

## In Legislative Election Year, Budget Negotiations Will Be Intense

By Carl Golden | January 12, 2023, 11:11 am | **Columnist**

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The governors' annual addresses to a joint session of the Legislature – the messages – are largely ceremonial events, an accepted hour-long exercise in back-patting, recitation of past achievements and predictions of a brighter future.

Gov. Phil Murphy's speech – his first in two years to a live audience – fit neatly into the established pattern of generalizations and the usual pronouncement that “the state of the state is good and will only improve if the Administration stays the course.

It was designed – as were all those that came before from governors of both parties – to exert a calming influence and reassure the state's citizens that all is under control and whatever crises may erupt will be dealt with by competent leadership.



exam nation of the state's tax structure to determine its fairness and whether alternative revenue-raising devices should be considered.

Murphy's ANCHOR will be drawn into the depths by the anchor of government costs. Property taxes remain the major source of

As the loyal monarch, Republican legislative leaders call for a tax-raising strategy whose policies have contributed to the state's

His social agenda, the far-reaching, extreme — stricter restraints on the state — and a tax system that is more efficient to promote his national ambitions.

While Murphy's name is periodically mentioned in speculation concerning the 2024 residential election, the odds of his becoming a viable contender in the Biden choose to stand down after one term are extraordinarily long.

He has moved from the left of center — as he said he would — and is reflecting his reach toward his party's progressive wing, signs to his left beyond Trenton. In his private moments, the thought may have crossed his mind to run a second term as governor winds down, but securing a national base of financial support is unlikely.

If there are those around him promoting his visibility and privately encouraging him to run, they are engaged in a wishful thinking exercise.

While there have been occasional newsworthy nuggets included in his messages, the addresses are eclipsed within six weeks or so by the executive's submission of a proposed state budget for the next fiscal year — a detailed document outlining the Administration's program and policies to be supported by what will surely be upwards of some \$5 billion in taxpayers' money.

With the full Legislature on the ballot this year, budget deliberations are sure to be more intense as incumbents attempt to use what is arguably the highest profile agenda item to their advantage while challengers will look to uncover instances of profiteering and misdeeds.