Sep 21 Gubernatorial Debate transcript

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EkwRQXskiVY>

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Thank you. Good evening, New Jersey. My name is Mikey Cheryl and I have a different kind of background, so I'm going to be a different kind of governor. I'm a former Navy helicopter pilot, federal prosecutor, member of Congress, and Jason and I are raising our four great kids. And so that's why I am laser focused on driving down costs for families like yours. I'm going to declare a state of emergency on day one, freezing your rate hikes. I'm going to demand transparency and accountability from our government to save you time and money. And for those of you that's been who have been following Jack's race, you've heard a lot of nonsense and you're going to hear a lot more tonight. But there's a clear choice. In 1990, Jack took his first of many votes to raise your taxes. That was the same year I took my first of many oaths to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. He'll support abortion bans. I'll support your personal freedoms. He'll do whatever Trump tells him to do and I will fight anybody to work for you. Thank you, Jack. [Applause] Jack Titterelli, it is your turn to deliver your opening statement. Jack Chedarelli. New Jersey, we need change. We need a hands-on CEO governor who's from New Jersey that knows exactly what needs to be done and is willing to do it. Overwhelmingly, New Jerseyians feel that we're heading the wrong direction. Here's why. There's an affordability in this crisis because of the taxes you pay and now because your electricity rates. There's a public education crisis in this state. We've slipped from 2 to 12 on the national report card because we no longer focus on critical life skills and vocational training. There's a public safety crisis in this state. Non-violent crime is through the roof. Breakins, car thefts, flash mobs in our malls and Jersey Shore. There's an overdevelopment crisis in this state where we're taking garden right out of the Garden State with all the overdevelopment. We're the worst place in the country in which to do business. These are the issues. My opponent will blame all these things on the president. Make no mistake, the party that's controlled our legislature for 25 years, the party that's controlled the executive branch for the eight years are the reason why we are today. I look forward to discussing my specific plans on how to fix New Jersey. Thank you both. Thank you both. All right, we're going to head over to our panel. Our first question comes from David Wildstein and it goes to Mikey Cheryl. Congressman, one of the things I've heard New Jerseyians say is that your campaign has been uh has had plenty of broad talking points, uh, but has been light on specific fixes to the state's problems. So, what do you say to people who question your mastery of state government issues and your desire to speak more about New Jersey uh, and how they'll deal with the White House and Congress than about local issues? So, I'm the only one that has a plan to actually take on the tough problems of New Jersey. In fact, Jack's been in office before, and a lot of the things he complains about, he was the architect of. But that's why I've committed to declaring a state of emergency on energy cost on day one to drive down your cost, to freeze rate hikes. I'm going to have a dashboard so you can see where your permitting is as we cut through red tape and regulatory issues so we can drive down cost. I'll make sure that we have a report card online so you can see exactly where your money goes and hold me accountable when the state's not performing well. So that's the kind of transparency, accountability, and cost savings I'm going to bring to government. Jack doesn't have a plan to do it because all he does is say that Trump's right. It's okay to drive up your tariffs. It's okay to have the one big beautiful bill which drives up your health care and utility costs. Not on my watch. [Applause] You just cited a campaign that's short on specifics and what you just got is 60 seconds of generalities and platitudes. My plan is very specific on how to fix New Jersey when it comes to affordability. How about we make all retirement income taxfree? How about we freeze property taxes once you hit 870? How about we allow you to deduct 100% of your property taxes on your New Jersey tax return? How about we make the first two years of income post high school, post college taxfree? so young people can get a start. How about we stop with all the overdevelopment by revisiting our Mount Laurel housing doctrine? How about we take the handcuffs off our police? These are the specifics that we could talk about on how to fix New Jersey. [Applause] Our next question. Our next question is just a production note. We lost our monitors out here. I'm not sure if the control room knows that or not, but our next question is go Micah Rasmusen and it goes to Jack Titerelli. When you first ran for governor, you were often critical of President Trump. Today, he says you've changed. What advice can you give sincere New Jerseyians who are closer to where you were in 2017 and say they can't look beyond the nation's border chief accepting a bribe or the F FCC silencing descent or those January 6 pardons for attacking our police? Well, **let's think about talk about what the president has done for New Jersey since he took office. He's put a temporary halt on wind farms off the Jersey shore. I'll make that permanent**. He's beating up He's beating up on the New York Democrats over their congestion pricing plan, which I think is an egregious money grab. We shouldn't be paying for their subway system. He's also quadrupled the salt deduction on our federal tax returns. The big beautiful bill also doubled the child care tax credit for those with young children. It also doesn't tax tips, overtime, and social security. It provides a magnificent tax credit for those that send their kids to private school. I want you to think about those four things. They're good for all New Jerseyians. She voted no. My opponent did on that bill. But make no mistake. Make no mistake. My job is to represent and advocate. That's our timer. I've got your timer. Okay. My job is to advocate for the 9.3 million citizens of this state. And I'll always do right by the citizens of this state, no matter who occupies the White House. Mr. I'm sure he would like you to focus on those four things because he doesn't want you to focus on this tariff plan which is putting small businesses out of business and freezing hiring from our large businesses. He doesn't want you to focus on the employment numbers or the fact that the deficit has gone up by 70 billion dollars in the year Trump's been in office. He doesn't want you to focus on the one big beautiful bill which is going to raise families utility costs by hundreds of dollars which is going to imperil the health care of one in three children which already now they're going after affordable care act. So they're taking away healthcare from people who have it healthcare insurance and then they're trying to drive up costs for people who already have the healthare insurance. So in every single way we're seeing costs go up on New Jersey families. And Jack just says he has nothing he disagrees with Donald Trump on. That's not leadership. This state needs real leadership and that's exactly what I'll do as governor. Our next question, Micah, are there chances for rebuttals? That wasn't it wasn't an attack. We're going to go on to our next question. Um, and I also want to ask the audience if we could refrain from applauding because every few seconds takes up time. Sophie has the next question going to Mikey Cheryl. Congresswoman, in recent years and months, politics has grown more divisive, leading to a rise in politically motivated threats and violence. Would you support legislation to make political violence a hate crime? And as governor, what would you do to keep political tensions from escalating? So, this is something I think about all the time, and everyone in elected office now faces this threat to themselves, but worse, to their families. And so we're all very concerned about it, which is why we advocated to the state to make sure not only myself, but Jack had more money to support his personal security and my family security as well. It's why we continue to work to uh fight against political hatred. And so we need to do more because in this nation, we should be able to have free speech. I've vowed to defend and fight for free speech my entire life, but it should never devolve into political violence. That is something I've also stood against my entire life. And I worry very much because now too many people are thinking to themselves, I'm not sure if I should go into political office. I'm not sure if I should run because I don't want to imperil my family. And that's why I continue to fight hard to protect people running to make sure we have free speech in this nation. And we always stand against political violence. Jack Tedelli, I think it's the responsibility of any public official and uh candidate for office to engage in rhetoric that doesn't divide us. My campaign has been about uniting us, not dividing us. I do think we need to take down the temperature a whole lot. So, I support the question was whether or not I support because a bill was recently introduced in the legislature by one of our Republican state senators whether or not to make political violence a hate crime and put some real legal teeth behind it. I don't think she answered the question. The answer to the question is yes. I believe that we should do that here in New Jersey. And again, I think we all have a responsibility to engage in rhetoric that doesn't divide us and doesn't promote hate. And this campaign from the very beginning has had a very positive energy about it. It's a campaign that's about uniting, not dividing. It's a campaign that's about bringing people together, not dividing us. It's a campaign that's about people, not power or politics. And so my opponent on Friday went down to Washington, voted yes on a resolution to celebrate Charlie Kirk's life, but then within minutes sent out a statement that basically condemned him. I think that was wrong. You can have 30 seconds to respond. That's a neat trick to say you don't want to divide people. and then in your answer bring up something that's very divisive. Here's the thing. I care deeply. I care deeply about this country. I stand against political violence. The videos that came out about after Charlie Kirk shooting were horrific. And I feel horrible because my kids have seen them. And so I can't even imagine how the Kirk family feels. And that should never happen to anyone because they speak out. And I also have stood up my entire life and I've taken numerous oaths up to and including offering to die for this country for free speech. And so I think it's fair to have free speech, but I think it should go to everyone to Jimmy Kimmel and to myself as well. Final word, Jackelli. 15 seconds. I ask the audience to please remain quiet. 15 seconds for you. She still hasn't answered your question. And we see this time and time in the campaign. Generalities, platitudes, ducking the direct question by not giving a direct answer. That's just not true. My direct answer is I voted to protect free speech. I voted to end political violence. I also think it's fair, Jack, to speak up when you disagree with something. And so if you want to stand up that Martin Luther King was a bad guy or that women should submit to their husbands, you Jack are welcome to do that. And I have the right to say that I disagree with it. Okay, we're going to we're going to move on now. We're going to move on to our audience. Our next question, we have a lot of questions to get to, is from Elisitia. She is a student at Ryder University from Brick. And that will go to Jack Chidarelli. So New Jersey has one of the highest property taxes and costs of living in the nation. What steps would you take to make the state more affordable for workingclass and middle class families? Now, thank you for that question very very much. So we know there's affordability in the crisis. We know that our state budget, it took 238 years to get to 36 billion and in eight years it's gone from 36 to 59 billion. And yet none of that investment has been made to make life more affordable. In fact, it's only become more unaffordable here in the state of New Jersey. So, there's a number of very specific proposals in my platform. We talked about a few already. Making all retirement income tax-free for our seniors because they worry about living out their lives in a home. Freezing property taxes once you hit 870 for life. Allowing seniors to deduct 100% of their property taxes on New Jersey tax return. Capping property taxes at 1% of the assessed value home if you're a first-time home buyer. making the first two years out of high school, the first two years out of college tax-free so you help get started here. These are just some of the things that we can do to make Jersey more affordable for everybody. And so, but what you'll also see is somebody that's going to be very responsive about the way we spend our money. I will be very responsibly and surgically reduce the size and cost of our state government to afford a tax cut for individuals and businesses. [Applause] Thank you. Um, I've been laser focused on driving down costs for New Jerseyians. Jack, on the other hand, has voted at every single level of government to raise your taxes. In fact, he's voted against over a billion dollar in property tax relief and he's supported Trump and implementing over $30 billion against property tax relief. So, in every way, he's raised costs on New Jerseyians. That's why I'm going to get into office and make sure I'm lowering them by sharing services in school administrative costs and municipal courts and continuing to hammer home the way in which we can support seniors with anchor and stay New Jersey so that they aren't here susceptible to the constant increases in property taxes. I'll continue to lower your cost and Jack's going to raise them at every level. 30 seconds Jack. So, a couple things about the um the anchor and state New Jersey program. I don't think somebody making $500,000 a year should get a property tax rebate in this state. Now, I I just that to me is not right. I think we should use the money to spread out. But let me say something else. I think it's insulting here in New Jersey when we take money out of your right-hand pocket, put some back in your lefthand pocket, and call it a fancy name. But one other thing about the affordability crisis, remember one thing that she'll never remind you of. The Democrats have controlled our state legislature for 25 years. The Democrats have controlled the executive branch, the governorship for eight years, and look where we are today. All right, we're going to go back to the audience. Our next question is coming from Frederick. Frederick is a professor here at Ryder University and he is from Hamilton. Frederick's question is going to go to Mikey Cheryl. How would you reduce the New Jersey tax burden on senior citizens? Thank you. This is something uh that as you just heard, Jack is against, but I am for reducing the property tax burden on our seniors because it's too expensive to stay here, watch your grandchildren grow, live on a fixed income when you constantly see your taxes going up. It's why I've been supportive of stay and anchor to make sure that our seniors can afford to stay here in retirement and stay with their families as opposed to moving out of our state. objected. This is starting to sound like a number of her commercials on TV. They're not completely truthful. Um, so a couple of things to be specific. Make all retirement income tax-free the way it is in Pennsylvania. Number one, freeze your property taxes for life once you hit age 70. Allow seniors to deduct 100% of their property taxes on their New Jersey tax return. Those are just some of the things that we can do across the state here in New Jersey. So, um, you're not hearing any specifics and, uh, again, the anchor program, stay New Jersey, they're in part gimmick. Why do we take money out of your right-hand pocket? Put some back in your left-hand pocket and then give it a fancy name. That's what the Democrats have been doing for years. I prefer not to take out of your pocket to begin with. And let me go as far as to say we need to simplify our income tax rates for everybody. Pennsylvania has a 3% flat tax. Ours is 10.75. I'm proposing three new tax brackets. 3%, 4%, and 5%. We need to be regionally competitive. We're losing people to Florida. We're losing people to Pennsylvania. We've got to stop it. You can have 30 seconds. So, talk about vague programs and talk about misleading statements. Here's Jack's proposal to raise cost on everything and food and clothing on the table. This is what he's talking about that he won't tell you. 10% increases on groceries in our state. This is exactly what he has continued to bring up since 2017. And then when he's called on it, he says, &quot;Oh, I just said we should put it on the table.&quot; We know it's on the table, Jack. We want it off the table. Final word, Jack, to our next question then. So, if any of you think I'm going to raise your sales tax to 10%, I got a bridge I want to sell you for about 50 cents. She knows it's a lie. They're trying to exploit you. They're trying to manipulate you. She knows she's in trouble in this campaign. So, this campaign is going to lie to you over and over again. Fasten your seat belts for the next 44 days because that's exactly what's going to happen. So, we're going to lower the overall tax burden for all New Jerseyians. You've heard me give you specifics for every class. We can do this if we're responsible with our spending. And I will cut the size and cost of the state government to afford a tax cut for everybody. Under Governor Cedarelli, everybody's tax burden will be lessened, not increased. Our next question, we're going back to the audience. We're going to Michael. Michael is an alum of Ryder University and from Lawrenceville. Michael, your question is going to Jack Chidarelli. Um, the back and forth blame on electricity rates has grown a little tiresome and frankly, I would like to hear a little more specifics because we all know that there are many factors that contribute to our rate increases. So, without blaming each other, what specifically you're going to do to tackle things like the grid operator, state mandates, and other impacts that rise our costs. So, Michael, I don't think it's blame when you're giving facts. And here are the facts. When Phil Murphy took office, we were an electricity exporter. We produced more electricity than we needed. He shut down shut down six different electricity generation plants. He put an unofficial moratorum on natural gas. He didn't expand our nuclear capabilities in South Jersey, zero carbon emissions. He didn't accelerate solar. talked to solar developers who want to use the rooftops of warehouses which is prime real estate for solar arrays. Didn't accelerate that. What he did do is he bet it all on wind. Now if he was from New Jersey and anybody who was from New Jersey would know that the Jersey Shore is sank sank here in this state. **Nobody wants wind farms off our Jersey shore.** Male, female, young and old, Republican, liberal, conservative liberal for different reasons. What I've said all along is I'll re reopen and repurpose the plants. **We'll expand our nuclear footprint in South Jersey. We will accelerate solar on the rooftops of our warehouses. And we're pulling out the regional greenhouse gas initiative.** That carbon tax initiative has been a failure. Air's no cleaner. Electricity is only more expensive. And we're not sending rateayer dollars to other states. By pulling out a Reggie, we can save half a billion dollars a year for rate. Dr. Thanks for the question. You know, anybody from New Jersey should know that this has been a long time in coming and that too many people have added to the problem. So whether it's PJM, the grid operator, or FK or BPU, uh whether it's **President Trump rolling back some of the initiatives on solar or adding $250 per family to your energy bill**, everybody at the table is at fault and they keep dumping the costs onto the rateayer here in New Jersey. That is why I'm freezing rate hikes on the rateayer. Because let's face it, some of our utility companies have made over a billion dollars in profits. And yet, our rateayers are constantly suffering. **So, I'm going to freeze those rate hikes by declaring a state of emergency. I'm going to add massive amounts of power into the grid**. Right now, we need to produce power here in our state because the market has been screwed up by PJM and because Virginia has a million data centers which are sucking all the power out of our market. So, we need to produce here lower cost here and stop putting the cost on the rateayers of New Jersey. Okay, Laura, our next question. There's a rebuttal allowed. We get 15 seconds each. That wasn't there wasn't an attack. So, we're going to go on to our next question. And our next question is Martha. Well, Our next question from Martha. She is a a writer, a professor writer from Oldbridge. How do you plan to lower rents in New Jersey? And I'm sorry, that goes to Mikey Cheryl. So, this is the number one thing I hear from people across the state when we're talking about affordability. People are saying that they're having too much trouble paying their mortgages, too much trouble paying their rent prices. And we know there are people colluding now in this state to raise rental prices. And we know Jack's not going to do anything about it because one of his biggest donors is actually being taken to court and sued on this very issue. But as governor, I'm going to fight for you. I'm going to make sure we're driving down rental prices, ending the collusion that goes on to drive them up, and continuing to bring more to the market so that people will have better rental prices here across the state. [Applause] So, you asked a very specific question. Let me give you a specific answer. Um, the reason why rents are going up is because property taxes are going up. The reason why rents are going up is because insuranceances are going up across the board. The reason why rents are going up is because in many cases, if the tenant doesn't pay electricity, the landlord does, and that's going up. These are all the reasons. And I know often times we talk about homeowners, but we forget that tenants feel the pain, too. Every time any one of those expenses goes up, it gets passed on to the tenant. I have a very specific plan on how to lower property taxes. We need a new school funding formula. A more equitable distribution of state aid to our schools will help lower the property tax from an insurance standpoint. We're such a bad business to do state bad state in which to do business. Businesses have left. We need more competition. We need more insurance companies to come back here. And under my plan, by pulling out of the regional greenhouse gas initiative, we could save a half a billion dollars in electricity on day one. Whether you pay that or the landlord pays that. The regional greenhouse gas initiative has been a failure. Been a failure. My opponent supports offshore wind. It's never going to be able to meet our energy needs and it's very, very expensive. Okay, we're going back over here. Our next question is coming from Joseph. Joseph is a student at Ryder University. Joseph, we are going to bring the microphone over. And uh he's a student from Ryder from Long Valley. And this question is going to Jack Chitterelli. Um, should people in my generation and younger have an expectation of privacy in their lives? I mean, we're living in an age of social media and location tracking for who knows what, you know, from people who knows where. So, should we have the same expectation of privacy that you and your opponent did when you were growing up? Yes. [Music] We're going to take that time and go to make the show. Hey, listen, man. I'm I'm all ears as to enhance is a constitutional right to privacy. And so I hear you loud and clear. We live in an age between the internet and everything else where people put all kinds of things on the internet that kind of invade our privacy. Um so whatever we can do to make sure people's right to privacy is enhanced and protected. I'm all ears on how best to do that. So Joseph, uh what year are you if I can ask? A senior. Okay. So, um, you went through COVID during school, um, like my kids did. And that's probably when you started to get online more and more because your classes were online and so much of your life was online. And that's when we sort of stopped really moving forward on how we protect kids online, for example. It's why I am going to put forward the Kids Online Safety Act, which was killed by the majority in the House, but I am going to make sure we're passing it here in the state so that kids can have better understanding of how to work online and we can keep them safe. There's a mental health crisis in our state. Uh we need to address it. I'm going to have more mental health counselors so that we can all work together to ensure people have that expectation of privacy because we have more coming. We've never appropriately addressed something called section 230 which holds providers liable and we now are looking at AI down the road and how that's going to bring a whole extra set of issues. So starting with the kids online safety act I'm going to work to make sure kids like you do have an expectation of privacy. Thank you. Okay. Our next is there is there an opportunity for further discussion on this issue? 15 seconds. Well, if if we're very very concerned about the welfare of our children, I do not support policy 5756. I don't think that school districts should be keeping secrets from parents. Okay? That's not protecting kids. And if we're concerned about protecting kids, I don't think that biological boys should be paying in girls sports. She opposes me on both of those issues. Did you turn to respond? Go ahead. Go ahead. So, I'm a mom of four kids. And as I mentioned to Joseph, our kids have gone through COVID. There are mental health issues related to that. We have learning loss because of it. Our kids are struggling. And that's why as parents, it's our job to make sure we're keeping our kids safe at every level. As a mom, I'm going to make sure we do that. Obviously, parents know their kids best and they need to be able to determine if there's something they want to opt out of in health class. Time. Thank you. Okay. Our next question is coming from Nancy. And I've been told I'm given permission to say that Nancy, you are 96 years old. 96 years old. And from And from Skilman, New Jersey, Nancy, your question. And that goes to Mikey Cheron. There might be other ways to describe me. [Applause] We all know that public education is such a vital part of what makes New Jersey strong. And so my question to both of to you is should school districts be combined to reduce property taxes? How about municipalities? If so, should mergers be compulsory given the fact they almost never happen voluntarily? Thank you very much. So, this is something that I know we have to do here in New Jersey because right now we have more municipalities than California and we have more school districts than municipalities. And it's raising costs on everybody. We have some school districts who have the whole administrative cost, all of the buildings, and yet they're not even running a K through2 school system. So, we do need to merge some of these school districts. We also need to make some county-based school systems. The ones that we have are some of the best performers in our state. And this is a way in which I think we can ensure we're getting great education to people while driving down property taxes, especially in those areas where we're not running a full K through 12 system. Thank you. [Applause] 564 towns. We are a home rule state and people love their home rule. Even though it might cost more in taxes, I do not believe their state government should force consolidation. That's up to the locals. But I tell you what, if you do consolidate or you do regionalize, Governor Cheddarelli will help incentivize that to make it easier. So if you all make that decision at the local level, we're going to provide incentives. When I was in the state legislature, Princeton Bureau and Princeton Township decided to become one. I worked with the administration at time to provide 100% of the one-time upfront costs to make that more feasible to fix public education. Ma'am, what we have to do, I think, is get back to the basics. Let's get a highquality education system here in New Jersey. You're never going to hear me say we have the best school system in the country because we don't. We've slipped from 2 to 12 on the National Report Card. We've got to get back to basics in teaching critical life skills and providing vocational training opportunities for our students with a more rigorous academic curriculum for our students. We need to get back there. So Mikey Cheryl, let me let me just ask a followup for clarification. Should there be compulsory uh consolidation? So I'd start by offering uh the carrot to help the areas that want to consolidate. But when there are areas that are not putting enough money into ed to students into educators into the buildings and then they are taking a lot of money in property taxes and from the state level then we'll have to start to look at compulsory movements. Laura, do I get another 15 seconds? Go ahead. So let me say something else. When a school system is failing and there are some reasonable metrics that tell us whether or not a school system is failing, there's got to be choice. That choice comes in the form of vouchers. that choice comes in the form of charter schools. My opponent opposes both. There's got to be choice when a school system is failing. I final thought, that's some more misinformation from my opponent. I've actually uh worked hard on charter schools. In fact, uh my lieutenant governor, Dr. Dale Caldwell, has been involved with charter schools, some uh high performing charter schools because I want to make sure that every child in this state has access to a fantastic education. Here are the facts of the matter. Phil Murphy's been in office for eight years and he's only approved one charter school and it was two weeks before the election in 2021 for political reasons. Okay. The Democratic nominee is owned by the NJA union leadership and they hate charter schools. Okay. And educational choice. Okay. We're moving on. Moving on to our next question. Our next question is coming from Olivia from Blackwood and our question goes to Jack Chitterelli. How will you address global warming's disproportionate effects on New Jersey's urban communities of color? Global warming. Yeah. Well, global warming, I've admitted I do think Mother Earth is sending us some powerful signals. I think human activity has a lot to do with that. But we need a rational transition to the future with regard to our energy. And I think that natural gas is a rational transition to the future, as is nuclear energy down in South Jersey. As is solar. We need an allabove approach. It's not just in our urban areas where the climate change is affecting us. The flooding that you see taking place in our suburban communities has a lot to do with the changes in the climate and it's adversely affecting the quality of life in many suburban communities that never used to flood before. But make no mistake, that flooding has a lot to do not just with the type of rain we get today. It has to do with overdevelopment. This is a big difference between the two parties. My opponent believes that we should have highdensity housing in all 564 towns. I don't believe that we should only have affordable housing, high density housing in a town that has infrastructure, mass transit, and um opportunities for jobs. If a town doesn't have infrastructure, mass transit, opportunity for jobs, why are we putting more idling cars on the road? [Applause] So, that is a great question. I sat in my first term um in Congress on science, space, and technology and I was the chairwoman of the environment subcommittee. And that, as you might remember, was the year we had the heat dome over Oregon, which put so many different people in danger as they weren't ready to handle it. We've seen flash flooding here in New Jersey, uh killing several people throughout the state. We've seen tornadoes and hurricanes like we've never seen before. Our climate is changing and we need to act because in too many of our urban areas we are seeing high incidences of asthma for example. So we know that we need to act quickly to protect our environment but to also ensure that we have better health outcomes in this state. And that's why as governor I'm going to make sure that we drive down carbon emissions, drive in massive amounts of power to the grid so we can decrease costs and ensure people are paying lower costs. Thank you, Laura. Can we have 15 each? 15 seconds and then our next question. Let me just say this. The way that the Democrats are doing highdensity housing in this state flies in the face of sustainability. They like to portray themselves as the pro- environment party, but there's nothing pro- environment about building highdensity housing in every one of our 564 towns. Final thoughts. Final thoughts. So, I'm really proud of my record here. I was actually a lead person passing the Great American Outdoors Act, which preserves open space across this country and right here in New Jersey. I also have h worked on projects and gotten money for the Bootin Reservoir, the Essex Hudson Greenway, ensuring that we're preserving open spaces while at the same time delivering on housing for people and ensuring that we are lowering carbon emissions in neighborhoods in urban areas. Okay, we have one more question from our studio audience before we're going to go to a commercial break. And that question is coming from John. John is a high school student from Edison, New Jersey. And John's question is going to be going to Mikey Cheryl. Congresswoman, as was said, I'm a high school student who commutes to New York City every single day for that high school. My question to you is, what is your plan to fix New Jersey Transit systemic issues of overcrowding, delays, and outdated infrastructure? Thank you so much. This is something I hear about a lot uh from my husband Jason who's in the audience tonight. He commutes into New York City all the time and he's quit coaching our kids soccer teams. Um he doesn't make it home for dinner. He often gives me frantic calls about whether or not I can drive our kids that night because he's not going to make it home in time. And so that's why I've been laser focused. In fact, in my first term, as Trump held infrastructure week every week and yet failed to fund the gateway tunnel project, I was called the tunnel obsessed congresswoman. And I'm proud to say we delivered on that on the most expensive infrastructure project in the nation, which is key to commuters here. And then when we were seeing summer of hell after summer of hell because the catinary wires were in the way, I demanded Amtrak keep up their rail system better because we utilize it in NJ Transit and got $300 million into Northeast Rail for catary wires. Now I'm on the port authority because they're not handling the wires underneath the tunnel well and we're seeing fire after fire after fire. So, I am going to continue to focus on our rail systems, on systems of transit across this state and make sure that we see updates and see better movement across our state. Thank you, sir. When I'm successful in transforming New Jersey, the hope would be that no one has to go out of state to get anything other than see a Broadway play. What I want to do here in New Jersey is something other states have done. We've got mass transit systems. It's not just trains. The Atlantic City Expressway is a mass transit system with tolls. Parkway and Turnpike are mass transit systems with tolls. New Jersey Transit is a transit system with revenue through fairs. Let's put them all under one roof called the Garden State Transportation Authority. Let's get rid of all these different authorities with all these different management structures. Let's put all under one roof. Better management, better accountability, one management structure, and we'll give it a dedicated revenue stream called the New Jersey State Budget. Okay? That's where we'll provide the funding. I think that'll be a much better job of managing our mass transit systems. But let me also say this with regard to mass transit. We need to re-evaluate every single train line and every single bus line to make sure there's adequate ridership to justify that route so we can dedicate all the resources we have to the most traveled routes. Thank you both. We are going to take a quick commercial break. We want you to stay with us as we continue our New Jersey gubanatorial debate between Mikey Cheryl and Jack Chidarelli. Stay with us. Oul Scrie, one of the fastest growing law firms in New Jersey. Relentless expertise, proven results. Kevin Oul, three decades as a senator, assemblyman, and mayor. Thomas Scrieo, chief counsel to the governor, bar association president, famed trial lawyer. Two leaders, two distinct paths, one shared vision. Tom and I met first day of law school and we talked then about forming a law firm. And with that, we said we have to have really smart, aggressive lawyers, folks with really deep expertise with certain disciplines. And we said there had to be an overall achievement of giving back to the community. That's exactly what we've built. We partner with charities, match employee giving, and volunteer year round. At UL Scrieo, we define success as making a difference. Different paths, one vision. Ooulso, where expertise meets integrity. We vote to protect the social security we worked hard for. We vote because family caregivers deserve support. We vote to have a say in our future. for all the reasons why AARP has information about when, where, and how to vote. Find the information you need to make your voice heard. For three decades, Audible has pioneered the audio storytelling format. From our headquarters in Newark, New Jersey, we develop talent, support tech and media startups, and foster communities of creators through our state-of-the-art studios, cuttingedge technologies, and paradigm shifting immersive productions. We're a global company, but we've been a New Jersey business from day one. We're proud of the story Audible and New Jersey are continuing to write together. My mom and I talk about everything from family recipes to health plans. She's my go-to for advice. When I was choosing a plan for Gina and myself, she suggested Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey. Mom has been a member since before I was born. A lot has changed since then, but Horizon has always been there. They focus on our overall health, including dental and vision plans. My family is what matters most to me, and I have peace of mind knowing that we're covered by Blue. Healthcare has become disconnected. At Johnson and Johnson, we want to give health care real meaning again. By focusing on health and care, we're bringing life-changing innovations and leading technology solutions to patients. Advanced treatments for today and potential cures of tomorrow. Let's show all the amazing things those two simple words, health and care, can do. Every Al has something to protect. I don't think I'm doing this right. Al Chun, can you hand me a pink cup? Alan Hagen. I'm not going to spend my retirement on land. Als who start a business. He's the boss now. And pass it down. Competitive Als. It's actually Ally. Weird Als. My friends think I'm normal. Whoever you are, you've got something to protect. You don't look at the camera. And with investment, retirement, and insurance knowhow, Credential can help protect your life's work. There you are. Who's your rock? [Music] Ready for anything? That ought to be our state motto. All hustle, no nonsense, never backs down. So when it comes to strengthening the grid and uplifting our communities, we do it our way. Because storms don't care what exit they hit. And talking doesn't fix the grid. Fixing it does. Around here, we make our own future because ready is who we are. PSG [Music] [Applause] is that. Wow. It's going to be okay. Hi, I'm Michelle Sukurka, president and CEO of the New Jersey Business and Industry Association. We're excited to join tonight's first gubanatorial debate. As the state's largest and most influential business association, it's our mission to ensure that business is at the center of the next governor's agenda. Because when business thrives, so too does our economy. To take us there, we presented our blueprint for competitive New Jersey to both candidates, the policy roadmap to drive innovation and prosperity in New Jersey. Check it out at njbia.org/b blueprint. We look forward to working with our next governor to put business at the center. Thank you. Heat. Heat. [Music] [Applause] [Music] [Applause] [Music] [Applause] [Music] I'm Laura Jones and welcome back to the alumni gymnast. on the campus of Ryder University in Lawrenville. We're going to get right back to our debate between Jack Chidarelli and Mikey. Cheryl going to our panel now. And Sophie, you have a question that goes to Jack Chedarelli first. Since 2018, New Jersey has been embroiled in a lawsuit arguing more needs to be done to improve the state's segregated school districts, a problem rooted in long-standing housing discrimination and the number of small districts. Would you continue fighting this in court? And what do you think New Jersey can do to achieve less segregated schools? We do have the most segregated schools, but I wonder if we would be having this discussion if the performance of schools with predominantly black student populations were outperforming schools with predominantly white populations. We need to get back on day one to improving all of our schools, and I intend to do that with a high impact curriculum. New Jersey recently slipped from 2 to 12 on the national report cards. Most of that's because we haven't made up for all the learning loss following the pandemic when Philvy and the Democrats shut down our schools for two years. We opened up our nursing homes, but we closed down our schools. Louisiana and Mississippi have moved significantly Louisiana from 48 to 32 with a high impact curriculum. What is that exactly? If your child is behind grade level in any of the critical life skills like reading, writing, and math, that child will spend the next market period and the one thereafter doing nothing other than reading, writing, math to get them on grade level. The data is clear. I'm a data-driven guy as an NBA CPA. If the child is not on grade level for reading, writing, math by the end of 8th grade, more than likely they will be undermployed their entire life. So, while that lawsuit proceeds, let's fix the schools on day one with a high impact curriculum. [Applause] So, I spoke before about county-based school systems because that can help address the segregation that we have going on in this state. It's also the way we have some of our best performing high schools. But we need to do more. We need highintensity tutoring because we know there's learning loss. And that's a special kind of tutoring that I've supported here in the state to make sure students get back on track. We also need to address third grade reading and make sure we're pu pushing in phonics-based reading. We know that's the best way to help children read. And it's a reversal of the way reading has been taught lately. And we know third grade is that critical inflection point because if you're not reading at grade level by third grade, you're not going to be able to move on very well to your math and social studies and history work if you can't read your homework. So in these ways, we can really push in as a state, get better outcomes, and address the segregation that we have going on here. Could you clarify if you're going to uh with the lawsuit? Clarify. Could you clarify if you're going to continue to pursue the lawsuit? I don't think it's the governor that's pursuing the lawsuit. The entity that's pursuing the lawsuit, I'm not going to get in the way. What I'm going to do on day one is fix our educational system. It's not the executive branch that's pursuing that lawsuit. They're they're fighting the lawsuit. The state is fighting the lawsuit. Yeah. We're not going to do that if they let the law let the lawsuit proceed. But I'll tell you what, I was in New York this morning at a house of worship that has the largest black congregation in the state. And you know what they said to me? fix our school system. Fix our school system. So, there's a number of metrics that tell us if a school system is failing. Attendance rate, graduation rate, performance on standardized test, readiness for career if you're not going to high school, going to college. If a school system is failing in two, three, or four out of four of those categories, that district, that that community needs choice. I'm going to give them choice. My opponent is not going to give them choice. Mikey, Cheryl, 30 seconds for that. 30 seconds. I think what you just heard is a very clear difference. I care deeply about our school system and I'm going to make sure it performs better. I'm going to make sure that we're educating children for the future, especially with AI coming. But I'm also going to attack the segregation that we have going on in the state. My opponent doesn't care about that. He just wants to talk about the schools, but has not come forward with any solution for the segregation. I care about both. That's what I'm going to do as governor. [Applause] Final word. We could integrate the NORC school system tomorrow and it's not going to improve student performance. We need to change the curriculum. Final thought, Mikey Cheryl, before I think you heard again that he has no intention of addressing the segregation in this state. We're going to move on next to Micah Rasmusen and that question goes to Mikey Cheryl. A child died of measles in the United States last week and we have counties in New Jersey like Ocean where the vaccination rates have now fallen below what's required to maintain her immunity. Should New Jersey parents be worried? Yes, New Jersey parents should be very worried. Uh we just had back to school, so many of the parents know there's a lot going around. Um, imagine if it was polio. Right now, we have, I think, over 10 cases of measles so far this year in New Jersey. We are the most densely populated state in the nation. If we are not going to ensure proper vaccinations for our kids, vaccines that have been going on over 50 years and have all but eradicated, things like measles, mumps, reel, rebella, and polio. Now we have babies dying of pertasus or whooping cough because people aren't getting their vaccines. These are eminently curable diseases and we are allowing children to get sick and yes die because we are not appropriately following medical research vaccine protocol in and is governor of this state. I'm joining the northeast group of governors that is going to ensure that we follow medical guidelines and keep our kids safe. uh the rise in things like measles, mumps, woofing cough and the like are very very concerning and once we fall below the her the threshold for her immunity it's of great concern in the community and so I support the vaccine schedule with regard to measles mumps rebella whooping cough polio on down the line we've got to get above the threshold for her immunity to keep our communities safe the obligation of any governor on day one after they take their oath of office is the public health and safety and we'll do that under Governor Chedarelli. I just wish my opponent showed the same concern when it came to biological males participating in female sports. We should be protecting all students. 30 seconds. 30. [Applause] You know, it's really interesting. I've been hearing around the state. I've spoken to thousands and thousands of people. I've been to all 21 counties. I keep hearing around the state, Jack Chinarelli will tell anybody whatever they want to hear. And I think we just saw that tonight because he hasn't actually stood up for vaccines. He hasn't stood against RFK. He hasn't mentioned anything about firing the head of the CDC. He doesn't mention anything about how Trump's appointee gets most of his medical information on TikTok and reals. [Applause] This is not somebody who's going to keep our kids healthy. objection. The congresswoman is right about one thing. I do get up and down this state. 564 towns, 21 counties, North, Central, South, and Jersey Shore. I'm actually pleasantly surprised to see her tonight. I thought I might see a surrogate. So, if you want to talk about getting up and down the state, if you want this job, interview for the job, get up and down the state. As I mentioned, I've been all up and down the state speaking to thousands of people. And once again, what he doesn't want to address is the fact that he will never stand up against Trump. He will let our cost continue to rise. He will let our kids get unsafe and unhealthy. He won't stand up. He said he's not taking this administration to court in any way, shape, or form. Well, they are driving a $5 billion hole in our budget, and the way we claw that money back is by taking them to court. We ask our audience to please be quiet. Jackie, you have the last word before our next question. Well, listen. No Republican in this state's had a more independent streak than I have. I've called on national prominent Republicans to resign over their rhetoric. I called on Chris Christie to resign. I've always been independent. I'm going to stand up for the people of New Jersey every day to week. Their party's been in control for 25 years and they've had the executive branch for eight years. But you don't hear her. You don't hear my opponent criticizing the current administration or the 25-y year reign of the Democrats. All right. I'm really regretting not bringing my bell tonight to ring on the audience. We love your enthusiasm. Uh but we want to give our candidates as much time as possible. So, we're going to move on. David Wildstein has the next question and that is going to Jack Chidarelli. Thank you. Both of you have at some point in discussing the state's finances said that all options are on the table. So, I want to ask you about an increase in the sales tax. Are you willing to commit to not raise the sales tax if if you become governor? And obviously, I'm looking for a yes or a no, but I know that sometimes I'm I'm disappointed in getting just a one-word answer. Whose turn is it first, Lauren? Jack. We are not raising the sales tax here in New Jersey. What we need to do is lower the income tax and the property tax here in New Jersey. Those are the most burdens and taxes we pay. Pennsylvania's flat tax is 3% on personal income. Our highest bracket is 10.75. Pennsylvania's property taxes on average are $3,000 less per home than ours. What is it that Pennsylvania is doing that we're not? They give Republicans control from time to time. I think that's what they do in Pennsylvania. Listen, it took us 238 years to get the $ 36 billion budget. In 8 years, we went from 36 billion to 59 billion. Can anybody tell me their life is better off than it was eight years ago? Has anything gotten better? I've been here for 64 years. 64 years. I never remember it being this bad. The affordability crisis. Look at your property tax bill. Look at your monthly electric bill. Public safety, public education, overdevelopment, and the worst place in the country to do business. That's why we are where we are today. 64 years. and for over half that time he's been raising taxes on all of us. Um, you know, I can see why your career as a CPA was so short-lived because your math just doesn't add up, Jack. So that's why as we look at a $5 billion hole that we're facing from the federal government, as we're working hard to make sure that we're paying into pensions, at least one of us, to make sure that people have the hard-earned dollars that they've earned over time as we're working to make sure that we have the best public school system in the nation. I'm not going to commit to anything right now because I'm not just going to tell you what you want to hear. Now, Jack raises sales tax all the time. And yet tonight, he said this because like we know, he'll tell you whatever you want to hear. Well, I'm going to tell you the truth. I'm going to be fiscally responsible with your money. I'm going to drive down your cost at every level. And I'm going to make sure your kids have great opportunities here in the state of New Jersey. So, in some of her uh ads, and again tonight, she's implying that I've been a career politician. Here's what she never tells you. I've term limited myself every single time. And at the municipal and county level, I didn't take the salary or the benefits. She never tells you those things. I call for term limits in my platform. And everywhere I've been, I have fought to save people taxes in this state, and I'll do it as your governor. So, I do like the revisionist history because most people in New Jersey know that the reason Jack didn't run for re-election is because he knew he was going to lose. But nevertheless, it doesn't matter. Hey, we have kids in here. It doesn't matter because I'm going to make sure that he doesn't get to serve again when I win for governor in November of this year. There's another big difference between her public service and my public service. It actually cost me money the time I put in and took away from my company. In the seven years that she's been in Congress, she's tripled her net worth. There's another big difference between the two of us. Okay? She broke the law. She had to pay fines for violating federal law on stock trades and stock reporting. And the New York Times reports that while you're sitting on the House Armed Services Committee, you were trading defense stocks. Jack News. Final word. Mikey, Cheryl, [Applause] Jack knows, and all of you can confirm that I don't trade individual stocks. He knows this because it's all public. And in fact, there have been articles written about how transparent and ethical I've been going above and beyond the requirements in Congress. And I continue to do that. In fact, I've run the most transparent governor's race that we've seen in the state. Now, I know we could probably continue with any of these topics all night long, but we're going to get back to our uh audience. Our next question comes from Tom from Princeton, and this question is going to Mikey Cheryl first. New Jerseys combined pension and employee health care funding shortfalls exceed hundred billion dollars, and the annual expense for these items consumes over 20% of New Jerseys annual budget. yet the pension plans remain severely underfunded. How would you address these deficits? How would you improve pension security? And would you pursue any structural reforms? Thanks. So, for decades, people have used fuzzy math. It's been a bipartisan thing for governors to not fully fund the pension. So, now we're working to fully fund it, but we're paying seven billion dollars to do so. New York, which runs a far bigger pension system because they've managed that well, is only paying about 1.5 billion. So, if we don't focus on funding this pension, we are mortgaging the future for our children. These are hard-earned benefits that people have paid into, but the state hasn't funded it appropriately. So, we've got to stop taking pension holidays. We have to make sure we're working to drive down the cost there. We have to continue to ensure that we are driving up the state's credit rating as we're doing by making sure our pension is solvent. So in all of these ways, we can drive down costs for people while taking care of our teachers, our firefighters, our cops, the people in this state who serve us. We now need to make sure we're taking care of them. Tom, the the the governor and the Democrats like to boast about the fact that they've made a full pension payment five years in a row, but while they were making a full pension payment, what they were doing is underfunding the state health care plan. And look what's happened today. It's on the verge of collapse. And employees that work for the state, school districts, municipalities, and counties that are in the state health plan, that includes teachers, are going home with less take-home pay despite getting a 2, three, 4% increase. It's all about priorities. We do not have a short-term liquidity problem when it comes to funding our post-retirement healthcare benefit or a pension. We've got a very long-term solveny problem. The priorities today are the ones that need our attention. And the priorities today for me are property taxes, income taxes, and making sure we get the state health care plan under control because right now it's crushing the middle class that are in that plan. We've got to fund the state healthare plan. Okay. Are did you want What you didn't hear was that he was going to fund your pensions. Final thought. We are going to fund your pension. Anybody that's earned a pension is going to get their pension. But right now, you don't pay if you're in the working right now, you don't pay your grocery or your rent or your mortgage with your pension. If you're working right now, you don't pay your groceries with your pension. You pay it with your net pay. and our public workers are going home with significantly less pay right now because the state health care plan is under siege. It's about to collapse. Okay, we're going to go back over to this side. Our next question is coming to we need to move our camera out of the way for just a minute. Oh, little collision there. It's all good. Oh, O is from Lawrenville and she is a professor here at Ryder University. O okay, and this goes to Jack Chitterelli. All right. Do you plan to add more AI guard rail laws? If yes, what would they be? Very good. Thank you for that question. So, you know, we talk an awful about AI as an economic development opportunity, but what you never hear the governor talk about are the things that concern the public. Social manipulation, job loss. These are two very important considerations that we need to talk about as well. Now, I'm not a computer science expert. I'm not an AI expert, but I tell you what I will do. We're going to sit down with people in the arena in that space and talk about how we protect people from the social manipulation. And I also want to talk about the job loss that comes with AI. Those are the things that have people terribly insecure about this new technology. So I'm going to look to get our state government in the 21st century. We've got in some departments databases that are kept on Excel and in Treasury. I have desktop systems that are on DOSs. DOSs. Now, there's a whole lot of college students here tonight that don't know what the hell doss is, but I get the sense that you do. Okay? This is a dysfunctional state government in so many different ways. So, we need to leverage new technologies by AI, but we also need to know the dangers of AI. And as governor, I will. [Applause] Yes, I'm going to put guard rails around AI. Um, we have a change coming and we are not all prepared in the way we should be for it. It's why I'm going to implement the kids online safety act to make sure that our kids are safe. It's why I'm going to make sure that uh when we make some of these countybased schools, they're schools like occupational schools and STEM schools. So, we're pushing into the jobs of the future because we know AI is going to have huge reverberations through the job market. I'm going to make sure that we are changing and addressing our technology here in this state as we move into some of the AI fixes, but also the protections we need for privacy and for people's data. We've already had problems. I have had a family come to me with a deep fake where their daughter's head was put on some pornography in her high school. Imagine that as a teenager. So, we need to do more to put guard rails around AI to protect our kids to ensure we're growing into the jobs of the future and to ensure that we do better by as a state. Thank you. Our next question is coming from Mitchell from Byum. He is a student here at Ryder University. And this question is going to Mikey Cheryl. As someone who is a student teacher currently at Fischer Middle School in Ewing, I'm curious as to what you will do as governor to continue to invest in education in New Jersey given the dismantling of the federal department of education. That's a great question and first of all, thank you. I have a middle schooler, so you're doing the Lord's work. Um, I have to tell you, uh, and they don't always shower as much as they should. So, thank you. Thank you very much. Um, yes, the the dismantling of the Department of Ed is a huge issue. This is one of the ways in which we're seeing a huge hit come into our state budget. It's why I fought so hard to claw to say that we're going to claw back that money. My attorney general is going to sue to claw back as much money from the federal government as we can. We pay $70 billion dollar more into the federal government than we get back as a state. So if they're not going to run their programs, they just need to send that money back so we can run them. And this is a real difference between myself and my opponent who says he doesn't disagree with anything Trump's doing and that he's never going to sue him. So what matters most in a child's education is that teacher, that family who I hope is supporting the teacher and making sure the students doing everything when they get home. You know how difficult it is to teach if parents aren't playing their fulfilling their responsibility and of course that student. And the point I'm trying to make is the farther away you get from the classroom, the less impact I think any governmental institution has on what's taking place in the classroom and student learning. So, I don't necessarily have a problem with the president and the administration downsizing a department of education. Just because they got rid of the department just because they got rid of a department of education doesn't mean they got rid of federal funding. The funding is still coming. Okay? And I'll fulfill my obligation as governor to make sure that our schools are f fully funded. But we need a new public school curriculum to get our kids back on track. And we need more vocational training opportunities. That's what matters most in the acade academic development of our students. Respond. I just want to make sure I correct some misunderstandings up here. Yeah, they did get rid of a lot of federal funding. They got rid of it at every level of education. They got rid of it for funding for our colleges and universities with Pell grants and with research and development funds. They got rid of it when they limited the amount of money you can take on as a student loan to such a small amount that many people now can't go to medical school who thought they were going to medical school. They've limited on for our title one schools that we're seeing. So in almost every level they federal government right now has limited the money that they're sending back to New Jersey for education. And as a state who spends so much money to the federal government, that's offensive. Two things. My attorney general will not be wasting your tax dollars suing the White House every other day. It's a waste of taxpayer dollars. Number two, if we want to if we want to get if we want to get more money out of the federal government, the way to do that is by the governor calling to task our 14 members of our congressional delegation. Two US senators and 12 House members. I'll meet with them every single month to make sure that the 15 of us are working on behalf of New Jersey. That doesn't happen right now. We got the governor and a 14 member delegation, congressional delegation, all run in different directions. They should be together to advocate for New Jersey. Okay. Our next question is going to come, we're going to have to move on with the debate here. Our next question is coming from Charles. Charles is a writer alumni and this is going to Jack Chidarelli first. To make housing more affordable, it's accepted we have to increase its supply. That said, we know that when voters hear more housing, they become concerned about overcrowding schools. Would you support a state bond referendum to give the schools development authority the funding to build new schools throughout the state? No. What I will support is to make sure that government is working in partnership with the private sector to make sure that there's more affordable housing. And by the way, we need to stop right now. Affordable housing is all rental. We need more lease to purchase opportunities. The next generation is doing nothing but renting because that's all we're forcing down their throat. And the reason I say that, Charles, is because I want to stop with us developing highdensity housing in every one of our 564 towns. I want to use the shortage of affordable housing to get people to live in our urban centers again. I live in downtown Somerville. This town has gone through a magnificent transformation because we've gone up with low, moderate, and market rate units, and it's vibrant. What we're doing in Somerville is what we need to do on a much larger scale in Newark, in Trenton, and in Atlantic City. We've got to stop the exacerbation of sprawl. Anybody that's concerned about the environment should not be doing this. And by the way, you want the poster child. Why are we condemning 175y old farm in Cranberry? Why are we condemning open space to build more highdensity housing? I don't think so. So, that's a great question. I I think what we all see here is too much of the money we spend on our education system is not going to the things we want it to go to. So, for example, number one, students, educators, buildings, and we know how necessary it is because I'll tell you, in Montlair, we had the stairway fall in high school. People couldn't go to school for several months. In Patterson, we've had the ceiling fall in elementary school. So, we have some of the oldest school inventory. We have to address it. But unfortunately, so much of the money is going to a bloated administration right now. We need to move that money into the places that we want to address. But you've also raised something about our state that I think is important and that is about how we're going to develop it. And what we really need to do is have a statewide plan to protect our open spaces because many of us know how deeply we really enjoyed them during COVID and how necessary it is for the health and mental wellness wellness. That's why I've been uh a a person at the Great Swamp Gala as I've spoken there about how important open spaces are. So we need to do both develop and have our open spaces preserved. Laura, may we very quickly because we move on to our next question. This is refreshing. I think what she might be saying is we're not going to develop highdensity housing every one of the 564 towns. But the other thing is she didn't answer your question. The answer is no. If we did that, it's only going to exacerbate sprawl. But she didn't answer your question. Again, that's not true. I was very clear on how I think we should spend the money. Okay, we're gonna move on then to Michelle from Byum. She is a parent of a Ryder University student. And Michelle, are you over here or is she over here? Hello, Michelle. How are you? How are you? Okay, Michelle, you have a uh you're a parent of a Ryder student and your question is going to Jack Chidarelli. Hi, Michelle. With Medicaid cuts looming, how will you protect services for people with intellectual developmental disabilities? So, I said before the first job, responsibility of any governor is to provide for the public health and safety. And that certainly applies most of all to our most vulnerable population, our most vulnerable citizens who under Governor Cedarelli will never be underserved. We're going to take care of our citizens, particularly those most in need, and that includes our developmentally disabled. Let's talk about the Medicaid reforms because this is another one of those things that's being lied about in the community. The two big changes in the Medicaid system are these. The reforms are these. You have to verify your eligibility twice a year now, not once a year. Twice a year. Interestingly enough, it was President Barack Obama that put that change in place. President Trump kept it in his first term. Joe Biden put it to once a year. The other thing you have to do with the Medicaid reform is if you're able-bodied and your children are 15 years of age or older, you have to provide us with 20 hours a week in order to continue with Medicaid. 20 hours of what? Volunteerism, education, or work. I think that's reasonable. My opponent doesn't seem to have any issue with people who are scamming the system. If you want the system to endure, we need to save dollars by stopping people from scamming it. I think those two reforms, if you meet those two criteria, which I think are reasonable, guess what? Medicaid doesn't get cut. You continue to have your Medicaid. But as governor, I'll take care of our most vulnerable citizens, and that includes developmentally disabled. You have my word. [Applause] Thanks, Michelle. I love that Jack thinks he's going to run the federal delegation when he doesn't understand federal legislation, but we'll save that for another day. This is a question I get from so many parents because they know what's going on with Medicaid and they know the deep funding cuts that are going on that are imperiling many of the programs that support their children. And so that's why as governor, I'm going to make sure my IG is fighting this tooth and nail because here's the truth. I was recently at a federally qualified health center in Camden and I have to tell you traditionally that's been one of the poorest cities in our state. So we were moving away from emergency room care which is both the most expensive kind of care and also the care that goes to charity care in our state budget, not the federal Medicaid dollars. and she was telling me how much their costs were going to go up about 20% more in going through the red tape and bureaucracy that the Trump administration is implementing instead of going to care for people. She said so many of the people are now going to be going back to emergency room care which will be very expensive for the state. I think the fair question of any gubernatorial candidate and obviously that includes my opponent is this. Do you believe it's fair to make somebody have to verify their eligibility for Medicaid twice a year? Do you believe it's fair to continue your Medicaid by giving us 20 hours a week of education, volunteerism, or work if you're able-bodied and your kids are 15 or older? I believe that's fair. You meet that criteria, Medicaid continues. Final thoughts. Thank you, Cheryl. So, it's not about fairness, it's about cost effectiveness. It's about who's going to drive down the cost for the state by making sure we're going into better and cheaper care like in federally qualified health centers or are we going to go back to the bad old days when we're sending everybody to emergency room care which is both worse care and more expensive care. Okay, we have one more question for our audience before we go back to our panel. It is one of our younger members of the audience, Mark. He is an a middle school student from Bridgewater and Mark's question is going to go first to Jack a rally. I'm only 12, but I've already seen one of our US um senators go to prison. What's your vision for restoring public trust in government? [Applause] don't. [Applause] First of all, congratulations on being here tonight and having the courage to stand up and ask a question. Leadership matters and it starts at the top. So, I've never broken the law. My opponent has. I've never broken the law and so you won't have to worry about they and we'll set the tone for the way that public service ought to be and we'll call out anybody on either side of the aisle that does the wrong thing uh either if they're self-s serving or if they're breaking the law. So, and my attorney general will be very very aggressive in looking at public corruption all up and down the state. But thank you for your question. Thank you so much for your question and you have a great mom bringing you here tonight. So, thank you for being here. Um, you know, I I think this is the key question. And I go around the state and I tell people this is the most nonpartisan race I've run because I think people have lost a lot of faith in both parties. And it's really important right now in this race that here in New Jersey in this state as we're holding the line that we're restoring faith. So that's why I talk a lot about being a Navy helicopter pilot because I think people know what that means. I think they know that I've always served this country and I'm proud of it. I also talk about being a mom because I think that also lets people know why I'm doing this and who I'm fighting for and what I care about. And so I have constantly and consistently listen to as many people as possible to make sure I'm hearing just what it is that people need to sleep at night. How can I, as governor make that a little bit easier? And what I hear is the cost of housing's too high, electricity costs are too high, utility costs are too high. and I want somebody to protect my rights and freedoms and that's what I'll do as governor. We're gonna go back to our panel. Our next question is coming from Micah Rasmusen and that is going to Jack Chitterelli. It's been more than 20 years since the last uh fix DMV. Yet the last I'm sorry, M the last fix DMV. The last fix for DMV. Yet, the agency still has not returned to full in-person service since five years since it's uh now five years after COVID. Uh it's still disenfranchising voters when it botches their motive voter registrations and can't keep up with demand for real IDs. So, what does the fix ID uh fix DMV of 2026 need to look like? So, in any gubernatorial campaign, we're going to end up talking about education reforms and policy, property tax reform and policy, public safety, uh, housing, all the like. But what's easy to overlook is that the state of New Jersey now is a 59 billion dollar enterprise with 60,000 employees, 9.3 million citizen customers, and 1 million business customers, small, medium, and large. And one of the reasons I'm running is because I feel very strongly this state needs a handson CEO governor who's going to show up every damn day and make sure that this state government works for its citizens. You can walk into a DMV office tomorrow in Florida and walk out an hour later with your real ID. Call DMV today in New Jersey for your appointment. They're putting you off until December. I find that embarrassing. I find that embarrassing. So I and my administration will show up every single day and make sure that this state government works on behalf of its citizens. And that means executive order number two. And executive order number two is everyone's coming back to work. They work for us. They work for us. Let's make this state government work for our citizens. You know, this is a difference between myself and my opponent because I am willing to take on anyone, including members of my own party, when it comes to serving the people of New Jersey. He's not. He just serves Trump. But that's why I'll tell you right now that our MVC is not working. It is not working. We were worst in the nation for Real ID. You couldn't get one. People were being told, &quot;Go get a passport. It'll be quicker.&quot; And that is the one way in which so many people interact with our government. And so if you're asking how do we build trust in government? How do we rebuild faith in government? We make sure government's working. And so I'm going to make sure the MVC is working for everyone. That you can go and you do most of what you need to do online. You don't always have to go in person. And then when you go in person, you can get an appointment quickly and you can get through the process quickly in and out. That if you need an inspection, you can get your car inspected. And so all of these things are the ways in which almost every person in this state engages with our state government and almost everyone in this state has a really bad story to tell you about it. Not on my watch. I'll fix that as governor. Our next question comes from Sophie Netto Munoz and it goes to Mikey Cheryl. The immigrant trust directive has limited local, county, and state police from assisting in civil immigration enforcement since it was put in place in 2018. If elected governor, would you continue the immigrant trust directive? As governor, I'm going to make sure here in New Jersey, we're following the law and the constitution. And let me tell you a little bit about what's going on right now. I just had a friend talk to a police officer here who had an interaction with somebody who was wearing a mask, who had no idea and was caring. And he walked up to him and said, &quot;Look, this is my town. What are you doing here?&quot; And the gentleman said, &quot;I don't have to tell you.&quot; And he said, 'You're walking around my town and you do have to tell me.' And he said, 'N no, I don't.' And so the police officer said, 'Well, then I'll take you to jail.' And he said, 'I'll take you to jail.' So he said, 'We'll work it out in jail, but here's the thing. It was an ICE agent refusing to show ID masked. So as governor, I'm going to make sure that people can't go around masked here in our state. [Applause] Now, my opponent supports policies where people who are here legally can be detained. Rolling back rights for American citizens, separating children and parents. I'm going to make sure people here in this state are safe and follow the law. Congresswoman, can you clarify? Is that a yes or a no on would you continue the immigrant trust directed? What I'm going to do is make sure we're following the law and the Constitution. So that'll include due process rights and the Constitution. I don't think she answered your question. Executive order number one on day one. We're getting rid of the immigrant trust directive here in New Jersey. I said this back in 2021. I'll say it here again. I've said it every single day. I'm out on the campaign trail. I believe the immigrant trust directive, us having sanctuary cities, us being a sanctuary state, only encourages illegal immigration and restricts our local law enforcement in a number of different ways. The goal here is to keep our community safe. And the best way to do that is us not having sanctuary cities. Let me say something else. My attorney general, unlike the current attorney general, who I think she has said she's considering reappointing, my attorney general will support local law enforcement. We're not getting rid of qualified immunity. She voted to get rid of it in the Congress. We're not doing that. We're going to take the handcuffs off. Let these trained professionals do their job. Flash mobs on our Jersey Shore. Flash mobs in our malls. Breakins, car thefts, nonviolent crime is through the roof. Did anybody see what went down in Saucus 3 weeks ago? Total disregard for law and order. Total disregard for law enforcement. We got to get back to being a law and order state with safe communities. Thank you, Joe. [Applause] So, I've served as a federal prosecutor. I've ensured that we're working hard to drive down crime in this state. I've prosecuted people who were criminals here and who were undocumented and they were deported because I care deeply about public safety for the people here and I think we can all agree that violent criminals should be deported. But what I also believe deeply in is due process. the due process rights that are in our constitution. Time is up. And so I'll follow the law and I'll follow the constitution. Getting rid of the immigrant trust directives doesn't mean we're violating your constitutional right to due process. But since she brought up her time as a US attorney, check her record. In the 11 months that she was supposed to be prosecuting cases, she pled most of her cases and people that committed some pretty heinous crimes were allowed to go free. All right, our very last question. So I'll repeat. I'm very proud of my prosecutorial record. I worked really hard to take illegal guns off the street to make sure our streets were safe. Jack has never served in law enforcement. He's never served to keep this country safe. I have and I'll continue to do that. One more question of this evening and it comes from David Wildstein. David David Wildstein has a fa uh final question and it goes first to Jack Chitterelli. Laura, I'm going to throw you a little bit of a curveball. You're throwing me Oh, you're asking more than one question. He's a baseball fan. Yeah, it happens. So, so is it a question for me? A closing question. Oh, you had a closing question. But, uh, there's a a man here named Tom who came to ask a question who, quite frankly, his question is more important than mine. I'd like to give him my time. Oh, you want to go back to Tom? I want to go to Tom. I don't I can go to Tom. Hold on. We had two Toms. Let me go back. Ah, sorry. Okay. So, Tom, I'm gonna go back to you. And I don't have my Q card. So, Tom, I am also a Tom from Princeton. So I I Yes, there is two to two toss from Princ. Thank you both for doing this. Let's see you do more of this, please. Uh who am I interested? Oh, so this is going to go first to Jack Chidarelli. Jack, please describe New Jersey's current state of care for residents with severe and persistent mental illness, the reasons why it is so, and your proposals as governor to address it. So Tom, I would like to do more of this. Uh by law, we have to do two. Uh CBS News out of New York invite us to a third. I agreed. My opponent did not. Uh let me say this. We know we have a mental health crisis and I'm proud of what we did in Somerset County. We created the first public private partnership and it was a 247 community mental health center because we saw what was going on in the community and people could not get access convenient access to highquality mental health services. So we actually employed in county government in New Jersey psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed clinical social workers. people had a place to go. It didn't matter what your coverage was. You got quality service. As governor, there are two things we should not be approaching 564 towns at a time. I think our state, our county governments across the state are underappreciated and underleveraged. We'll put a plan in place the state will fund for there to be a community mental health center in every one of our 21 counties and a homeless shelter. We need that here and you can't expect us to address that 564 towns at a time. So, I think we need to use the Somerset County model to provide for community mental health clinics all across New Jersey so people have convenient access to highquality mental health services. Tom, thanks for raising this question because as I've sort of mentioned already tonight, we have a mental health crisis. We have a loneliness crisis. I see it in our kids. I see it in seniors. I see it across this state. people who aren't connecting anymore. And so that's why this is so important and we need to add resources. I've added federal resources to the Mental Health Association of Morrison Essex. I'll continue to work hard to fund the different programs that we have. uh making sure that we also put in place things like red flag laws so people like many of our veterans who are contemplating suicide uh can be protected by those and keep those red flag laws as the courts attack them and people like Jack Chidarelli vote against them. I'll also make sure that as we have our police officers going out, we use the Verrive Together program. In talking to so many of our police officers, they don't have the tools or the training sometimes to handle some of the most egregious mental health problems and it often creates really bad outcomes. Thank you, Tom. The one other thing that we need to do and I will instigate as a member of the National Governor's Association, I think it's long overdue, it's time for us to get rid of the Medicaid reimbursement rates. Community physicians will tell you off the record they won't see Medicaid patients, many of which have mental health issues. We need to start reimbursing at one rate, the Medicare rate. Community physicians find that acceptable. They do not find the Medicaid rate acceptable. So, let's work together with our congressional delegation, the other 49 governors to start reimbursing at one rate. Let's move everybody into Medicare, one rate, which community physicians find acceptable, and people have better access as well. Tom, you're really on the hot feet. Um, but I think what we also need to do is add money to housing. Um, many mental health professionals will say what you first need to do is stabilize people in housing and have wraparound services from there. Thanks. All right, that concludes our question and answer time. It is time now to go to closing statements. Each candidate has 30 seconds. Our first candidate going for our closing statements. That is going to go to Mikey Cheryl. You have 90 seconds. Well, thank you so much everybody. I really appreciate it. Uh, this has been a great debate and I think you've heard some clear differences here. I've served this country my entire life. As I mentioned, helicopter pilot, prosecutor, member of Congress, and mom of four great kids, I'm going to continue to serve this state because I want to drive down your costs. So whether it's utility cost or housing cost or energy cost, you've heard again and again and again, I have a plan to drive down your cost. Jack's going to go a lot in lock step with Washington as he drive as Trump drives up your energy costs. So at every level I'll continue to work for you and at every level he'll raise your costs like he's done at every level of government with taxes. So I really appreciate all of you coming out tonight to hear about this. This has been a great evening and thank you once again New Jersey. I appreciate it. You have 90 seconds. You have 90 seconds. The Cheddarellis have been here for a hundred years. Three generations of Chedarellis have all achieved their American dream right here in New Jersey. My grandfather started out in the ditch as a laborer, saved his nickels and dimes, became a very successful independent contractor. My parents were successful restaurant bar owners, but that wasn't their only job. My mom worked midnights on the line for J&amp;J. My dad was in the street department for public service gas. Every dime they made went to their family. the roof over our head, clothes on our back, meal on a table, and our public school education. I followed in my grandparents and parents' footsteps. I'm a two-time successful business owner here in the state of New Jersey, having created jobs. I've also had the privilege of serving at every level of government, municipal, county, and legislation legislature, terminating myself each time, not taking the salary of the benefits at the at the municipal or county level. I'm an MBA CPA. No candidate has ever come before you with that resume. And so I'm committed to fixing our state. When something I love is broken, I want to fix it. I believe leadership matters. I believe that we can fix the state of New Jersey or I wouldn't be asking you for your consideration. We can do this. But I want you to know this. Unlike governors on both sides of the aisle over the last 40 years, I'm not using this to get to Washington. This is my final destination. When my four or eight years are over, you'll find me at the beach in Surf City. Okay? But I'll give you four or eight years of the best years of my life and we'll work in partnership with the legislature and we'll get things done and we'll fix the state of New Jersey. Thank you very very much.