

GOLDEN: Murphy making promises he likely can't keep

Carl Golden Published 2:31 p.m. ET Oct. 2, 2017

It took a while, but Democratic gubernatorial candidate Phil Murphy has conceded what campaign observers concluded long ago — his campaign promises have outrun his ability and his willingness to pay for them.

He has proposed a \$1.3 billion tax increase and has said he'll not seek more even though the total additional revenue he wants falls well short of fulfilling his wish list.

(Photo: AP)

Faced with mounting questions about how he intended to finance his ambitious agenda, Murphy went into retreat. His administration, he said, will instead establish spending priorities, concentrating on fully funding the state's formula of aid to local school districts and contributing to the beleaguered public pension system.

If he follows through on those pledges, there will be little left of the \$1.3 billion in additional tax revenue to support the lengthy list of proposals he's already offered.

Even a cursory examination of the promises he's made — restoration of homestead rebates, invest in transportation and infrastructure, free tuition at county colleges, paid family leave for all, to name but a few — raises serious doubts about their affordability, particularly at a time when the state's budget condition is dicey at best.

It's become common, for instance, for fund transfers and spending cuts to be implemented as the end of the fiscal year approaches to assure the books balance.

Promises are to political campaigns what gasoline is to the internal combustion engine. Neither works without it.

Murphy isn't unique in laying out a legislative agenda, but he's raised the bar on promises to an unprecedented level and, in doing so, has invited criticism that his campaign is driven in considerable measure by the demands of private and special interests in return for their support. What Murphy describes as a vision for the state is portrayed less charitably by his critics as pandering.

His refusal thus far to support renewing the 2 percent cap on salary arbitration awards for police and firefighters, for example, has been offered by his critics as evidence of placing special interests ahead of taxpayer interests. His position, they say, reflects his desire to avoid offending public employee unions whose endorsement he enjoys. The cap expires at the end of this year and its supporters contend it has saved more than \$2 billion in property taxes.

