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## COLUMNIST

# The Murphy Strategy

By Carl Golden | June 14, 2022, 12:29 pm | in **Columnist** (<https://www.insidernj.com/category/columnist/>), **News** (<https://www.insidernj.com/category/news/>)



Competition among states to lure major business development – either new or through relocation – can be fierce with potentially tens of millions of dollars and thousands of jobs at stake.

Political and business leaders make their pitches in corporate boardrooms, extolling the many benefits of their home state while dangling incentives in the form of subsidies or tax breaks to convince decision makers their deals are superior to those of their rivals.

The presentations normally emphasize a favorable tax climate, a quality education system, a modern and integrated transportation network, ease of access to major markets, a trained workforce, affordable housing, and attractive vacation and recreation opportunities.

Gov. Phil Murphy has taken New Jersey's pitch a step further, adding a guarantee of access to abortion services as a significant consideration for businesses to choose to invest in the state or, for those contemplating a move, to locate here.

In official letters from his office to nearly 60 companies in states where severe limitations or prohibitions on abortions are already in place or anticipated should the U. S. Supreme Court overturn the 50-year-old ruling that established abortion as constitutionally protected, Murphy warned that the court decision to lift that protection would have "a chilling effect" on the ability "to attract and retain top female talent."

The companies singled out by Murphy are all in states with Republican governors where some form of abortion restrictions have been enacted.

In addition to seeming to interfere in the legislative affairs of other states by poaching business investment at some considerable cost in tax revenue, it is unlikely that an argument in support of abortion rights will rank very high in the minds of corporate decision-makers to either abandon their existing location or break new ground in New Jersey.

The profit motive trumps all else — and always has.

Will a relocation or expansion enhance the corporate bottom line remains the basic fundamental consideration for company executives and stockholders.

Will a company, for example, grow in size and strength and will shareholders experience an increase in dividends as a result of establishing a major presence in New Jersey?

The traditional attributes — education, transportation, tax environment and the like — all play into the ultimate decision, of course, but all are viewed through the profit prism.

While the competition for the corporate dollar may be intense, it's always been civil, an exercise in power and vibrancy of presentation. Murphy's introducing a divisive political issue into the contest may well generate resentment on the part of the political and governing establishments in the states he's singled out.

There is a not-so-subtle undertone in Murphy's approach that states whose legislatures and chief executives do not share his abortion rights position are anti-female and that their populations are somehow backward, insensitive and insufficiently progressive.

His statement, for instance, that he encourages businesses looking to stand with their employees to look to New Jersey, a state where they can be confident that individual rights will always be protected is a gratuitous suggestion that disagreement is tantamount to ignoring those rights.

Deliberate or not, his attempt to use New Jersey's strong abortion rights law to persuade out of state business executives to pressure their governments to adopt similar legislation under threat of leaving and disrupting the economy smacks of an arrogance and presumptuousness certain to offend.

It can be construed as well as an element in a longer-term Murphy strategy, one based on his embrace of policies dear to the hearts of his party's progressive wing with an eye on the 2024 presidential election.

With rumors swirling and intensifying that the Democratic Party establishment has been quietly and privately discussing a path toward convincing President Biden to withdraw as a candidate for re-election, potential successors spy an open field and preparing for it is a wise and prudent move.

Murphy has insisted he is not interested in a national presence, but parsing his words and deeds suggest it is more than a fleeting thought.

His call for greater restrictions on the purchase and ownership of firearms fits neatly with his call for extending abortion rights beyond those already codified in law, even though the legislative leadership has been clear in their belief the issue has been settled and there is no need for additional action.

It's doubtful that companies in receipt of Murphy's letter will be moved or persuaded by his appeal. Some may resent it while others disregard it as simply another political maneuver by a governor in furtherance of his ambitions.

While Murphy drew on the usual talking points touting the benefits of headquartering here, he did so in the knowledge that his references to abortion rights and reproduction health programs would overshadow the usual chamber of commerce rhetoric.

It amounted to a strategy to gain media attention rather than achieve tangible results.

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