, and it’s our collective responsibility to offer meaningful help and hope. These grants directly support the outstanding organizations on the front lines, working tirelessly every day to improve lives and strengthen our communities.”

Governor Codey was first elected to the General Assembly in 1973 at 27 years old. After serving 10 years in the Assembly, he was elected to the Senate, where he served for 42 years, including eight years as Senate President.

“Public service is about making a difference in the lives of people. It’s about working together to create a better future for everyone,” Codey said in a statement upon his 2023 retirement from the state senate. “I’ll

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miss that — the hope and promise of doing something great for people every day. And I'll miss you — the people who voted for me and the people who didn't."

Inveterate sports fan, movie lover, basketball coach, and Essex diehard, proud and loving husband, whose compassion for people stemmed in part from his work in the family funeral business, where, in his own words, removing accident victims from train tracks at a young age caused him to "grow up quick," Codey - "The Guv," always somehow seemed to keep his feet on the ground, the signature of his leadership, and a green sash at the ready for every Irish Parade.

"Dick Codey was above all else a good and decent man," said Democratic State Committeeman Tom Barrett. "The 'Guv' was relentless in caring for those who couldn't fend for themselves. Both combative and kind, Dick loved a good fight, a good joke and he loved his life and his family. The state of New Jersey loved him in return. His passing marks an end of era and his memory will be a blessing."

