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THE STRANGE DIALOGUES OF ELECTIONS



Frequently, one election produces a result reexamined and readjusted in the next election. New Jersey's gubernatorial elections – along with Virginia's – at a bare minimum give voters a chance to reevaluate those conditions that produced a winner and loser in the presidential elections that preceded them by a year on the election calendar.

Whatever the issues from year to year, an enduring question arises as voters in New Jersey consider the political lay of the land determined in part by the prior year's presidential contest. Should the state follow the trend produced by the national result, or buck the trend?

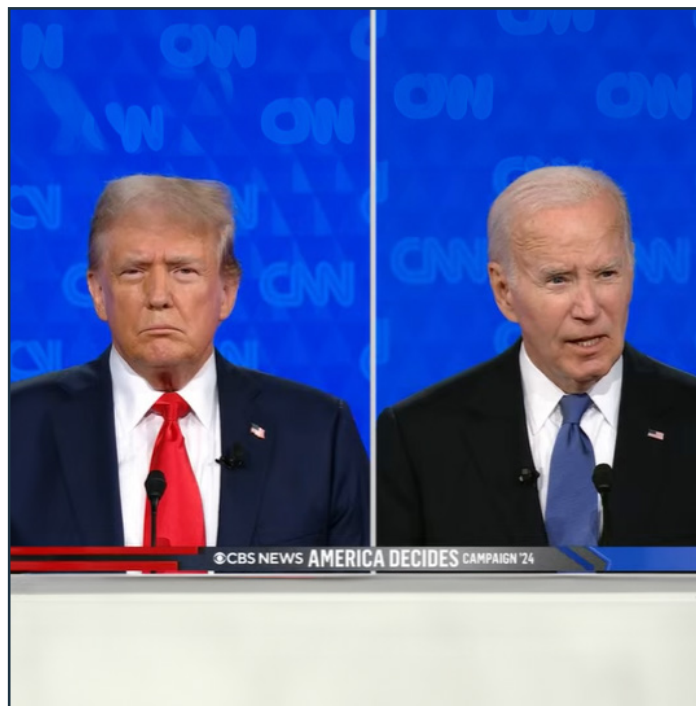
Voters in this state like to provide an answer, usually zigzagging between the two parties to balance the political deck.

Consider the last 30 years here.

A year after Democrat Bill Clinton's 1992 victory over incumbent Republican President George H.W. Bush, Republican Christie Todd Whitman defeated incumbent Democratic New Jersey Governor James Florio. In 2000, Republican George W. Bush won the presidency, followed by Democrat James McGreevey's 2001 New Jersey win. Bush won reelection in 2004. In 2005, Democrat Jon

Corzine prevailed. In 2008, Democrat Barack Obama won the presidency, followed in 2009 by Republican Chris Christie winning the governorship of New Jersey. Republican Trump won nationally in 2016, followed by Democrat Phil Murphy’s Garden State victory a year later.

Now, before 2024 the Trump era suggested his presence in politics would only drive voters in Blue New Jersey more emphatically to Democratic Party candidates at the presidential level. The rolls of Democrats swelled to a million during the first Trump presidency, as voters ousted or forced into retirement Republican congressional incumbents in part as a statement of resistance to the sitting GOP president.



Biden beat Trump 57-41% in 2020. In 2016, Democrat Hillary Clinton beat Trump 55-41%. In 2012, Obama beat Republican Mitt Romney

58-40%. Obama defeated John McCain 57-42%. In 2004, in the first presidential election after 9/11, Democrat John Kerry beat wartime President Bush 53-46%, arguably an outlier election. In 2000, Democrat Al Gore beat Bush 56-40%. In 1996, Bill Clinton beat Republican Bob Dole 54-36%. Clinton defeated Bush I 43-41% in 1992, the year New Jersey’s affixed itself as a reliable blue state in presidential elections. In 1988, Bush beat Democrat Dukakis 56-42%, and Republican Ronald Reagen destroyed Democrat Walter Mondale 60-39% in 1984.

Over a 30-year period, Dems consistently turned up for their party’s presidential candidates, but this year, Harris beat Trump in New Jersey by a slender margin, 52-46%, a result that looks most like 2004, when wartime-9/11-attack boosted incumbent Republican President Bush lost the Garden State to Democrat Kerry 53-46%. Couple that with the results of the 2021 gubernatorial election, when incumbent Governor Phil Murphy barely defeated Republican challenger Jack Ciattarelli, 51-48%, and it becomes easier to see why the GOP sees an opportunity in 2025. The three-decade trend has shifted, argue Republicans trying to turn Democrats out of Drumthwacket on the strength of Republican production not just in 2024 but in 2021.

In the immediate aftermath of the 2024 general election and Trump’s national victory over Harris, the NJGOP under the leadership of Chairman Bob Hugin, issued the following statement:

“What a beautiful day in America!



Pictured above:
Sean M. Spiller, President (center)
Steve Beatty, Vice President (left)
Petal Robertson, Secretary-Treasurer (right)

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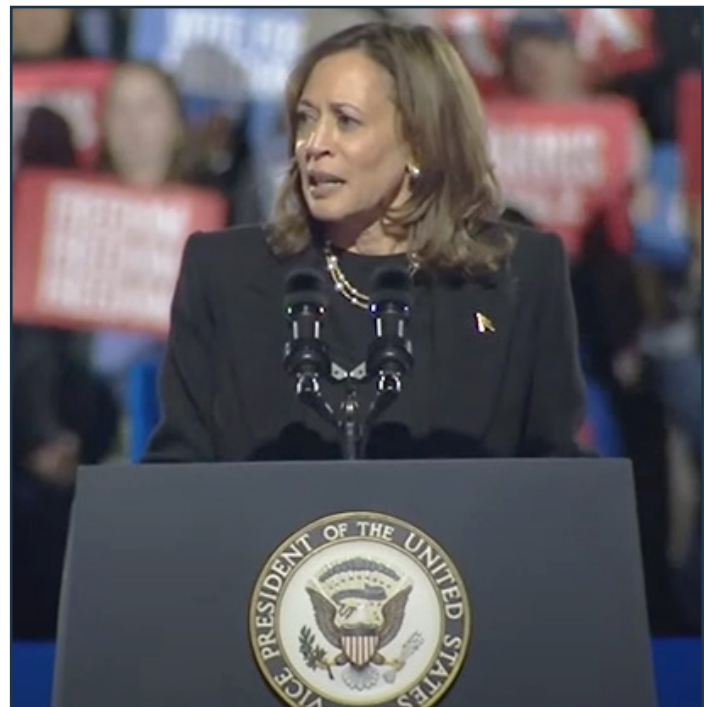
Congratulations to President Trump & Vice President-Elect JD Vance on their hard-fought victory! It was also a great night for New Jersey Republicans! We re-elected Congressman Tom Kean, Chris Smith & Jeff Van Drew, and had several historic victories at the county & local levels. Together, we delivered the strongest performance in NJ for a Republican Presidential candidate in over 30 years! This cycle, we opened three NJGOP Election Headquarters around the state, mobilized grassroots volunteers to contact hundreds of thousands of low propensity voters, and made significant inroads with NJ’s Hispanic community & other minority groups. Looking at yesterday’s results, it is crystal clear that our work is making a difference. The best for our state is yet to come!”

While Democrats licked their wounds, and blamed racism, among other troubles, analysts cautioned the GOP about getting overly enthusiastic in a state where registered Democrats outnumber Republicans by 700K.

From InsiderNJ Columnist Fred Snowflack:

“A look at the numbers shows Democrats had a problem, but that does not translate into ‘swing state’ status. Some votes are still being counted, but as of Friday afternoon, Donald Trump received about 1.9 million votes in New Jersey on Tuesday. How many did he get in 2020? About 1.9 million. That is the point. This election did not show any surge in the number of people supporting Trump – his total number was about the same this year as it was in 2020. How about the Dems? Well, Joe Biden got

about 2.6 million votes in 2020. Meanwhile, Kamala Harris got about only 2.1 million this year. That is a staggering stat. Trump’s support was the same, but the Democratic support in New Jersey dropped off by 500,000. Where did they go? Maybe nowhere near a voting booth. If they voted for Trump, his number would have increased. The logical point is that while Dems had an obvious problem with turnout, there was no great migration to the Republican candidate – something necessary to truly put New Jersey in the swing state column.”



In his own post-election analysis, Monmouth University Pollster Patrick Murray doubled down on that point. “Some of the national polls were reporting a blue-belt weakness for Harris, more so than in the battleground polling,” said Murray. “And that phenomenon seems to be borne out by the difference in actual results when we compare blue states to battleground states. In fact, it may also be a touch worse

for Harris in the Northeast than polling in that region already indicated it would be. Bottom line, it's probably more appropriate to characterize this race as a Dem-base nosedive rather than... a Trump surge [with the caveat that there are clearly Trump gains among some groups – but not nearly enough to explain the entire final margin shift].”

“A Dem-base nosedive.”

Interesting – and if the old, 30-year trend holds, or if one applies that trend as a baseline to determine the outcome of the next statewide election, Democrats should feel better than Republicans heading into 2025. That's because Trump's victory at the national level signals New Jersey's likely tack to Democrats, not correcting necessarily, but balancing power to the other party. That trend suggests Trump will overreach, stumble, and contribute to reawakening Democrats who snoozed through 2024. Or maybe his victory already reawakened and angered them, and the pendulum has already begun its steady swing in their favor.



But what if a base-nosedive – to borrow Murray's term - is the developing condition of the Democratic Party, as it struggles to address the needs of real people, and contributes to a general malaise about politics, while MAGA types and Trumpies ride movement enthusiasm and energy about their party under Trump's leadership?

Alan Ashkinaze, a Republican and ally of 2025 gubernatorial candidate Ciattarelli, notes the following:

“Trump's strong showing in CD-5 and CD-9 will likely prompt the US House Republican campaign arm, NRCC, to target these races in 2026. With few House seats available to gain, these contests may play a crucial role in determining control of the U.S. House of Representatives in the 2026 midterms. For state Democrats, Trump's strong showing here may suggest a need to reinvigorate voter mobilization efforts [and enthusiasm for their candidates], especially in the urban and suburban areas that form the backbone of their support—and the Blue Wall. Donald Trump revealed vulnerabilities in the Blue Wall. Republicans' challenge in next year's gubernatorial and state Assembly elections, however, is how to breach it without Trump on the ballot.”

Finally, we come back to the same, age-old question: Should the state follow the trend produced by the national result, or buck the trend? And within that question are two more questions: Can Democrats break out of their enthusiasm gap, and can Republicans maintain

their enthusiasm when their leader – to Ashkinaze’s point – does not occupy the ballot?

On the strength of his 2021 performance, when he almost defeated a Democratic incumbent, **Ciattarelli** believes he can regenerate Republican enthusiasm and once again reach out and touch independent voters. A big, vocal backer of Trump, radio show host **Bill Spadea** expects Trump’s endorsement in the GOP Primary, which gives him an edge on the specific base enthusiasm Trump capitalized on in New Jersey to make Democrats sweat. State Senator **Jon Bramnick** – as vocal critic of Trump as Spadea is a supporter – finds his gubernatorial candidacy in a difficult spot. If Ashkinaze is correct, and the Republican Party needs to maintain 2024 levels of general election excitement about the direction of the party, Bramnick almost a wet blanket on the cause. Other candidates – former state Senator **Ed Durr** and **Mike Crispi** (who is exploring a run) – are diehard Trump backers looking to lend their voices to the MAGA movement on a statewide platform.

On the other side of the equation, Democrats have perhaps more fractures than their rivals as they attempt to rekindle the enthusiasm they lost between 2020 and 2024. If the party too often lacks a finely honed economic message that fails to break out of special interest-speak and lacks a connecting point with real people struggling to pay bills through inflation-dogged times, the Democratic candidates themselves arguably appear individually suited for different groups within the party less than dominating deliverers of a cogent, compelling argument.

Since the statewide meltdown of James McGreevey, Democrats’ formula for winning statewide gubernatorial elections required a Goldman Sachs executive with no political experience unveiling himself as sufficiently progressive to captivate (or fool, depending on your perspective) the Democratic Party Primary electorate. In 2013, the party departed from this strategy, as the establishment mostly quietly backed the reelection of Republican Governor Chris Christie while throwing state Senator Barbara Buono under the bus.

In 2025, Democrats apparently don’t have that unifying corporate liberal they can blow up into an icon in time for an election, complicating the diminishment of county party power caused by pending ballot designs that will dispense with New Jersey’s unique ballot “lines”.

Without seeking to simplify each of these 2025 fledgling candidates:



Mikie Sherrill (Congresswoman from the 11th District), generally regarded as the frontrunner based on a unique ability to generate suburban

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interest, while maintaining an edge with Democratic Party leaders in the critical areas of Central and Northern New Jersey, still must demonstrate the ability to go beyond that base and connect in the urban houses of worship and union hardhat halls of other key party demographic groups.



Josh Gottheimer (Congressman from the 5th District), regarded at this moment as the second-place Democratic Primary candidate, has a problem-solvers message based on energetically executed but decidedly ragingly moderate politics. He may sell in a general election but it's hard to imagine the Democratic Party base getting truly excited about the pragmatic Gottheimer in time for the primary.



Ras Baraka (Mayor, the City of Newark), will try to appeal directly to Black and Brown voters in the urban areas who feel dislocated from establishment Democratic Party politics. But Baraka hasn't really impressed in a local election. Except for his 2014 campaign, he's never transferred his electric energy into commanding citywide numbers. His allies maintain that's because he hasn't had a real citywide rival. They admit he might fight down to his level of competition a little, running over challenges in 2018 and 2022 that never looked strong.



Steve Sweeney (former Senate President), got canned by South Jersey voters in 2021, and wants to reassert the Democratic Party’s ability to connect with rank and file Building Trades guys. An ironworker, Sweeney connects with those guys, and can make the case that Murphy monkeying around during COVID had more to do with his getting mangled than his own moderate “All we do is build” policies. Time will tell. But Sweeney has enemies in the progressive movement because he worked with then-Governor Christie on overhauling the public pension system.



Steven Fulop (Mayor, Jersey City), has a progressive record to run on and like Baraka, demonstrable executive experience in a big city, with a complex constituency. But does anyone really trust him enough to shoulder the entire party after he suddenly backed out of his 2021 gubernatorial candidacy and left allies – Baraka among them – feeling unwittingly guillotined?

The challenge of these individuals, getting back to the overarching point made by Snowflack, Murray, and Ashkinaze, will be to embody something bigger than the superficial segments they seem to most effectively represent.

Again, not oversimplifying them and recognizing that they will have a lot of time to define themselves, but on paper, each appears fairly snug in a segment of the party, as opposed to radiating Shogun-of-the-realm energy. Put them all in a blender and you probably have something resembling the kind of individual who can lead New Jersey. Separate them and you have a fractured party and real questions about how to concentrate energy.



Sean Spiller (President of the New Jersey Education Association), speaks for public sector workers, and thereby reveals the divide between public sector (teachers) and private sector (Sweeney, representing the Building Trades).

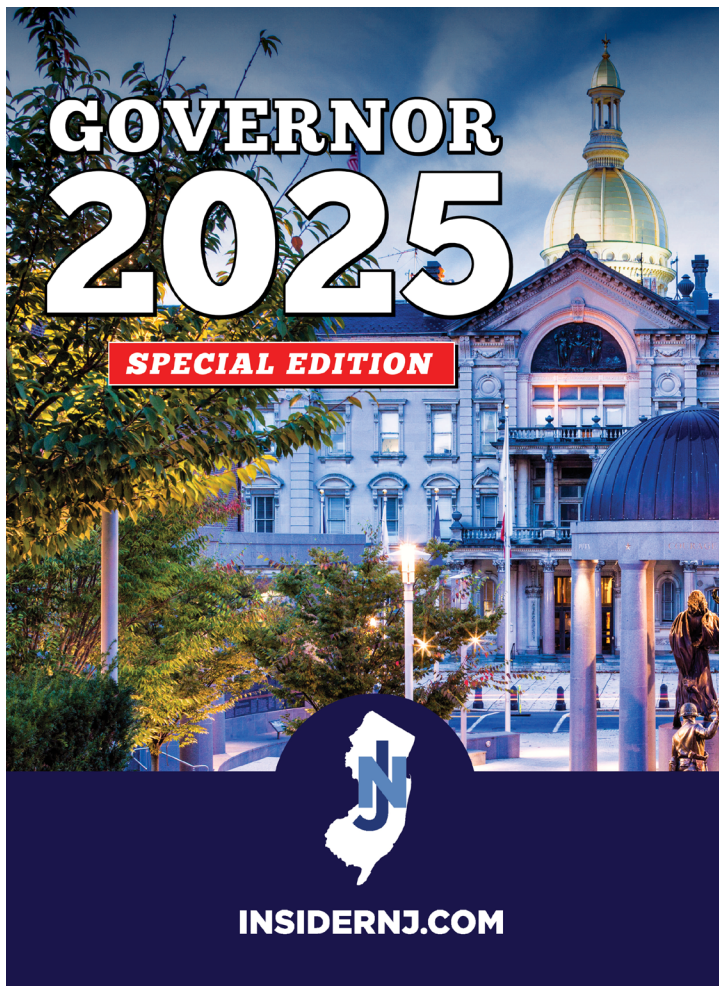
Will the primary at long last provide Democrats – the same party that bubble-wrapped their president rather than let him scrap for a whole year prior to a career-ending debate, and fire-blanketed state politics in the past with Goldman Sachs money – a legitimate forum for them to have the war of ideas necessary to forge an actual composite individual who can galvanize the party and beat the Republicans in the 2025 general election? Do they even trust a war of ideas can create energy or do they fear such a collision? 2025 will answer those questions.

On the other side of the divide, will Ciattarelli, never an Elon Musk space capsule Trumpie but a

backer of the TV personality turned commander-in-chief, make a real Republican Primary of it or will Spadea, who's never won an election, but commanded the most consistently vocal pro-Trump platform at 101.5 FM – on the strength of Trump and his allies riding 2024 into 2025 – consolidate support in a party foundationally structured by the President? Only 2025 will tell.

See you there!

See you on the streets of Jersey City for what promises to be a genuinely competitive election as candidates line up to succeed Fulop, who has served as mayor since 2013.



FOR MORE ON THE DEVELOPING STATEWIDE ELECTION

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POLITICIAN OF THE YEAR

ANDY KIM



The self-derailment and disgrace of U.S. Senator Bob Menendez didn't come as much of a surprise. He had already wriggled out of one jam-up with a hung jury and his overall public demeanor and history suggested a perilous tightrope walk in a desperate attempt to stay above the law.

So, when Damian Williams, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced

multiple corruption charges against the longtime U.S. Senator, including the allegation that he had stuffed his jacket pockets with gold bars, no one expressed shock, let alone horror.

It's New Jersey, after all.

This was just the latest corruption meltdown, in a case perhaps spruced up by the involvement of Menendez's wife, who also absorbed charges,

and the lurid audacity of the proud Cuban American senator himself, a victim, of course, who would denounce his accusers by trying to claim he kept gold bars around out of a habituated state of readiness, persecuted as he is for all time by the devil, otherwise known as the ghost of Fidel Castro.

While the establishment checked a gut that had long ago spilled shamelessly over its own belt buckle, the nimble U.S. Rep. Andy Kim (D-3) got busy. The congressman from Burlington County had a history of going into mop-up mode, generating national headlines in the aftermath of a desecration of the United States Capitol on Jan. 6th, 2021, to help clean up the mess. Not waiting around for a boss-stamped statement of condemnation (or a more likely respectfully issued half-measure on the order of “Let’s not rush to judgment here, folks, for after all, this is our beloved senior senator.”), Kim not only condemned Menendez, but within 24 hours of the feds’ announcement declared himself a candidate for Menendez’s United States Senate seat.

On September 22, 2023, Williams unveiled the indictment, which alleged that MENENDEZ and his wife, NADINE MENENDEZ, accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars of bribes from [Wael] HANA, [Jose] URIBE, and [Fred] DAIBES in exchange for MENENDEZ’s agreement to use his official position to protect and enrich them and to benefit the Government of Egypt. Among other things, MENENDEZ agreed and sought to pressure a senior official at the U.S. Department of Agriculture in an effort to protect a business monopoly.”

A day later, after having taken the lead in a statement demanding the senior senator’s resignation, and subsequent calls by Democratic chairman for Menendez to stand down, Kim issued the following statement:

“After calls to resign, Senator Menendez said ‘I am not going anywhere.’ As a result, I feel compelled to run against him. This is not something I expected to do, but I believe New Jersey deserves better. We cannot jeopardize the Senate or compromise our country’s integrity. I believe it’s time we restore faith in our democracy, and that’s why I am stepping up and running for Senate.”



“Disrespectful,” more than a few voices intoned, voices creakily arising from the internment of the New Jersey Democratic Party establishment or lifting off bar tops intergenerationally slobbered on by equally sternly disapproving predecessors.

As Menendez proceeded to meltdown over the coming months, eventually absorbing a guilty verdict on all counts, and standing shellshocked outside a Manhattan federal courtroom, Kim began the new year preparing for a Democratic Primary faceoff with First Lady Tammy Murphy, Menendez’s party organization-coronated successor.

Coming from Goldman Sachs, the Murphys had learned a lot in their time here in the swamps of New Jersey: like how – in the inimitable words of Jon Corzine – to “keep it going.” If Menendez could land the Hudson County-based U.S. Congressional seat for his son, surely the Murphys, now a household name in their adopted state, could easily affect a transition from Phil to Tammy for the foreseeable future. Like Menendez, the Murphys had come of age when a show called *All in the Family* starring Carroll O’Connor captured the public imagination. This was their version of that, executed not just to captivate the public, but in the public *interest*.



The public – specifically the participants in the unfolding county primary process - didn’t see it that way. Angered by Menendez, bothered by the Murphys’ attempts at leveraging the power of the governor’s office for their own benefit, and irritated by county chairs apparently willing to enable power at the apex of the state’s political pyramid to gain something in return, county committee members rebelled.

Simultaneously, the hyperkinetic Kim – not content to let party insides decide his fate - filed a lawsuit challenging the construction of New Jersey’s party line-dominated ballot, calling it “fundamentally unjust and undemocratic.” “The issue presented to the Court today is quite simple: the line must be abolished because it is unconstitutional,” read the lawsuit.

The Murphys were ready, or thought they were, shaking off a couple of early county party wins by Kim in Monmouth (ok, it was embarrassing, because it was the First Lady’s home county, but they could overcome it once the pre-primary contest moved north) and Hunterdon (ok, it was embarrassing, the process a shambles, but they could overcome it once the pre-primary contest moved north, besides it was Hunterdon – hardly indicative of Democrats statewide. Right?) Well, wrong. Or kind of wrong. Bergen did go for Murphy over Kim, in the words of nearly every party chair conferred with behind the scenes “stopping the bleeding” of the Murphy campaign. But the other official acts conferring support to Murphy looked absolutely awful. Tough guys camped out in front of party headquarters in Camden expressly to guard dog Murphy’s candidacy gave



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off about as much of a democracy vibe as extras in *On the Waterfront*. And the thumbs-up edict for Murphy issued by Middlesex? It might as well have been delivered by a guy in a Papal Mitre hat and shepherd's staff.

And this is supposed to be the anti-Roman Catholic party.

Then came the coup de grace.

U.S. District Judge Zahid Quraishi ruled in favor of Kim, scrapping the county party lines and effectively short-circuiting the one advantage the Murphys thought they had in the Democratic Primary.

“Today’s decision is a victory for a fairer, more democratic politics in New Jersey,” the victorious Kim said in a statement. “It’s a victory built from the incredible grassroots work of activists across our state who saw an undemocratic system marginalizing the voices of voters and worked tirelessly to fix it. While fixing this unfair ballot system is a massive step forward towards perfecting our democracy, there is still work to be done. Both in New Jersey and nationwide, we need to regain the trust of the voters we serve.”

But it was even worse.

On the eve of Quraishi’s ruling, state Attorney General Matt Platkin issued a statement indicating that his office would not defend the three state statutes that prescribe how New Jersey designs its primary ballots.

Platkin was supposed to be a big fat walking rubber stamp for the governor.

But Plat went Splat on that.

“The challenged statutes are unconstitutional,” Platkin wrote, therefore the state had no interest in *defending the county line*.

“I think the people of New Jersey are fed up with Senator Menendez, just tired of this politics that is, frankly, just embarrassing to our state and to our country”

The letter came as sources anticipated Quraishi imminently ruling against the line in *Kim et al. v. Hanlon*.

Just as the Murphys looked for another establishment lifeline, Plakin’s letter carried the reverse added weight of an upper echelon member of the Murphy Administration opposing the establishment process in place.

Platkin poured gasoline on the fire.

“...Whether or not candidates choose to associate with other candidates will have no bearing on their placement on the office-block ballot. Indeed, such ballots are uniformly used outside New Jersey; that New Jersey is the only State to use a grid ballot with a bracketing system for primary elections undermines the view that such a system ‘is necessary’ to advance government interests.”

County chairs went for their phones, cascading no end of Benedict Arnold invective on the Murphy attorney general. “How dare he do that to Phil?” said one indignant party leader, who had already stuck his neck out for Tammy Murphy, only to get guillotined by Platkin. “Phil made Matt,” another one of them howled.

Platkin was supposed to tiptoe onto the crime scene and disguise the evidence before Quraishi got there, not turn the headlights of his squad car on so the judge could get a better look.

Certainly, Quraishi didn’t need any help. “The integrity of the democratic process for a primary election is at stake and the remedy Plaintiffs are seeking is extraordinary,” Quraishi wrote in his opinion. He added that the plaintiffs “have met their burden and that this is the rare instance when mandatory relief is warranted.”



A thoroughly outplayed Tammy Murphy had already tapped out of the contest by that point and pulled the plug on her ill-starred campaign. Kim would go on to win the Democratic Primary for the Senate seat with roughly 75% of the vote. Having vanquished the same machine humiliated by the disgrace of Menendez, the congressman from Burlington County – formerly of the Obama State Department - looked practically heroic in a state accustomed to having crumb bums in office who either go to jail or celebrate not going to jail as a public victory.

“I think the people of New Jersey are fed up with Senator Menendez, just tired of this politics that is, frankly, just embarrassing to our state and to our country, and we deserve better representation. So, you know, I’m really proud that I was able to get past the primary election, last night,” Kim told CNN’s Jake Tapper. “And I will win in November, even if it means that I have to take on both Senator Menendez as well as a Republican.

“You know, Senator Menendez is in court right now because of allegations that he was putting his own personal benefit ahead of what’s right for the country. And now we’re seeing it again. You know, the Senate majority is so important. It’s what’s standing in the way of having Republicans pushing for a national abortion ban or doing so many other damaging things to our country, including Supreme Court nominations. So that’s something that, you know, [Senator Menendez] is playing with fire in that way.”

Kim capped a thoroughly brilliant 2024 by manhandling Republican nominee Curtis Bashaw in the general election, 54-44%. Vice President Kamala Harris swore him into office on December 9th.

If only the rest of the Democratic Party had taken care of business the way Kim took care of the Democratic Party.

His own words came back with a vengeance. “I voted to impeach Donald Trump twice,” he said, prior to Trump’s 50-48% victory over Harris in the national presidential election. “We don’t want him back into the White House. But we also need to make sure that we are controlling Senate and making sure we have

the ability to be able to vote on and control who’s going into the Supreme Court at a time when people are very worried about what comes next when it comes to women’s reproductive rights, when it comes to LGBTQ rights, immigration, amongst so many other issues.”

It didn’t happen, as Kim occupies a governing body controlled by the GOP, with Trump ready to reassume the Oval Office desk, even as New Jersey’s junior senator supplied at least a little spark for those enduring good guys, wherever they are, who prosecute a guerilla war on all fronts in a takedown of the grimy, static personages too familiar with the hallways of power.

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POLITICIAN OF THE YEAR RUNNER-UP

JEFF VAN DREW



The late Ray Durkin once said, “When you see it coming, jump at the head of the parade.” Van Drew not only jumped at the head of South Jersey’s Trump Parade, but he donned a sash, hat, cape, and velvet gloves. People laughed when Trump said he would win New Jersey, but relative to past recent Republican contenders, he came close, losing 46-52% to Kamala Harris, a respectable result, especially compared to Trump’s 41-57% 2020 margin of loss in NJ to Biden. A Democrat turned Republican in the Trump era, Van Drew served as Trump’s 2024 state director in New Jersey, where, on the strength of Trump’s performance, the GOP intends to contend for the governor’s seat in 2025.

WINNER OF THE YEAR

MIKIE SHERRILL



Tammy Murphy almost mangled Sherrill’s gubernatorial candidacy by becoming New Jersey’s first woman senator and thereby giving the male-dominant establishment a reason to deny another woman running for statewide office. But Kim’s defeat of Murphy played into the strategy of Sherrill’s allies, who see afresh that opportunity to run with the strength of suburban grassroots support and propel Sherrill – congresswoman from the 11th District - as New Jersey’s first woman governor from the Democratic Party. At grave risk of irrelevance, the county machines read a chance to revive themselves by getting behind Sherrill’s candidacy and appealing that undeniable strength within the party, motivated in no small part by reproductive freedom, and awake to the possibility of pragmatic public service representation.

WINNER OF THE YEAR RUNNER-UP
STEVE SWEENEY



The meltdown of the county party lines on a judge's ruling gives a shot to the former Senate President in the rapidly unfolding Democratic Primary for Governor. If South Jersey remains solid in its support for their favorite son and North Jersey kneecaps itself with too many candidates, the Building Trades icon with a knack for public policy stands a fighting chance.

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LOSER OF THE YEAR

BOB MENENDEZ



Hudson County's Menendez, who once twirled the world on his finger as chairman of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, became a foreign agent and betrayed his constituents and his country, according to a jury.

This was an epic twirl-down, which makes the fall of the House of Usher look like child's play, by comparison. It's too bad Shakespeare's not around. He'd find a way to spin this tragic tale

in an inimitably eloquent way, and it would almost be appropriate, as Menendez as a young man is said to have recited Shakespeare to prepare himself for the speechifying of federal office. By the time he was done, however, he was singing Loren Allred at the Taj Mahal. It's a sad story – for New Jersey.

Menendez survived his first corruption trial in 2017 with a hung jury – but couldn't escape the lurid evidence of gold bars accepted for services

delivered as he absorbed a damning guilty verdict. The jury found Menendez guilty on 16 counts of corruption.

“I have never violated my oath. I have never been a foreign agent,” the defiant senator told reporters.

It looked bad, in fact dreadful, from the beginning.

Last year, federal prosecutors in New York alleged the New Jersey Democrat accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes in the form of cash, gold bars, a luxury car, mortgage payments and more in exchange for the senator’s political clout. From ABC News:

“Three New Jersey businessmen who were also charged, along with the governments of Egypt and Qatar, were the alleged recipients.”

Menendez pleaded not guilty to 16 federal charges including bribery, fraud, acting as a foreign agent and obstruction. But after deliberating for 14 hours, the jury rejected his defense, finding the senior U.S. Senator guilty, not only of enriching himself but of acting as a foreign agent, a stunning plummet from grace going back to when then-Governor Jon Corzine tapped him to replace him in the U.S. Senate, to the disgrace of Menendez’s first indictment, to the semi-redemption of a hung jury, to full-bore disgrace and the strong possibility of hard time.

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LOSER OF THE YEAR RUNNER-UP THE MURPHYS



Power – it eventually gobbles and spits out the powerful. Just ask MacBeth, poor guy. Now, despite their detractors’ best efforts to consign them to hell, the Murphys never radiated any special, nefarious gleam. They projected no more ruthlessness than others who brazenly seek

prolonged time on the throne. When Tammy Murphy presented herself as the people’s best option to supplant the utterly smashed Menendez, it seemed like no especially crude stab at power, given society’s overall complacent and vulgar posture. *This is what they do. This is what we do. This is what they are. This is who WE are. Power re-congeals as power.* It almost sounds like a T.S. Eliot poem, and yet we seem so caved in even from *The Wasteland* that even a simple literary invocation, let alone a political campaign, falls apart. So instantaneously began the less-than bewildering cave-in around the candidacy of Tammy Murphy, First Lady of the State of New Jersey, wife of Governor Phil Murphy, at first rationalized as a Democratic Party effort to rectify, on a smaller platform, the injustice of Hillary Clinton imploding because her husband, of all people, had previously served as president; and quickly dismissed as – what else – a power grab. Again, if it carried no especially malevolent tinge, in retrospect, given Kim’s challenge of the party line process and a judge’s ruling in his favor, Tammy Murphy’s candidacy brought down the empire as we knew it, which gave birth to their public life in New Jersey and others like it, among them the Menendez’s and Corzine’s, all of them politicians of an epoch brought abruptly to an end by the severely punished overreach of the unwitting and almost innocuously ambitious Murphys, Phil and Tammy.

LOSER OF THE YEAR RUNNER-UP GEORGE NORCROSS III



Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin and the Office of Public Integrity and Accountability (OPIA) on June 17th announced the filing of criminal charges against six defendants following a years-long investigation into a criminal enterprise run by Norcross and his associates in South Jersey and elsewhere. The thirteen-count indictment alleged that through a series of unlawful acts, the Norcross Enterprise obtained property and property rights on the Camden Waterfront for itself and others, collected millions of dollars in government-issued tax credits, and controlled and influenced

government officials to further the interests of the enterprise. The indictment available here alleged that from as early as 2012 through the present, the Norcross Enterprise used its power and influence over government officials to craft legislation tailored to serve the interests of the enterprise, and with the cooperation of then-Camden Mayor Dana Redd and other officials, used parts of the city's government to aid the enterprise in acquiring property and property rights for itself and others through coercion, extortion, and other criminal acts.

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LOSER OF THE YEAR RUNNER-UP COUNTY PARTY ORGANIZATIONS



Look, we won't spend a lot of time repeating what we already outline above. U.S. District Judge Zahid Quraishi's ruling in the Kim v. Hanlon case dealt a significant blow to those operations long complacent in the awarding of "the line" to its preferred candidates and receiving little in the way of serious opposition – that is until Kim came along.

CAMPAIGN OF THE YEAR **HERB CONAWAY** FOR CONGRESS, CD-3



Possessing one of the best public service resumes in New Jersey politics, the veteran Assemblyman from the 7th District put together a credible campaign to match as he went for and attained the CD-3 Congressional seat left behind by aspirational U.S. Senator Andy Kim. Conaway had his hands full with a very credible challenge by slate mate Assemblywoman Carol Murphy (D-7), but he prevailed on the strength of his longstanding goodwill reconfirmed by seriousness of intention in the clutch, and his own enduring substance as a public servant.

From the ground:

MOUNT LAUREL – Unpretentious, cerebral, face crinkling into a smile still genuinely friendly without overdoing it after all these years, Assemblyman Herb Conaway – transitioning from Saturday afternoon fundraising to interview mode – strode across a parking lot in BurlCo amid crisscrossing Spaghetti Western shadows. The would-be saloon doors actually opened into a suburban Starbucks, and on the same week that Joe Biden reprimanded Bibi Netanyahu over civilian

casualties in Gaza, the assemblyman jumped right into Middle East foreign policy.

“We need a humanitarian cause, for sure,” said Conaway. “I’ve been a supporter of Israel since my teenage years, and the United States must be a guarantor of the safety and security of Israel. These are human beings hard pressed on an island of democracy surrounded by autocratic states. It’s critical for a number of reasons that we be engaged there, with an ally that is a democratic state in a region where there’s not a lot of democracy going on. In addition, Israel is a touchstone that impacts a lot of things going on in the world, a small piece of land mass which contains a lot of interest in that area. Now Hamas attacked Israel – a heinous and unprovoked attack – and they [the Israelis] have a right to defend themselves. I support the attrition of Hamas and their destructive activity. Now, additionally, Iran is a focal point of destructive activity.



“The Obama administration looked to engagement, while Trump removed engagement. On the ground now, we have a war situation where there are far too many civilian casualties in an urbanized landscaped where there are two million people crammed into a space about the size of Burlington County. It’s difficult to throw a rock and not hit a human being. This is not the same thing as battling where you don’t have a heavy concentration of human populations. So, the challenges are very steep as Israel wants to rightly deal with Hamas. As you make your calculations, part of the planning is what is the impact on civilian noncombatants. I would question whether enough of that planning has been done.

“We need a humanitarian cause to put an end to the starving there. Nobody wants to see noncombatant dislocation and terrible casualties where these angels were killed – wrongly killed – because they cared about human life. Our leadership needs to think about how this war is going to be conducted. Again, I believe Hamas should be attrited. But there’s got to be some thought on the Hamas side with a ceasefire at this point that they are no longer willing to see death. My hope is if all hostages are released, you’ll get a prolonged cessation to the hostilities. I do believe at this point that Netanyahu is doing more harm than good, as a result of being captive of his own alleged misdeeds and the coalition that has brought him to power. I hope he’s doing a calculation to the harm he’s now doing to his country.”



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CAMPAIGN OF THE YEAR RUNNER-UP

SUE ALTMAN



No, she didn't win. Incumbent U.S. Rep. Thomas Kean, Jr. (R-7) prevailed, 52-46%. But Altman, the competitive former state director of Working Families, ran a credible and dynamic campaign to oust the eternally vacuous, establishment-map-protected Kean, who transmitted all the energy of an Egyptian tomb. Andy Kim liked what he saw, enough to install Altman – the other lone very early voice calling for Menendez to resign before the establishment staggered upright - as his state director.

JUDGEMENT OF THE YEAR

KIM V. HANLON



U.S. District Judge Zahid Quraishi made the year’s most significant ruling when he favored plaintiff Andy Kim over the county clerks in assessing as inadequate and unjust the county party line-dominant ballot, long uniquely in effect in New Jersey. “The integrity of the democratic process for a primary election is at stake and the remedy Plaintiffs are seeking is extraordinary,” the judge wrote. “Mandatory injunctive relief is reserved only for the most unusual cases. Plaintiffs’ burden on this Motion is therefore particularly heavy. Nevertheless, the Court finds, based on this record, that Plaintiffs have met their burden.”

LAWMAN OF THE YEAR
DAMIAN WILLIAMS



The U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York shone in his successful corruption takedown of U.S. Senator Bob Menendez (D-N.J.). “This was politics for profit,” said Williams. “[Menendez’s] years of selling his office to the highest bidder have come to an end.”



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LAWMAN OF THE YEAR RUNNER-UP

MATT PLATKIN



Not only did the sitting state Attorney District demonstrate chutzpah by refusing to do the bidding of his so-called boss, Governor Phil Murphy (see above), but Platkin showed even more guts by going after one of New Jersey’s most powerful bosses, South Jersey Powerbroker George Norcross III.

Charging Norcross and his associates on June 17th with various counts of financial facilitation, misconduct by a corporate official, and official misconduct and conspiring to commit theft by extortion, criminal coercion, financial facilitation, misconduct by a corporate official, and official misconduct, Platkin said, “The indictment unsealed today alleges that George Norcross has been running a criminal enterprise in this state for at least the last twelve years. On full display in this indictment is how a group of unelected, private businessmen used their power and influence to get government to aid their criminal enterprise and further its interests. The alleged conduct of the Norcross Enterprise has caused great harm to individuals, businesses, non-profits, the people of the State of New Jersey, and especially the City of Camden and its residents. That stops today. We must never accept politics and government – that is funded with tax dollars – to be weaponized against the people it serves. Today we reaffirm that no one in our state is above the law – period.”

CHAIRMAN OF THE YEAR **PAUL JULIANO**



It was a bit of a Pyrrhic Victory, let's face it, but the Democratic Party Chairman of Bergen County managed to secure 738 votes, or 64%, for Tammy Murphy over Andy Kim, to briefly make it appear that the First Lady had a fighting chance. Credit Juliano with having done the relationship-building to put Murphy on stronger footing coming out of Bergen. A weaker chair would have bellyflopped, even as – going forward – Murphy bellyflopped on her own accord.

CHAIRMAN OF THE YEAR RUNNER-UP **JOHN CURRIE**



Fielding a candidate after the shocking death of Sheriff Richard Berdnik, veteran tough guy Currie, chair of the Passaic County Democratic Committee, successfully shouldered his party with Thomas Adamo and forcefully stared down a challenge by former Sheriff Jerry Speziale. A good win for Currie, even as Donald Trump won Passaic County in the general election (but Currie maintained countywide victories and helped elect longtime ally U.S. Rep.-elect Nellie Pou).

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NEW ADDITIONS TO CONGRESS

HERB CONAWAY

DEMOCRAT, CD-3



An elder statesman who looks the part, record to match, wonky by nature, with arguably the most mind blowing educational and professional background in the state legislature – a medical doctor and a lawyer, and a retired Air Force captain – Conaway easily defeated Murphy for the backing of three county party organizations, only to watch a judge – ruling in favor of the anti-county-party-stampeding Kim – wipe those victories out of existence like a Jackson Pollock-aspiring, juvenile delinquent wielding an out-of-control spray paint can. Conaway won the Democratic Primary anyway, then prevailed in the general election to secure the seat left behind by U.S. Senator Andy Kim.

NEW ADDITIONS TO CONGRESS

NELLIE POU

DEMOCRAT, CD-9



Thoughtful, soft-spoken, and substantive, U.S. Rep. Nellie Pou (D-35) transmits the opposite kind of energy as the hate-spewing Donald J. Trump, which makes it more fitting perhaps that she quietly but no less steadfastly occupied a ballot this election season on the opposing side.

Democrats selected Pou as their candidate to run to succeed the late Bill Pascrell, who died in August. A 28-year veteran of the legislature, a Paterson native with deep-roots in Puerto Rico, she served in the Assembly representing LD-35 from 1997-2012, and as LD-35's senator from 2012 to the present.

Having defeated Republican candidate Billy Prempeh, the mild-mannered Pou faces a swearing-in atmosphere at the United States Capitol potentially overcast by Trump, who enabled the desecration of the Capitol by his followers on Jan. 6th, 2021, and who is already trying to sow doubts about national election results with incendiary and misleading claims.

The state senator is typically composed.

“It goes back to believing in the country,” she told InsiderNJ at Bergen County Democratic headquarters ahead of the election. “We are a country of laws and we must recognize that and respect that. If we don't recognize that and accept that, then that individual doesn't belong in Washington. ...I'll be going in with my eyes open. Things are different.”

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NEW ADDITIONS TO CONGRESS

LAMONICA MCIVER

DEMOCRAT, CD-10



After prevailing in the summer Democratic Primary, McIver ran in the special election against Republican contender Carmen Bucco. McIver, the former council president of the Newark City Council, will fill the remainder of the term of the late U.S. Rep. Donald Payne Jr. in the 10th Congressional District.

“Thank you to the voters of the 10th District for again placing their faith in me,” McIver said on Election Day, Sept. 18th. “The significance of tonight’s election runs especially deep for me. Tonight, I am standing on the shoulders of giants, chief among them is Congressman Donald Payne, Jr. Being chosen by voters to carry on his legacy of service is a profound honor.

“It has also been an honor to serve my community as a member of the Newark City Council. Together, we have accomplished so much from working to make housing more accessible and affordable to investing in clean drinking water for every city resident and so much more.

“Now, I have the opportunity to continue the fight in Washington on behalf of the entire 10th Congressional District and I will fight, because the purpose of politics and the purpose of our vote is to give the people of our communities and our nation a bold voice in shaping our future for the betterment of all Americans.”

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In Memoriam

Insider NJ remembers some of the notable figures who left us this year.



Bill Pascrell

Beloved, dogged, justice-committed, and tough-minded New Jersey Congressman Bill Pascrell (D-9), a proud son of Paterson and former Silk City Mayor, died this year. The 87-year-old served as the U.S. Representative for his district since 1997 and demonstrated political organizing excellence and a winning depth of support in North Jersey when he fought off a GOP redistricting map and won reelection in 2012.

“It is with deep sadness that we announce that Bill Pascrell Jr., our beloved husband, father, and grandfather, passed away this morning. As our United States Representative, Bill fought to his last breath to return to the job he cherished and to the people he loved. Bill lived his entire life in Paterson and had an unwavering love for the city he grew up in and served. He is now at peace after a lifetime devoted to our great nation America,” a statement on Pascrell’s X account read.



A straight-talking, tough retired educator and U.S. Army sergeant who represented one of the most diverse districts in the country, Mr. Pascrell had a reputation for fighting for working class voters. Notably, he battled Chris Christie for awarding deferred prosecution agreements (DPA) as U.S. Attorney that protected a powerful medical supply company that produced faulty prosthetics for senior citizens.

Mr. Pascrell took a grandson-of-Italian-immigrants work ethic to Washington D.C., famously showing up at Union Station with his briefcase the morning after he spectacularly won the 2012 Democratic Primary in a redrawn congressional district. Many insiders at that time believed he would lose his seat – payback for courageously taking on DPAs – to colleague U.S. Rep. Steve Rothman. But Mr. Pascrell put together one of the most complete campaigns in New Jersey in the last 20 years and demonstrated political mastery on every campaign front.

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Pass the Reproductive Freedom and Health Equity Bill Package.



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In Memoriam



Donald Payne, Jr.

Congressman Donald Payne, Jr. of Newark died this year.

Elected to the seat formerly held by his father in 2012, Mr. Payne was known for his commitment to public service, his gravitas, his love of Newark, and his ready smile. A former Newark City councilman and former Essex County Commissioner, Mr. Payne affectionately went by the nickname “Choppy.”

On April 9th, his office issued the following statement:

“Congressman Donald M. Payne, Jr. suffered a cardiac episode based on complications from his diabetes during the weekend. He was admitted to a local hospital for treatment. Currently, he is recovering in the hospital as doctors conduct routine exams to monitor and observe his improvement. The Congressman’s prognosis is good and he is expected to make a full recovery.”

He did not.

Having suffered a heart attack on April 6th, Mr. Payne lapsed into a coma, from which he would not emerge.

He was 65.

Never the most vociferous, demagogic or attention-seeking congressman, the pro-labor Mr. Payne played a critical role as an infrastructure and transportation policy expert. The son of New Jersey's first African-American congressman, his family, personal and political history vitally tell a critical part of the history of the City of Newark.

Notably, Congressman Payne, Jr. helped pass President Joe Biden's infrastructure bill, which became law on Nov. 15, 2021. "The new, \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is going to create opportunities for minority and women-owned businesses nationwide," said Payne, Jr., who earlier that same year assumed the chairmanship of the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials for the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. "We must not let discrimination in federal contracting deny them their right to participate in these infrastructure projects. As Chairman of the Rail Subcommittee, I will continue to work to make the process of how we award federal passenger rail projects more equitable and transparent for all American businesses."



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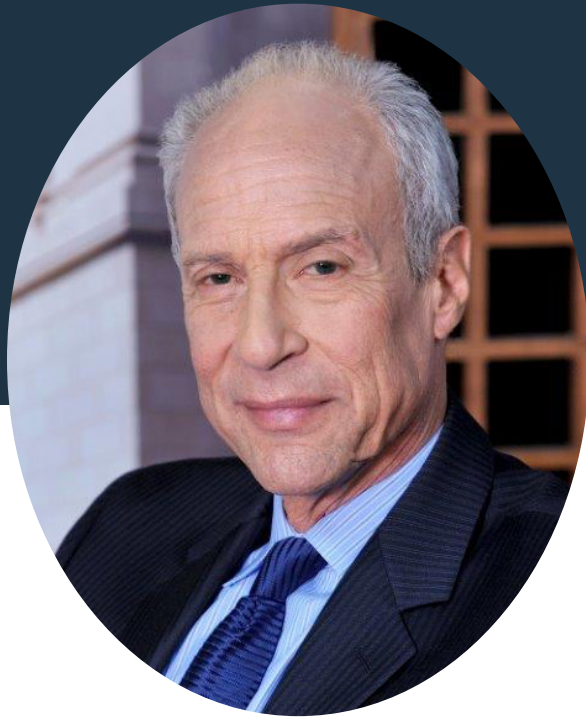
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In Memoriam



Michael Aron

Michael Aron died this year.

Dean of the New Jersey Press Corps, host of On the Record, host of Reporters Roundtable, he gave all of us a seat at that table and a place of respect. He spoke to everyone, especially the young reporters – no, actually, especially *everyone* – with reassurance, kindness, humility, and authority.

Critically and always, he respected his audience. He respected the viewers, the readers, and the news consumers. He respected the voters and the people of New Jersey. He never indulged an egotistical moment, an unprofessional moment, or a moment of mediocrity.

It hurts to think of him not around anymore, with his sleeves rolled up, running through the halls of the Statehouse, as an elder statesman working harder than anyone else to supply news to the citizens of our state. It feels less secure to not have him there, that handsome face, the sonorous voice, the insightful take, the alive, analytical mind, the man, the professional, the pioneer of Statehouse Cool, firmly footed in the world he helped create.

Through the worst days, Mike Aron's New Jersey could always fall back on the unimpeachable excellence of one man, educated here in part at one of the world's finest institutions of higher learning, civilized, refined, urbane, and a worker in the truest sense, a great conversationalist and communicator, and mostly a great listener, whose wise presence, like his colleague so many years ago said, made everyone want to do a little better – to honor him.

He was that good. He was that special. He was that great. A public servant to our civic core. Don't forget, New Jersey, Mike Aron, friend, leader, mentor, reporter, legend.





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In Memoriam



Mildred Crump

Legendary local leader and history-making public servant of distinction, former Newark City Council President Mildred C. Crump, died in December of this year.

She was 86.

An iconic presence in Newark for three decades with her professorial horn-rimmed glasses, winning smile, and zestful, can-do attitude, unafraid of occupying the front line to solve a complicated city's toughest problems, and routinely leaned-on by others for her leadership and bridge-building prowess, Ms. Crump left a legacy to be cherished.

Councilwoman from 1994-1998, and again from 2006-2021, Mildred Crump was the first Black woman to serve on the city's governing body, elected in a 1994 runoff. She would serve on the council during the times of Mayors Sharpe James, Cory Booker, and Ras Baraka.

Born in Detroit, Michigan, she graduated from Wayne State University, where she was the recipient of the David D. McKenzie Honor Society Award as the “Most Outstanding Female Student for Leadership and Scholarship”. A graduate of Rutgers-Newark with a Master’s Degree in Public Administration, the Honorable Ms. Crump was New Jersey’s first African-American Braille teacher.

In 2020, the New Jersey State League of Municipalities inducted Ms. Crump into its Hall of Fame.



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In Memoriam



Christy Davis Jackson

Christy Davis Jackson transitioned over the Thanksgiving Holiday after facing a series of medical-related ailments.

Ms. Jackson was the beloved wife of AME Bishop Reginald T. Jackson; mother to Seth Joshua; stepmother to Regina Victoria; former Supervisor of the Sixth Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME); a dear friend to so many across the states of Georgia, New Jersey, and Ohio; and a national figure in the fight for equity, civil rights, and equal rights.

Ms. Jackson worked tirelessly to forge partnerships among the public, private and faith sectors, and to help government reach its potential as a force for policies that improve people's lives.

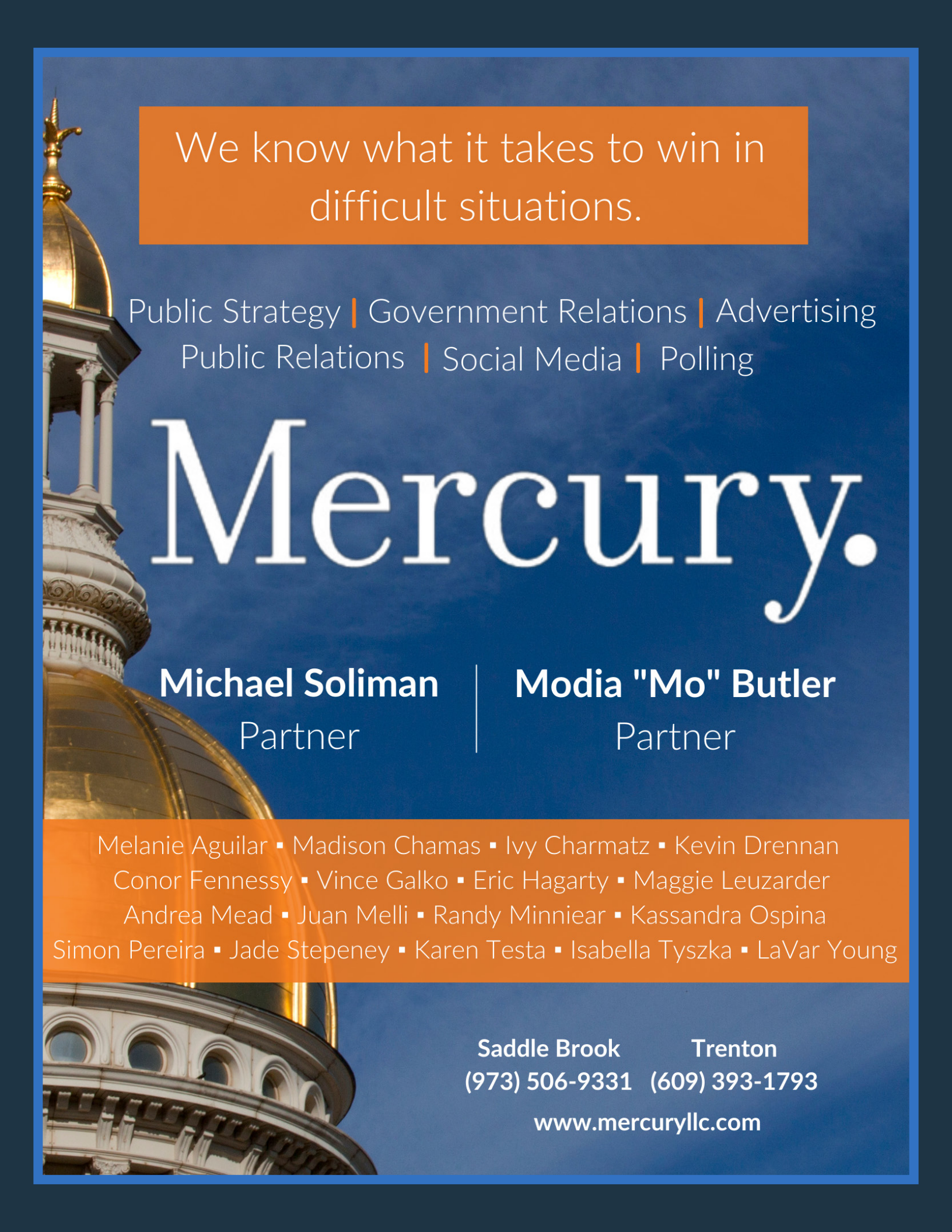
In her early professional career, she served as the legal counsel and Chief of Staff for State Senator Wynona M. Lipman, who was the first African American woman elected to the state Senate in New

Jersey. She went on to serve various organizations and institutions throughout the Garden State, including as Senator Frank Lautenberg's State Director and Chair of Jon Corzine's senatorial campaign. She continued her professional career developing education, workforce and economic development, and health policies as the Founder of City Strategy Group and a Principal at BusDev Solutions.

From 2012 to 2016, she served with her husband in the AME's 20th Episcopal District, which includes Malawi, Zimbabwe, the northern portion of Mozambique, Tanzania, and Uganda.

In 2016, Ms. Jackson relocated to Georgia to once again work alongside her husband as Supervisor for the Sixth Episcopal District (AME). In that role, she led the statewide organizational and operational activities for the AMEs and its 534 churches across the state, directed the Women's Missionary Society in the state of Georgia, fought to strengthen the voice of women within the Church, and served as advisor and strategist to her husband.





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In Memoriam



Richard Berdnik

Passaic County Sheriff Berdnik died this year. From the Sheriff's Office:

On January 1, 2011, Richard H. Berdnik was sworn in as the 49th Sheriff of Passaic County. On January 1, 2014, he started his second term.

Prior to becoming Sheriff, Richard Berdnik had a distinctive twenty-eight year career with the Clifton Police Department. Upon retirement, Sheriff Berdnik was the Commander of the Juvenile Division and the SWAT Team; previously, he had served in virtually every position in the agency. During his Clifton career, Sheriff Berdnik received numerous citations for exceptional service and received many certifications in various law enforcement functions.

Upon becoming Sheriff, Richard Berdnik undertook a complete top to bottom review of all aspects of the Sheriff's Office. Because of that review, operations were streamlined and efficiencies were created. Sheriff Berdnik has focused on improving technology, training and overall operations of the agency. Sheriff Berdnik has been able to help local law enforcement investigate and increase enforcement of criminal activity. All three major Divisions of the Agency: the Patrol, Corrections and Courthouse Security have seen basic and operational improvements under Sheriff Berdnik's leadership.

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In Memoriam



Carl Golden

Carl R. Golden, whose remarkable political savvy and lightning wit made him trusted advisor and confidant to two NJ governors, a state chief justice and many others, died in May at 86.

Golden died during a medical procedure, his wife of 32 years, Linda Monica Golden confirmed.

“He was absolutely the best. I don’t think anybody ever had a better press secretary,” said former NJ Gov. Thomas H. Kean, who worked with Golden for decades.

During a career of more than 50 years, Golden held a wide range of jobs in journalism and politics. He was a reporter for the Easton (Pa.) Express and the Newark Evening News and served as press secretary/spokesman for former U.S. Rep. Peter Frelinghuysen Jr., former state Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz and former Gov. Christie Whitman.

He played a key role in Whitman's election in 1991 and was her first Director of Communications. She said, "He knew Jersey backwards and forwards. The state will be missing his important voice at a time when we desperately need it."

He played a key role in Whitman's election in 1991 and was her first Director of Communications. She said, "He knew Jersey backwards and forwards. The state will be missing his important voice at a time when we desperately need it."

But Golden was best known for his association with Kean, first in his role as spokesman for the former governor when Kean was speaker of the state Assembly, then as part of both of Kean's gubernatorial campaigns and as press secretary for Kean's entire eight years as NJ governor.

Both lifelong Republicans, the two formed an unlikely partnership. Kean, who traced his lineage to NJ's first governor, wore pinstriped suits and loved opera. Golden favored cowboy boots and Willie Nelson.

"We were perfect together," Kean said, using the trademark phrase of his governorship.

As a professional, Golden's word was truly golden. A friend recalled his three rules of politics: "Rule one, tell the truth. Rule two, tell the truth. Rule three, read rules one and two."

"His integrity in the job was remarkable," Kean said.





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THE DRONE OF THE YEAR AWARD
ASSEMBLYMAN
GREGORY P. MCGUCKIN
(R-10)



Sizing up those mysterious drones blanketing New Jersey at year's end like a nightmarish recurrence of Orson Welles' War of the Worlds, Assemblymen Greg McGuckin and Paul Kanitra didn't feel like playing footsy with the universe.

"Shoot them down already!" McGuckin said.

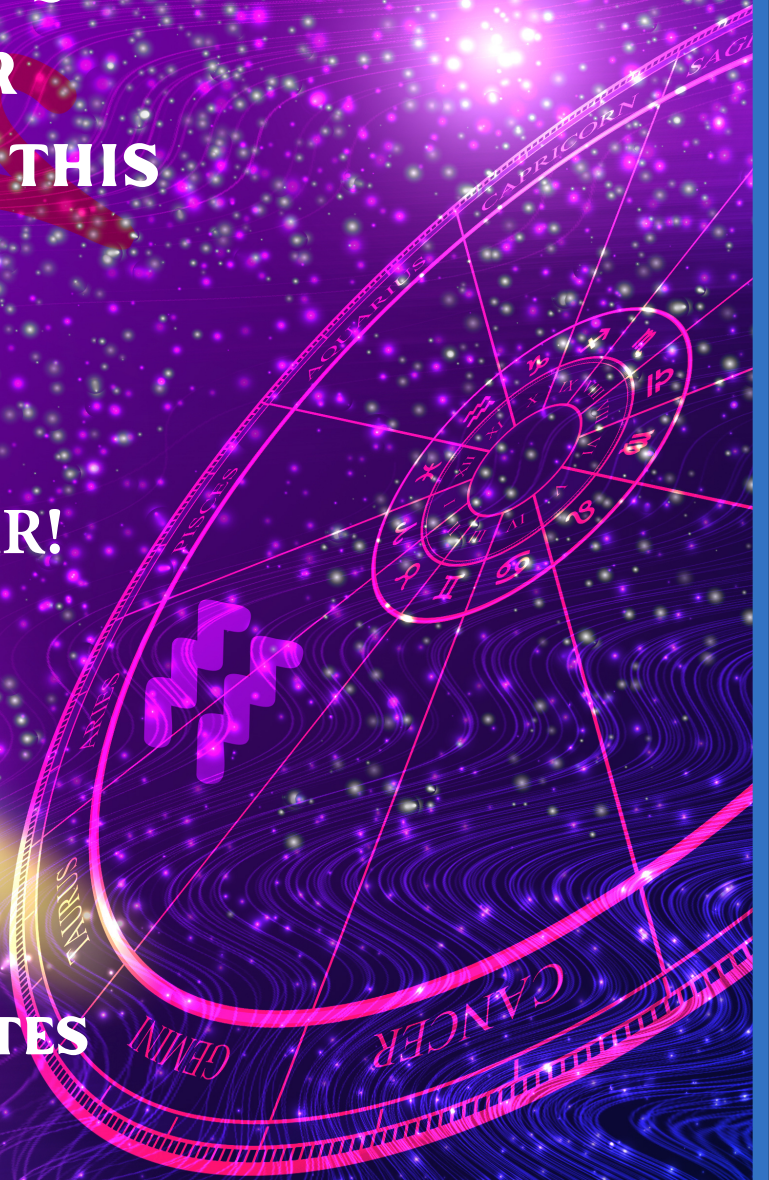
The first reported drone sightings occurred on Nov. 13 in Morris and Hunterdon counties. Since then, reports flooded in from all over New Jersey in addition to Philadelphia and Staten Island.

"This is like the Chinese balloon all over again. How long are we going to wait while unknown actors perform reconnaissance over our critical infrastructure facilities and neighborhoods?" McGuckin said. "If it was anyone with a legitimate purpose they certainly would have come forward by now."

**WHILE WE CAN'T PREDICT
THE FUTURE, LET'S
CELEBRATE OUR
ACCOMPLISHMENTS THIS
YEAR...**

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

**DAVID PARANO
PARANO & ASSOCIATES**



*In honor of our friend, the Late Carl Golden,
who wrote the following piece, which ran in
InsiderNJ on November 22nd, 2023:*



Today — Nov. 22 — is one of those moments indelibly stamped in American history, a day when “I remember where I was when I heard the news” comes immediately to mind.

For an older generation, it was Dec. 7, 1941, and for today’s, it was Sept. 11, 2001, days of such horrific events that memories, though painful, remain vivid.

Sixty years ago today, President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Tex., sending the nation into shock, disbelief and mourning.

On that Friday afternoon in 1963, I had taken my pre-school age son to Bamberger’s (later to

become Macy’s) department store in downtown Morristown when a visibly upset salesclerk was overheard telling her co-workers that the president had been shot.

Shoppers — including me and my son — quickly went to the third floor where a bank of television sets filled one wall, all tuned to one of the national networks. We all stood silently, staring at the images on the screens and listening for the latest bulletins.

At the time, I was a reporter for the Newark News assigned to its Morristown bureau and I knew I and my colleagues would be called into our offices to await orders from editors.

My assignment was to phone elected officials in Morris County, seeking response and reaction to the events in Dallas for inclusion in a more extensive statewide roundup account.

One of the officials I contacted served on the county Board of Freeholders and, after eliciting his comments, I was about to end the call when he said: “It reminds me of the presidential assassination I saw when I was a child.”

Wait! What?

When I asked for details, he recounted he was an elementary school student in Buffalo, N.Y., when on Sept. 6, 1901, and he and his classmates were on a field trip to the Pan American Exposition there.

He told me he was sitting near the front row to see President Willam McKinley when a man darted toward him and fired a shot. The president fell, mortally wounded, and died eight days later.

I listened entranced as he recounted that day 62 years earlier when my reportorial instincts took over, aware that I stumbled upon a story that no one else had.

I asked if he’d told anyone else about his experience and, when he answered he had not, I asked if he’d wait until the following day — when my newspaper came out — before he did. Despite the tragedy of the day, I felt the small thrill that every reporter experiences when his is the only story to appear.

For me, the “I remember where I was when I heard the news” recollection has remained strong in the intervening years, not only because of the horror of a president gunned down, but for the journalistic coup I’d scored. It may seem a minor blip in the overall scheme of things, but I kept the news clip of my story, toting it around in a scrapbook as I moved through my career and from New Jersey to Washington, D.C., and back again.

It turned yellow with age as edges crumbled and creases obscured the type face.

It’s long gone now, but it remains a part of my personal history even though it’s dwarfed by the events of that day.

It’s in my memory bank— forever.

Carl Golden is a senior contributing analyst with the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University.

