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Plato taught us in his Ship of State allegory that true power rested with the philosophical ruler who could look up into the dark sky and read the stars because, without that person, the ship would be entirely lost.

To be powerful in New Jersey politics, you must be a stargazer. The challenge for men and women of influence is to see things others don’t see; the truly significant brokers of power must possess one critical skill: the ability to visualize the board objectively and realistically, not just how they want it to look. They must have beautiful minds.

Politics is frequently a sport that combines palace intrigue, intricate bait-and-switches, swagger, enigmas, extraordinary psychological thrillers, and the ultimate game of liar’s poker. It involves a complicated formula that frequently puts serious, brilliant, and genuinely decent people in the same room — and once in a while, even on the same ticket — with odd, ineffectual, ne’er-do-well simpletons, and sometimes maybe even psychopaths who inexplicably find themselves enjoying the admiration of the electorate. From that comes the responsibility of building a coalition to serve the public and maybe, sometimes, do some good.

Simply put, the truly powerful must be able to walk, chew gum -- and count -- simultaneously.

Plato also taught us that persons of consequence must be proficient in not just ordering people to follow them but persuading them to do so. Whether it’s a hornet’s nest, a Gordian knot, or a simple botheration, people of influence must figure out solutions and not incite further turmoil -- unless chaos serves a greater good. Balancing that effectively is easier said than done.

In New Jersey, politics is frequently a confluence of the community power struggles of Lord of the Flies, the pursuit of individual liberty in Great Expectations, and the story about nothing from Seinfeld. There needs to be someone who can lead the preparation of what has increasingly become just a sort of highbrow dog’s breakfast — an individual who can somehow figure out a path to assemble a hodgepodge of often conflicting interests. That’s the type of person who finds themselves atop the New Jersey Globe Power List.

“TO BE POWERFUL IN NEW JERSEY POLITICS, YOU MUST BE A STARGAZER. THE CHALLENGE FOR MEN AND WOMEN OF INFLUENCE IS TO SEE THINGS OTHERS DON’T SEE.”
For the first time, the New Jersey Globe has a Power List Emeritus: people who, through their longevity of influence and sheer gravitas, no longer need to be ranked with the mere mortals of New Jersey politics. Through their intelligence, experience, and continued involvement in the political arena, either as advocates or advisors, they continue — to be clear, there are no retirees on this list -- to wield influence decades after first emerging as power players. In a good way, they epitomize the types of people former Jersey City Mayor Thomas F.X. Smith as “The Powerticians.”
LORETTA WEINBERG

Former Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg retired from the legislature in 2021 after 28 years. She was the Liberal Lion of the New Jersey Senate and among the most consequential lawmakers in New Jersey history. Now a Horizon Blue Cross and Blue Shield of New Jersey Board of Directors member and the head of Loretta PAC, Weinberg, 88, continues to speak out on some of the same social justice issues that first spurred her political involvement in the early 1960s. Her support of Matt Platkin’s attorney general nomination was enormously helpful in the Senate confirmation process.

Hetty Rosenstein as state director of the New Jersey CWA in 2019.
Photo: Nikita Biryukov for the New Jersey Globe.

HETTY ROSENSTEIN

After over 40 years with the Communications Workers of America and a long stint as their state director, Hetty Rosenstein retired (arguably a poor choice of words) in 2021 while still at the very top of her game. She went on to help Gov. Phil Murphy win a second term and getMatt Platkin confirmed as attorney general. Awaiting Senate confirmation for a seat on the Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield Board of Directors, Rosenstein remains the Grand Dame (hopefully, that’s a description that has not fallen from the vernacular) of the progressive wing of the New Jersey Democratic Party. When she chooses to speak, she can still move mountains.

ROGER BODMAN

Roger Bodman started out as Millicent Fenwick’s driver in her first congressional race 49 years ago, managedJim Courter’s campaign for Congress that unseated Helen Meyner in 1978, and was campaign manager for Tom Kean’s 1797-vote win in the 1981 governor’s race. At age 29, he joined Kean’s cabinet in 1982 as Commissioner of Labor and served as Commissioner of Transportation from 1985 to 1987. As the founder of Public Strategies Impact, one of the largest and most influential lobbying firms in New Jersey history, influential people from both sides of the aisle continue to seek his counsel.
When former State Sen. Joe Kyrillos retired from the legislature in 2017 after 30 years of service, he was just 57 years old. He began working on political campaigns and was working in Washington for the U.S. Secretary of the Interior when he was recruited to run for assemblyman in 1987. He moved up to the Senate in 1991. While still young, especially in the part of the state he comes from, Kyrillos has become an elder statesman in New Jersey, where he continues to influence GOP leaders and elected officials from both parties through a series of old – and new – relationships across the state.

Some people know better than others that Michael Critchley is one of the fiercest trial lawyers in New Jersey. A former assistant Essex County Prosecutor, he spent part of the early 1970s in the statehouse as an Assistant Counsel to Gov. Brendan Byrne during an era when the Chief Counsel’s office started to become one of the most influential law firms in the state. Critchley’s political contacts extend deep into New Jersey’s hierarchy of powerbrokers, where he has enjoyed the respect of Democrats and Republicans for over 50 years.
IN JANUARY 2019, George Helmy faced a difficult personal decision. He was serving as state director for U.S. Senator Cory Booker, who was on the verge of launching a bid for the Democratic presidential nomination, when Gov. Phil Murphy approached him with an offer to become his new chief of staff. Helmy and Booker were close, and he was part of the inner circle of a man who, at the time, might have been on a path to the presidency.

While Booker’s star was on the rise, Murphy was struggling. One year after becoming, constitutionally speaking, the most powerful governor in the nation, Murphy was having trouble getting along with his fellow Democrats who ran the legislature. His administration faced a genuine scandal after Katie Brennan alleged that Al Alvarez raped her while working on Murphy’s 2017 campaign. Poll numbers showed that New Jerseyans didn’t know much about their new governor other than they were glad his predecessor was finally gone.

Helmy didn’t know Murphy well at the time — they’ve since become brothers from different mothers — but the challenge of advancing the governor’s political agenda, and getting him re-elected, appealed to him.
Fast forward a mere four-plus years later, Helmy has now broken a record that has stood for 33 years: he’s the longest-serving chief of staff to a governor in state history.

Because Phil and Tammy Murphy trust him as a government official and political leader, and due to the network of friends, Democratic and Republican, that he has earned, Helmy remains the most powerful insider in New Jersey.

“A chief of staff is more than just the right hand of a governor,” Murphy told the New Jersey Globe when Helmy broke the record. “A chief of staff sets the tone for the entire administration. With his calm demeanor, quick wit, and in-depth knowledge on any number of issues, George has set our tone through his example.”

The 43-year-old Helmy is effectively the chief operating officer of New Jersey, a state with 9.3 million people, nearly 65,000 state workers, and, if he gets his way this spring, a $53 billion budget. He does this job concurrently under the constant watch of some of the most actively involved shareholders possible.

As chief of staff, he’s advocated for New Jersey while sitting inside the Oval Office; traveled globally, including Hollywood, a place some view as an entirely different planet, in a bid to bring new businesses and jobs to the state; and has built relationships with legislators and South Jersey Democrats that are, frankly, better than those enjoyed by Murphy.

In early 2023, Helmy added a new title to his portfolio as a commissioner of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. The Senate confirmed him painlessly and unanimously. His six-year term will extend beyond the end of Murphy’s governorship. As his friend Kevin O’Toole has shown, Helmy’s influence could continue even after he departs Trenton, regardless of who wins the next election.

For Helmy watchers, departure is the critical word. While Helmy has stayed longer than any chief of staff since Tom Kean’s second term, few expect that he will be the guy who turns the lights off in the Office of the Governor. Helmy will likely be managing Murphy’s politics for a while. Sooner or later, when Helmy leaves, he’s positioned to do something that few Murphy alums have pulled off: remain a key member of the governor’s inner circle.

Still, all good things must end at some point, and this could very well be Helmy’s final year at number one on the New Jersey Globe Power List or perhaps even in the top ten. Power is indeed fleeting – just ask Ed McGlynn, who held the record Helmy now owns for more than three decades – and time moves on.

GEORGE HELMY’S ORBIT

PHIL MURPHY
TAMMY MURPHY
CORY BOOKER
GARY TAFFET
BILL CASTNER
KEVIN MCCABE
PARIMAL GARG
LEROY JONES
MATT PLATKIN
PAUL JULIANO
JOHN CURRIE
DAN BRYAN
MAHEN GUNARATNA
HETTY ROSENSTEIN
JUSTIN BRAZ
MO BUTLER
BRENDAN GILL
MICHAEL SOLIMAN
KEVIN O’DOWD
BOB MENENDEZ
AS KEVIN MCCABE’S political power increases, so does the target on his back. That’s especially true as he passes George Norcross for the first time. But that doesn’t seem to bother the 50-year-old Middlesex County Democratic Chairman, who brandishes the largest regional legislative delegation in the state and who will be assiduously courted by everyone seeking to become the next governor of New Jersey. He presides over what is arguably, in 2023, the most robust political apparatus in the state.

His relationship with Gov. Phil Murphy and Senate President Nicholas Scutari remains exceptionally strong; the coalition he formed with Norcross and South Jersey Democrats in 2017 to elect Middlesex favorite son Craig Coughlin as Assembly Speaker is strained.

Math matters in politics; for McCabe, it’s all about the digits. He has assembled a formidable bloc of senators and assemblymembers that helps a candidate for governor or a legislative leadership position get enough votes to win. His numbers are boosted by the population of Middlesex County, which has the third-largest number of registered Democrats in the state; one in ten Democrats who vote in a New Jersey primary live in Middlesex County. This year, for the first time, Middlesex has more registered voters than Essex.

Middlesex Democrats control everything at the county level: a 7-0 majority on the Board of Commissioners, a sheriff, a county clerk, and a surrogate. Under McCabe’s leadership, seven of the ten countywide officials are women, and six of ten are non-white. That offsets a legislative delegation that is whiter than the county. County government runs seamlessly, except for the times in the year when the county clerk is statutorily relevant.

Locally, there are Democratic mayors in 20 of 25 municipalities. McCabe gets some credit for that in a county where demographics – 42% white, much of it middle class, and 26% Asian American – should make Middlesex more competitive for Republicans. Except for Edison, where McCabe’s guy is the mayor and a controversial rival is the municipal chairman, there has been peace and calm among Democrats in Middlesex County. McCabe has figured out how to be simultaneously assertive and deferential.

Within the next year, Coughlin must decide whether to run for governor in 2025. If he does, McCabe will need to do some ciphering to figure out how to make Coughlin the first sitting Speaker in state history to become governor. Even if Coughlin passes, McCabe still plays a significant role in selecting the next Democratic gubernatorial nominee.

In addition to being county chairman, McCabe is a commissioner of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and is a partner at River Crossing Strategy Group, a top public affairs firm.

2 KEVIN MCCABE
Middlesex County Democratic Chairman
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IT WOULD BE SHORT-SIGHTED and just plain dumb to ever count George Norcross out or even to diminish his influence in New Jersey politics. For the last 34 years, he’s consistently been one of the most powerful men in New Jersey, mainly because of something that critics for some reason think is a negative: a sign on an office door at the Camden County Democratic headquarters that reads, “Can-Do Club.”

So the question is not whether Norcross remains an influential power broker – he is – but rather if he’s as powerful as he was just a few years ago. The loss of Steve Sweeney as Senate President two years ago was indeed a setback; for the first time since 2006, a direct Norcross branch manager does not preside over one of the houses of the New Jersey Legislature. Republicans occupy Senate seats in four districts where a Democrat has served within the last six years. The manifest destiny of the last decade is down to just four legislative districts in Camden, Gloucester, and Burlington counties. But in Norcross’ defense, those three counties still make up 16% of the Democratic primary voters in the state, a substantial bloc. Camden has an outsized influence because Team Norcross embraced vote-by-mail a decade before everyone else, with more than half the votes cast early.

The number of Democrats in South Jersey, the likelihood of the line holding just about everywhere but Atlantic, and the sheer force of Norcross’ personality and record signify that he will be a crucial player in the race to pick the next Governor of New Jersey.

One thing about Norcross is that he has the word pragmatist tattooed on his neck, figuratively, at least. Theoretically, South Jersey already has their candidate, Sweeney. But Sweeney is a tough sell to some Democratic primary voters – as Senate President, he’d have been a more formidable contender for North and Central Jersey lines – and Norcross either needs to find more support north of I-195 or decide if it’s in his best interests to go down with his friend or bail on him.

Perhaps most importantly, Norcross’s ability to assemble massive war chests remains intact. Some of the building trades unions that are part of the South Jersey Democratic machine wield the kind of gargantuan numbers that could make even Josh Gottheimer blush.

Local control over the Camden County government is firm. The county has no GOP mayors, and Republicans haven’t won a countywide election since 1990. After upset Democratic losses in Gloucester two years ago, Norcross took a control election most people thought he would lose seriously, calling the Can-Do Club into action and narrowly holding on. The loss of county government in Cumberland was less a reflection of Norcross and more about the burgeoning Republican kingmaker, State Sen. Michael Testa, Jr.

One thing Norcross can’t do anything about is that parts of South Jersey are simply becoming more conservative and increasingly Republican. Some of his branches may not be in business ten years from now. Salem County, admittedly the size of Old Bridge, was controlled by Democrats as
recently as 2018; now it’s solid red. And it’s unclear whether Burlington, which converted from red to blue in six years, is a sovereign county or a territory of the Camden machine.

A move to help Mercer County Executive Brian Hughes win a sixth term fizzled early; so did an overt action to flip a Middlesex Senate seat by trying to recruit Wayne DeAngelo to challenge Linda Greenstein in the Democratic primary. Still, Team Norcross had done relatively little by the time Hughes, with 22% of the vote at his party’s convention, bowed out.

For Norcross, 2023 is a critical year requiring heavy investments with no guarantee of success.

His greatest challenge may be in the 4th district (Gloucester-Camden), where Democratic State Sen. Fred Madden is retiring after 20 years. Republican Jack Ciattarelli carried the district in the 2021 governor’s race. The 1st district Senate seat, occupied by then-Democrat Jeff Van Drew for eleven years, is now safely in Testa’s column. That means Norcross needs to pick up legislative seats in the all-Republican 2nd, 3rd, and 8th districts. He’ll also need to defend Gloucester again and maybe even invest in sheriff, surrogate, and county commissioner races in Cumberland.

Recently, Norcross cut his ties to Senate President Nicholas Scutari, whom he helped obtain the job just hours after Sweeney lost his own Senate seat.

Norcross isn’t all about politics these days. His business interests are expanding to turning a local bread-baking business he bought from former Atlantic County Commissioner Frank Formica into a national brand. He seems to be enjoying some success as an activist shareholder in a bid to take complete control of Republic First Bank.
People Who Thought LeRoy Jones, Jr. wanted to become Democratic State Chairman simply as a capstone to an exceptional political career should rethink their position, since Jones’s political power is on a rapid upward trajectory.

Jones knows how to play the game of New Jersey politics with quiet elegance, mastering an ability to build a consensus among Democrats in his hometown of East Orange; in Essex County, where he’s been county chairman for nearly a decade; and in most regions of the state. He also knows how to be strategically theatrical when he needs to be.

It was as the Democratic Chairman of the Legislative Apportionment Commission that Jones excelled, drawing a deal map that, despite a possible path to a Republican majority, will likely see continued Democratic control — and maybe even Democratic gains this year.

Jones is already reaping his commission on the map he helped draw. After Ronald Rice retired for health reasons last year after nearly 36 years in the Senate, Jones was easily able to install an ally, Renee Burgess, into the 28th district Senate seat. Next year, he’ll gain a second seat after protégé Britnee Timberlake moves up to the Senate in the newly-drawn 34th district.

In the 27th, Jones appears positioned to get rid of his longtime political foe, State Sen. Nia Gill. The new district he drew put her into a primary against State Sen. Richard Codey, a former governor, that she is unlikely to win. That settles a 20-year grudge that included Jones’ own bid to unseat Gill, then a freshman senator, in the 2003 primary. In a partnership with popular Essex County Executive Joe DiVincenzo, Jones has already completed a partial makeover of the Essex legislative delegation, with three open Assembly seats in safe Democratic districts. Jones is making the group younger and more diverse.

Jones is extraordinarily close to Gov. Phil Murphy, Senate President Nicholas Scutari, Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, and New Jersey’s two United States Senators, Bob Menendez and Cory Booker. The lieutenant governor of New Jersey, Sheila Oliver, also lives in East Orange and is a longtime friend. That benefits him as a party leader and a principal at 1868 Public Affairs, one of the top lobbying firms on State Street.

Jones, DiVincenzo and Essex Chief of Staff Phil Alagia have worked hand-in-hand to maintain peace at the county level. There hasn’t been a civil war in Essex in 21 years.

Essex is a Democratic stronghold, where Jones has helped his party gain control of some suburban towns that were once solidly Republican. In 2022, North Caldwell elected a Democratic mayor and took a majority on borough council seats for the first time ever. Republicans countered with a Republican mayor and council majority in Caldwell. Jones is all-in for Mikie Sherrill for Governor in 2025 if she decides to run. He’s been a cheerleader for Sherrill since she emerged on the political scene in 2018 to flip a congressional seat Republicans held for 34 years. A Sherrill governorship might quickly propel Jones even higher on the list.

For a person who has worked his way up the political ladder, from East Orange Administrator to Essex County Freeholder to Deputy Minority Leader of the New Jersey State Assembly – he was a progressive leader in a centrist Democratic caucus – the election of Sherrill might actually be the capstone of Jones’ 30+ years in New Jersey politics.
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Pictured above:
Sean M. Spiller
President (center)
Steve Beatty
Vice President (right)
Petal Robertson
Secretary-Treasurer (left)
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HELEN MEYNER MIGHT have served two terms in Congress, but Tammy Murphy is undoubtedly the most politically influential First Lady in New Jersey history.

Murphy remains a significant force in state government as a true partner of the governor. She has a seat at the table when major policy decisions are made. She participates in discussions over significant appointments. And her influence would likely expand if her key ally and friend, Chief of Staff George Helmy, departs before the end of the term.

While the governor remains the state’s salesman-in-chief, Tammy Murphy is consumed by the details. Murphy has taken on an increasingly heavy workload, becoming personally involved in Netflix’s $850 million plan to build a 300-acre film and television production studio at Fort Monmouth. In January, she played that role during a whirlwind promotional tour of New Jersey in meetings with TV and film studio executives in Los Angeles.

Murphy is a forceful advocate for her signature issue: reducing maternal mortality in New Jersey by 50% over the next five years and eliminating racial disparities in birth outcomes. She remains active in a foundation formed to help families affected by the pandemic. In New Jersey, the first lady has noticeably increased her public speaking schedule.

She was the driving force behind her husband’s potential White House bid, ensuring an apparatus was in place if Joe Biden had decided not to run. Still, Murphy is hardly a lame-duck first lady: people mention her as a candidate for elected or appointed office in the future.

Tammy Murphy continues to be the top Democratic fundraiser nationally in New Jersey. With her husband serving as chairman of the Democratic Governors Association in 2023, she will raise money to re-elect a Democratic governor in Kentucky and maybe even help Elvis Presley’s cousin win a gubernatorial race in very red Mississippi.
IT’S BECOME A sort of tradition to begin our justification for including Gov. Phil Murphy’s chief counsel, Parimal Garg, as the first paragraph: Every piece of legislation that passes the legislature touches his hands, and his review will largely determine whether it becomes a law or faces a veto. Every Supreme Court Justice, Superior Court, Administrative Law Judge, Workers’ Compensation Court Judge, and county prosecutor nominated by the governor will be vetted by his office. Garg can blackball a judicial aspirant and, in some cases, has the power to block a sitting judge from getting tenure. Decisions involving complex legal strategies, like New Jersey’s move to exit the bi-state waterfront commission that was heard this year by the U.S. Supreme Court, all involved Garg.

Garg maintains a low public profile that befits his quiet persona, but inside the Office of the Governor, he is a force to be reckoned with. He’s a world-class policy wonk and a genuine political nerd, beginning as a teenager, not that there’s anything wrong with that. Murphy and his chief of staff, George Helmy, trust him implicitly and rely on his judgment. People who work with Garg say he’s the consummate team player and a brilliant lawyer.

For better or worse, it helps that Garg and Murphy share the same ideology. Garg passionately believes in the same social justice issues that Murphy espouses. He’s also taken a particular interest in nominating a diverse pool of judges to make the judiciary more representative of the state; if that has slowed the filling of judicial vacancies, Garg does not apologize.

A Harvard Law School graduate – it’s noteworthy that Supreme Court Justice Rachel Wainer Apter is the only Harvard law alum to make it to the bench on Garg’s watch – Garg spent a year with a giant New York law firm before becoming Chief Justice Stuart Rabner’s law clerk. From there, passing up what was probably wads of money, he took a low-paying job in the Murphy for Governor policy shop at a time when Murphy was, at best, in third place. That led to him becoming Matt Platkin’s deputy counsel in 2018 and his successor in 2020.

The chief counsel has become increasingly significant over the last 50 years, with Cary Edwards creating a large in-house law firm with one client, the Governor of New Jersey. Garg, widely expected to leave the same day Murphy does, is set to break the record for the longest-serving chief counsel in October 2024. Edwards, who retired after four years to become attorney general, holds that record. He’s already the first chief counsel to transcend two terms since 1966. And in the record-holder category, no one has written more executive orders, many due to the pandemic, and some through a liberal interpretation of a policy to fly flags at half-staff to honor a deceased state legislator.
IT SEEMS LIKE Kevin O’Toole is playing professional Whack-A-Mole every day, but when you think about it, it’s not a challenging game if you’ve memorized the patterns or written the code.

A former state senator from Essex County, O’Toole has been the chairman of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, a behemoth bistate transportation agency with an $8.3 billion budget larger than eight U.S. states, since 2017. That’s a pretty good powerful gig for a Republican to hold through the first six years of a Democratic governor, with no apparent expiration date on his tenure.

During a recent meeting of the Senate Judiciary Committee, a panel he once served on, three of Gov. Phil Murphy’s nominees for Port Authority commissioner up for confirmation – including the governor’s chief of staff, George Helmy – made O’Toole the topic of the confirmation. Senator after senator, Democrats and Republicans, asked the same question: will they support O’Toole’s continuation as chairman. They all said yes.

O’Toole hasn’t just survived; he’s thrived. With a deep bench of relationships that transcend party affiliations and without the encumbrances of having to run for office, O’Toole is now more powerful than ever. He has no problem navigating his way through the most treacherous of terrain. New Jersey’s elite turns to O’Toole for advice and counsel. Everyone in New Jersey will quickly and anxiously return his call as if it were no bother.

Along with Tom Scrivo, a former chief counsel to the governor, O’Toole has built a hugely successful new law firm with an enormous reach and a reputation for competence. He’s won plaudits for his philanthropy.

He has also developed a reputation as a master of paying forward the generosity others have shown him. Modeling himself after people like Joseph Minish, John V. Kelly, and Stephen Adubato, Sr., O’Toole has mentored an enormous number of officeholders and operatives that have become part of his collection of friends. His former chief of staff, Al Barlas, is on a path to capturing the 40th district seat in the State Assembly that he once held.

By the way, as Port Authority chairman, O’Toole has now shepherded an extraordinarily consequential project to completion with the opening of a new one million square foot, $2.7 billion Terminal A at Newark Liberty International Airport. Now he’s already at work on a new Terminal B. Those are the kind of massive generational missions that will define O’Toole’s legacy long after his career ends.
IN A WAY, the baseball equivalent of Bill Castner would be if the Pirates lost one of their best players to the Yankees after the 1960 World Series. Castner was once a star player for George Norcross and his team of South Jersey Democrats; now he’s part of the inner circle of teams outside the Norcross orbit, including Gov. Phil Murphy and Middlesex County Democratic Chairman Kevin McCabe.

These days, Castner is in the room for significant political decisions at the highest levels. Tactical skills he learned from Norcross, and his mentor, former Assembly Speaker Joseph Roberts, and honed during his time as chief counsel to Gov. Jon Corzine, are now used to help move significant pieces of legislation through Trenton. With an astonishing ability to understand the confluence of politics and public policy, powerful elected officials count on Castner to run the traps on complicated issues. On issues related to gun safety, Castner’s reach extends to the highest levels of national firearm control advocates. Castner has gotten by on his brains in a state where a strategic thinker can go far.

He started in an entry-level government job drafting bills for the non-partisan New Jersey Office of Legislative Services, and then clerked for a New Jersey Supreme Court Justice and a presiding state appellate court judge. At age 34, Castner became the executive director of the Assembly Majority Office; within the next four years, he became the governor’s top lawyer and commissioner of the State Commission of Investigation. Now, at age 50, he’s a partner at one of the state’s most influential law firms, where clients turn to him to navigate complex regulatory, business, and ethics issues. And he mentors some of the most powerful government lawyers in the state.

Now a veteran of three decades inside the political arena, Caster is the keeper of extensive institutional knowledge that fuels his role as a powerbroker. While it may never be said publicly, there’s a decent chance that Norcross will view Castner as the one who got away. Part of Castner’s secret sauce is a special brand of social skills; the Yiddish word would be haimish since he wields his power in the most unpretentious way. Those talents have allowed him to collect a wide array of long-term friendships, often behind the scenes, that provide him access to the most influential people in New Jersey. He’s also demonstrated remarkable resilience; to use another baseball metaphor that is only appropriate for one of the most successful softball coaches in the history of Trenton’s Golden Dome League, Castner is a guy who gets on base and drives in runs.
THE MOST SENSIBLE way to begin a conversation about Ed Oatman is to explain what a county manager is, especially since New Jersey has just one. Oatman is essentially the county executive, except he doesn’t have to run for office. He runs the day-to-day operations of Union County, overseeing a budget of more than half-billion dollars and nearly 3,000 employees.

Despite that, his real power comes from his role as the person who is closest to the second most powerful person in state government, Senate President Nicholas Scutari. Scutari may have a wide circle of friends and acquaintances, but there is no one whose counsel he relies on more than Oatman, his former chief of staff. Perhaps more than anyone else, Oatman has the ability to move Scutari where he needs to be politically on substantive policy issues. That puts Oatman in, as they say, the room where it happens.

Oatman has also taken the lead in helping Scutari forge relationships with political insiders across the state. If Scutari secures a second term as Senate President – he’s the favorite to do so – Oatman deserves to take a chunk of the credit for that.

Much of Oatman’s success stems from a reputation as a smart, competent, and fair guy with an uncanny ability to see the forest through the trees. He’s good at spotting those who overstate what they can deliver. People think he’s easy to work with; in a business with an unusually high number of toxic people, Oatman has been able to leverage his ability to remain calm and measured. But make no mistake, Oatman can deliver a lethal blow when needed.

Oatman has been a top player in New Jersey politics for the last 20 years as a veteran legislative staffer and Democratic operative. He continues to be one of the leading political consultants in the state. It’s not hard to imagine him as chief of staff to the Governor of New Jersey in the future; indeed, on the few times Phil Murphy and Sheila Oliver are out of state at the same time, he sort of is.
THERE ARE STILL some old-timers in New Jersey politics that remember Gary Taffet as the kid who worked in the State Assembly and then helped James E. McGreevey become mayor of Woodbridge in 1991 – and the governor a decade later. Now Taffet himself is a veteran of the political arena, with plenty of scars and medals to prove it. He’s an insider’s insider.

His experience in campaigns and government, which included a stint as chief of staff to the governor, has allowed the still-young 56-year-old head of a major insurance company to become an influential powerbroker in New Jersey politics. Over the past few years, Taffet has become an invaluable advisor to Gov. Phil Murphy’s political and governmental teams and occupies a seat toward the head of the table of the Middlesex County Democratic organization, which has become one of the premier political organizations in the state. He helped mastermind Craig Coughlin’s campaign for Assembly Speaker; Taffet is one of Coughlin’s most trusted advisors. His tentacles extend far beyond Middlesex, into Hudson and Bergen counties, and throughout the rest of the state – even in parts of South Jersey where his competition in the insurance business is sometimes unwelcome.

Like most people who occupy the top ten slots on the power list, Taffet possesses a keen intellect, a natural instinct for politics, a strong understanding of public policy, and a willingness to build a consensus. That’s one of the reasons hugely important people set their schedules to accommodate Taffet. These days, few critical decisions about the direction of the state are made without someone running the idea by Taffet.

Back in 2002, in his first year as McGreevey’s chief of staff, a PoliticsNJ Power List – the third to be compiled in New Jersey -- ranked Taffet at number two. Of the top ten that year, only Taffet and George Norcross (he was number three) remain in the Top 10 on power lists published 21 years apart. That’s a remarkable feat that evinces Taffet’s strengths and abilities now and then.
CWA thanks those elected officials who fight for working families and share our union values!

At all levels, New Jersey needs more leaders who support collective bargaining and expanding the bargaining rights of all workers.
WHEN PEOPLE in New Jersey politics hear that 825 is getting involved in a race, they sit up and take notice. That’s because Greg Lalevee doesn’t fool around. His decision to back someone means he’s all in, not just partially involved. But his real clout doesn’t come because he spends money on campaigns – which he does, a lot of it – but because he’s a relatively young labor leader with old-school values: his word means everything. So when Lalevee gives you his marker, it’s good for life.

AS A SUBURBAN high school student not that many years removed from his bar mitzvah, Matt Klapper met Cory Booker, then a Newark city councilman. He came to work for Booker at City Hall, and then in the United States Senate. Now Klapper spends his days sitting in a room with U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland, for whom he is chief of staff, undoubtedly seeing things that nobody else on this list sees, and playing three-dimensional chess in the most unimaginable circumstances with brains and dignity.
IN THE NEW JERSEY political arena, there is nobody Cory Booker listens to more closely than Mo Butler, who is his eyes, ears, and sounding board in his home state. Butler has also extended his influence into the Statehouse – he’s close to Chief of Staff George Helmy – and at the White House, where a bunch of ex-Booker aides he mentored now advise the President of the United States. He also serves as chairman of the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority, which gets a cut of casino revenues and then doles out a huge amount of money.

SEAN SPILLER IS the mayor of Montclair and a potential candidate for the 2025 Democratic nomination for governor, but his real power comes as the head of the New Jersey Education Association, the state’s largest public employee union and one with a sometimes unfathomable amount of money available to influence elected officials and voters. Spiller gets along well with the governor and the state’s legislative leadership and has picked and chosen his battles well. He’s more reserved than some of his predecessors – with Phil Murphy in office, he can do that – but he’s not afraid to twist arms as a stealth advocate for public school teachers.
15  **PAUL JULIANO**

Bergen County Democratic Chairman

**AS BERGEN COUNTY** Democratic Chairman, Paul Juliano is at the pinnacle of a political career that started at the lowest rung on the ladder at a young age. Now he runs a political machine in New Jersey’s largest county, where Democrats control almost everything they can, even in places that ought to be more politically competitive. Juliano excels at coalition building, managing an organization that deftly avoids infighting common in other parts of the state. The governor had enough confidence in him to make Juliano the next president and CEO of the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority.

16  **TIM HILLMANN**

Deputy Chief of Staff to the Governor

**GEORGE HELMY’S** decision to recuse himself from dealing with senators while awaiting confirmation to a Port Authority commissioner seat was risky; it was entirely possible that the Senate liked dealing with Tim Hillmann better. The son of a journalism legend and a longtime staffer to U.S. Senator Bob Menendez, Hillmann plays a critical role as a liaison between the governor’s office and legislators and other key elected officials. He shepherds gubernatorial appointees. Murphy and Helmy have confidence in him.
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RUNNING GEORGE NORCROSS’ political operation is no easy task, but data-driven Mickey Quinn has figured out new ways to save elections, like retaining control of the Gloucester County Board of Commissioners in 2022. Norcross trusts him because he’s unwavering in his loyalty, and likes him because he knows how to deliver a no-nonsense analysis of the political landscape. His influence in South Jersey continues to grow.

THERE’S A POINT WHERE Steve DeMicco and Brad Lawrence will wind up in the Power Hall of Fame. No Democrat has won a statewide election without them in decades, and the longtime business partners are frequently consulted by the governor’s team on major messaging decisions.
19  **BRENDA N GILL**  
President, BGill Group

**THERE’S NOBODY ELSE** (well, almost nobody else) who understands just how tough a business Jersey politics is than Brendan Gill. Despite a flurry of people who have tried to trip him up, he’s still standing and flourishing with a successful business — and a wife who appears headed to the State Assembly. And increasingly, his influence shows that all politics is local: Montclair, the progressive kingdom where he serves as Democratic chair, is the second-highest vote-producing town in Essex County.

![Photo: Kevin Sanders for the New Jersey Globe](image1)

20 **MICHAEL SOLIMAN**  
Partner, Mercury

**FOR A KING**, it’s an heir and a spare; for Mike Soliman, it’s a United States Senator and a Congressman. He is the top New Jersey advisor to Bob and Rob Menendez, and others in Hudson County. Members of Congress, state legislators, important county chairs, and prospective candidates for federal judgeships seek out his counsel in some of the toughest of political situations.

![Photo: Mercury](image2)
**21 Al Barlas**
Essex County Republican Chairman

**THIS IS PROBABLY** Al Barlas’ last year on the Power List since he’s likely headed to the State Assembly. The map being run in 40 legislative districts in the state has his name on it, and he is already in the room on major strategic decisions in the state where major political figures seek out his advice.

---

**22 Frank Spencer**
Second General Vice President, United Brotherhood of Carpenters

**ONCE UPON A TIME,** Frank Spencer was a Camden County Freeholder, and while his local ties remain strong, this smart and tough labor leader is now the number two guy at the United Brotherhood of Carpenters, where he has a seat at the table as a national leader.
LESS THAN TWO years ago, Jack Ciattarelli was nearly elected governor. He is laser-focused on 2025 when he wants to take the nearly out of his description. He remains well-connected among New Jersey Republicans who constantly seek his guidance.

TIM LYDON GAVE up the top Senate staff post to become a Superior Court Judge and then left the judicial career on an upward trajectory to return to the legislature. He’s smart, seasoned, mature, and has Senate President Nick Scutari’s full confidence.
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AFTER YEARS OF running Assembly campaigns – no one in New Jersey history has won more seats – Michael Muller has refocused his energies on taking on Democratic candidates and causes outside his adopted home state. But still, he remains a power player in South Jersey, with huge amounts of influence over lawmakers across the state.

PHIL ALAGIA ISN’T just the chief of staff to the most powerful County Executive in New Jersey; after more than 20 years at Joe DiVincenzo’s side, he’s essentially the Vice County Executive. No governmental action in Essex County happens without him, and he’s respected and well-liked among high-ranking political leaders across the state.
27 KEVIN DRENNAN
Managing Director, Mercury

IN HIS POST-government career – he ran the State Senate when Steve Sweeney was Senate President – Kevin Drennan continues to flourish as he uses two decades of connections and contacts to serve his new private sector clients. He remains a valuable insider in Democratic politics.

28 STEVE SWEENEY
General Vice President of the International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Ironworkers; President, Iron Workers District Council of Philadelphia and Vicinity

AFTER 20 YEARS in the State Senate – twelve of them as Senate President, the second most powerful position in state government – Steve Sweeney returned to civilian life this year. He’s expected to run for Governor in 2025, but in the meantime, he still has much sway in state government and in South Jersey local politics.
DAN BRYAN REMAINS a key member of Gov. Phil Murphy’s inner circle, something that rarely happens after people depart the Murphy orbit. He’s building a blossoming consulting firm and has emerged as a key advisor to Middlesex County Democrats. With a reputation for understanding what works – and what doesn’t – he’s more powerful now than when he worked in the governor’s office.

BILL SPROULE isn’t a household name in politics, and that’s probably by design. But his ability to influence elections through a humungous war chest and an army of union members makes him extraordinarily influential up and down New Jersey.
LIKE DAN BRYAN, Joe Kelley remains close to the governor even after his recent departure as deputy chief of staff. He’s quickly building a consulting practice and serving as a younger-than-usual Port Authority commissioner, and his work as Phil Murphy’s top economic development advisor will allow him to only grow his influence.

GOV. PHIL MURPHY will never admit it publicly, but Kevin Brown is probably his favorite labor leader, now that Hetty Rosenstein is retired.
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14TH AMENDMENT UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION RATIFIED JULY 28, 1868
33 Franceline Ehret

New Jersey State Director, Communications Workers of America

The smart and sensible union leader has strong connections in the governor’s office and with legislative leaders.

34 Dale Florio and Al Gaburo

Princeton Public Affairs Group

The Somerset County duo together run one of the most successful lobbying firms in the state. Their ability to play a key role in Jack Ciattarelli’s campaign for governor while maintaining ties to Gov. Phil Murphy’s office is a testament to their abilities and professionalism.
CHRIS RUSSELL CONTINUES to land key Republican campaign clients as he prepares to try to elect Jack Ciattarelli governor for a third time. Last year, his business partner, Mike Lawler, was elected to Congress, unseating the sitting DCCC chairman – another feather in Russell’s hat.

HUDSON COUNTY politics is a complex world, and as a trusted advisor to North Bergen Mayor/State Sen. Nicholas Sacco, Joey Muniz continues to exercise much influence even as people wait behind dark corners with their daggers.
THE CALM, STEADY AND SMART Democratic strategist has the ear and respect of the man occupying the second-most powerful job in the state, Senate President Nicholas Scutari.

ASSEMBLY SPEAKER Craig Coughlin relies on Seth Hahn’s leadership to negotiate key state decisions and put together a coalition of 41 Democrats in the lower house to support them.
**39 **

CRAIG GUY

Chief of Staff to the Hudson County Executive

THIS WILL ALMOST certainly be the last year on the Power List for Craig Guy, who will step out of his role as a staffer to become a principal as Tom DeGise’s successor as Hudson County Executive.

**40 **

RICHARD MAROKO

President, NY/NJ Hotel and Gaming Workers Union; Recording Secretary and General Counsel of the Hotel Trades Council, AFL-CIO

MONTCLAIR’S RICH MAROKO is still more influential in New York, where the center of his union’s power remains, but his clout in New Jersey continues to expand.
THE HEAD OF the umbrella group of building trades unions is never someone politicians want to piss off.

ANGELO GENOVA HAS become a legend for his legal acumen and street smarts, and he's a sure bet for a berth in the Power List Hall of Fame down the road.
**THE TITULAR LEADER** of the state's grassroots progressive organizations, Sue Altman continues to wield influence over elections, and could become the next congresswoman from New Jersey's 7th district.

**SUE ALTMAN**
State Director, New Jersey Working Families

**RAJ PARIKH**
Partner, Genova Burns

**THE INCREDIBLY SMART** and savvy election lawyer has made himself a valuable advisor to the very top of New Jersey's political elite.
45  **JUSTIN BRAZ**

Assistant Commissioner of Transportation

THE RESPECTED POLITICAL tactician moved from being a top aide to the governor to being a force at the New Jersey Department of Transportation, which is only adding to his already impressive skill set.

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46  **DENNIS ZEVELOFF**

Chief Policy Advisor to the Governor

SMART AND DETAIL-ORIENTED, Dennis Zeveloff is at the center of policy decisions made by the Governor of New Jersey.
CONGRATULATIONS TO THE NEW JERSEY GLOBE ON A SUCCESSFUL YEAR AND TO THE 2022 POWER LIST HONOREES.

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NICK FIXMER
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ONE OF THE principal cartographers for Democrats in redistricting, Scott Snyder is inside the room for every major decision made by Middlesex County Democrats.
WHEN IT COMES to politics, Mark Longo is the guy who makes the trains run on time at one of the state's most politically potent labor unions.

STEVE AYSCUE IS the man who can find a needle in a haystack. He's ferociously loyal and prepares the most thorough opposition research book in the state.
50 CHARLES WOWKANECH
President, New Jersey AFL-CIO

THE POPULAR LABOR leader has led the New Jersey AFL-CIO since 1997, and he's closing in on the 27-year record held by his predecessor, Charles Marcianite.

51 AMOL SINHA
Executive Director, American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey

RESPECTED BY JUDGES, prosecutors, legislators, and the governor, Amol Sinha plays a key role in passing new social justice legislation, and fighting old laws he believes to be unfair.
THE MAN WITH the late Hoboken mayor’s yardstick to measure snow in a blizzard is the most powerful journalist in New Jersey because when he covers something, millions of people see it.

WHEN IT COMES to health care policy and many other issues, Laurie McCabe is about as good as they come. That's why Senate Health Committee Chairman Joe Vitale and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin rely on her so strongly.
AFTER MORE THAN 20 years in New Jersey politics, Kevin Hagan is still someone important people rely on to get things done.

IF IT WASN’T FOR Steve Adubato, Jr. and the public television programming he provides, the people of New Jersey would have no way to learn about the intricate details.
FROM SECAUCUS to Chicago, Phil Swibinski continues to be a reliable tactician of modern political campaigns, and he does so without bringing the kind of stress and drama that others in his business are known for.

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THE BEST CAMPAIGN manager in the history of Union Hill School, Donald Scarinci is a man of gravitas and a treasure trove of institutional knowledge.

IT’S HARD TO BELIEVE it’s only been six years since she Saily Avelenda was working for a bank and just learning how politics works; now she’s a tough and seasoned operative. And it’s still likely that if Rodney Frelinghuysen saw her walking down the street, he’d hide under a parked car for his own safety.
SMARTER, MORE likable, and better looking than Bill Spadea, it’s entirely fair to wonder why Matt Rooney isn’t running for governor.

PATRICK MURRAY is smart and, more often than not, right. That’s why people across America listen to him.
A FIERCE ADVOCATE for the men and women of his union, Patrick Colligan won’t hesitate to call out powerful people for being wrong – and have their backs when they are right.

A VETERAN OF New Jersey politics, Artie Cifelli is the kind of loyal guy you want fighting with you in the trenches. He’s the person you want to be with you on game day – and on your day off.
The secret of Bill Stepien’s success is that he wants to win, and does it by seeing a path others miss and then sticking to his plan with the greatest possible amount of intensity.
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A S A K E Y A D V I S O R to Cory Booker, Josh Gottheimer, and Paul Juliano, Adam Silverstein has amassed considerable influence as a capable and thoughtful Democratic strategist.
WITH TWO DECADES of experience, Sean Darcy is a solid Democratic strategist and communicator with an impressive roster of clients and an ability to deliver.

ONE OF THE best Republican strategists in the state and the lead GOP tactician on congressional redistricting, Harrison Neely started out as Tom Kean Jr.’s driver sixteen years ago. Now he’s the congressman-elect’s top political advisor and the first GOP consultant to oust an incumbent New Jersey Democratic House member in twelve years.
NEW JERSEANS look to the incredibly well-trained Matt Friedman for his unbridled satiric sharpness and his must-read morning POLITICO Playbook that keeps the state informed.

THE SKY IS the limit for this amazingly talented Democratic operative who will probably be number one on the power list someday.
IN A WORLD WHERE ways to communicate with voters change rapidly, Joshua Henne has figured out how to balance modern methods with old-school tactics that still work.

A VETERAN OF many political battles – most of which he’s won – Sean Kennedy has statewide connections that give him access to many of New Jersey’s political powerhouses. This year, Rowan is preparing to grow new legislators rather than inherit old ones.
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2022: NY Congressional District 17
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LIKABLE BUT tough, Janice Fuller is now one of the leaders of New Jersey’s emerging renewable energy business, where she wields an economic driver that’s worth billions to the state. As the Democratic chair of congressional redistricting, she had the confidence of the most powerful party leaders in the state.

BILL MAER HAS been around for a long time and has built a reputation as a dependable advocate for his clients up and down New Jersey.
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2022 WAS THE Year of Laura Matos: she is now chair of the Pinelands Commission, served on the Legislative Apportionment (replacing Steve Sweeney), and was then named partner of Mike DuHaime’s new public affairs firm. Matos is a leading voice for Latinas in New Jersey politics.
AFTER FOUR YEARS of mapping out Gov. Phil Murphy's communications plan, and a stint with the nation's leading gun control advocacy groups, Mahen Gunaratna has returned to Trenton to resume managing the governor’s message and media strategy.

IDIDA RODRIGUEZ has considerable experience in government and on the campaign side, which is why people turn to her to help solve their problems and navigate the treacherous waters of New Jersey politics.
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Patrick Colligan
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GOV. PHIL MURPHY relies on the political advice of his former deputy chief of staff, who has started his own public affairs and political consulting firm. Mike Delamater is the new Morris Democratic vice chairman – a long-term investment – and Murphy’s nominee as a commissioner of the New Jersey Turnpike Authority.

BILL SPADEA is using his morning drive-time platform and a grassroots political group to influence public policy in New Jersey – and maybe even seek the Republican nomination for governor in 2025.
**Eddie Donnelly**

President, New Jersey State Firefighters Mutual Benevolent Association

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**Harry Hurley**

Radio Host, WPG Talk Radio 95.5 FM

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WHEN YOU SEE Jack Carbone’s name attached to an election law matter against you, it’s not uncommon to say a few expletives under your breath. His institutional knowledge is why he represents most of the state’s county clerks.

THERE IS A generational shift of white-collar criminal defense and civil litigation lawyers in New Jersey and Leo Hurley is at the top of the list of people high-ranking politicos turn to for advice, either to keep them out of danger or help them when they find themselves in trouble.
Congratulations to all of the awardees on the New Jersey Globe 2022 Power List!

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**Senator Troy Singleton ’05**
District 7
94 MOLLIE BINOTTO

Vice President, SenaKozar Strategies

NOW A DEMOCRATIC political consultant, Mollie Binotto managed campaigns for Mike Sherrill in 2018 and Phil Murphy in 2021 and is widely respected in state and national Democratic circles for her political acumen.

95 MICAH RASMUSSEN

Director, Rebovich Institute for New Jersey Politics at Rider University

MICAH RASMUSSEN is the go-to guy for the media to comment on what’s happening in New Jersey politics – and what it means.
FROM OFF-THE-LINE county committee candidate to the chief of staff to the Governor, Jeff Michaels has demonstrated an ability to excel in politics and government for nearly 40 years. Now he runs an enormously successful lobbying shop.
Congratulations to All!

Dave Parano
Parano & Associates
Data Driven Politics for the Modern World
GOV. PHIL MURPHY’S former deputy chief of staff has re-emerged as an influential political player, mostly because he’s very good at the game.

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Congratulations to David Wildstein and The New Jersey Globe on another great year!

Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr., Essex County Executive

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Guillermo Artiles

Partner, Government Affairs Practice Chair, and Cannabis Practice Leader, McCarter & English

Once an assistant counsel to Gov. Phil Murphy, he’s a rising star in politics and law with an expansive Rolodex of connections.

Julie Roginsky

President, Optimus Communications

While taking a few steps back from New Jersey politics to work on her national group fighting non-disclosure agreements in the workplace, Julie Roginsky can still make her way into a New Jersey newspaper.
A TOP AIDE AND advisor to Rep. Mikie Sherrill for the last five years, Jackie Burns guided the North Jersey congresswoman to a 19-point victory in 2022. If Sherrill decides to run statewide, Burns will help decide who gets to sit in the room.
Building service residential workers have been the unsung heroes of the pandemic.

As the cities continue to grow, these workers need fair wages, good benefits, respect and dignity.

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