



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on September 8, 2020

## New Jersey Governor Overrules Turnpike Authority on Removal of American Flags From Overpasses

New Jersey Democratic Governor Phil Murphy has overruled the unpopular decision by the New Jersey Turnpike Authority to [remove patriotic displays](#) of American flags from the Garden State Parkway and Turnpike overpasses following major backlash.



The Robbinsville Township Police Benevolent Association (PBA) was one of the vocal opponents against the Turnpike Authority's decision to remove American flags from the state's overpasses ahead of the 19-year anniversary of the September 11 attacks. While the authority claimed the flags violate a "long-standing policy" of prohibiting flags and signs from being flown, critics argued that the flags have been hung from overpasses since 9/11 and question the timing of this move.

"American flags have been flown on overpasses throughout the state and throughout the nation since 9/11," Michael Slininger, president of the Robbinsville Township Police Benevolent Association, wrote Monday in a post on the group's Facebook page. "Now, as we approach the anniversary of that horrific day, we are extremely disappointed to announce that the NJ Turnpike Authority saw fit to remove all flags on overpasses covering the N.J.T.P. last week, replacing them with signs citing ... a code which is meant to apply to advertisement material or improper road signage."

But Governor Murphy said during his Tuesday press briefing on the coronavirus that the Authority has "suspended" their decision.

"I didn't like what I heard. After I got off the call, we spoke with the team," he said at the afternoon briefing. "At least for the time being, the Turnpike Authority has suspended that."

According to Slininger, the police union only recently replaced more than a dozen flags that were either in poor condition or had gone missing from overpasses along the New Jersey Turnpike and Interstate 195. He adds that the PBA has taken responsibility for maintaining the flags and ensuring they were safely secured and did not pose a threat to motorists.

The Authority argued the display of flags, banners, and signs has always been prohibited on Turnpike Authority property.

A statement from the New Jersey Turnpike Authority said in part: "The long-standing policy of the New Jersey Turnpike Authority has been to prohibit the display of any flags, signs or banners by private parties on Turnpike Authority property. While we appreciate the desire of some New Jersey residents to



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express their patriotism in these turbulent times by displaying flags on turnpike and parkway overpasses, Turnpike Authority regulations do not allow it.”

But Slininger observed that the flags have been displayed and cared for by groups of local veterans throughout the state for nearly 20 years and questioned why it has not been addressed as an issue in the past.

“We cannot understand why the N.J.T.P.A. has suddenly decided to abandon a tradition of patriotism and respect for our veterans. It is not known what happened to the brand new flags that we put up, but we truly hope they were respectfully disposed of, if not displayed elsewhere,” he said. “The placement of the flags was done in the same manner that has been done for nearly twenty years.”

Noteworthy, the New Jersey Department of Transportation claims it received complaints about a pro-law enforcement flag being displayed on one of the bridges. But the veterans said they had already removed and replaced the “offending” flag.

New Jersey State Senator Declan O’Scanlon said Turnpike Authority officials should have asked for a legislative solution to some of their concerns about flags and displays that may be deemed controversial before simply tearing down all patriotic displays. Veteran groups have already said they were fully in support of common-sense rules to avoid controversy.

The NJDOT also claimed the flags are a distraction, but New Jersey resident Robert Hommel, known affectionately as the “[flag man](#)” after maintaining the flags along the turnpike overpass since 9/11 and spending more than \$1,000 of his own money annually decorating the bridge, says the flags have also garnered positive attention without issue.

Hundreds of protesters, led by Patriotic Bridges of Port Reading/Sewaren, gathered on Sunday to rally against the Turnpike Authority’s decision to remove the flags. One protester, Woodbridge Township resident Carmine Pannullo, was a first responder on 9/11 and told News 12 New Jersey he was offended by the Turnpike Authority’s decision to remove the flags.

“It’s something that if you experience, you’ll never forget,” Pannullo says. “So the mere thought of flags just being flown on a bridge, it’s kind of silly compared to all those lives lost on 9/11.”

According to NJ.com, several New Jersey lawmakers will be introducing a bill to exempt display of American flags from the Turnpike Authority statute.

“In times of prosperity and crisis, we must always hold our flag high and fight to protect all it represents,” said Assembly Transportation Committee Chairman Dan Benson (D-Middlesex). “The officers and veterans who maintain flags on state highways are looking to remind us of this great symbol of democracy. Their work should be celebrated.”

The Robbinsville PBA plans to hold an event on Friday to replace the flags that were removed from the Turnpike overpass in Mercer County as well as from an I-195 overpass.

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