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FOR RELEASE:

Sept. 2, 2009

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SPEAKER ROBERTS **ANNOUNCES HE WILL NOT SEEK RE-ELECTION**

Will Leave Office in January after 34 years of public service

(TRENTON) – Assembly Speaker Joseph J. Roberts Jr. today announced he will not seek re-election after serving 22 years in the Assembly.

Roberts has served in elected office since joining the Bellmawr school board in 1976. He was the Assembly Majority Leader for four years before becoming the Speaker in January 2006.

During his Assembly tenure, he has authored laws to improve treatments for autism and developmental disabilities, tackle skyrocketing property taxes, reform ethics, repeal the death penalty and combat the spread of HIV and AIDS in cities.

"I've spent 22 years in this house, including four years each as majority leader and speaker," said Roberts (D-Camden). "They've been exciting years, and this has been an opportunity I will never forget, but I know that the time has now come to let someone else have their turn at this great job."

Roberts said he will be taking his name off the ballot and will ask the 5th Legislative District Democratic Party committees to select a replacement for the November election.

"This is a big decision, but one that I have put a lot of consideration into," Roberts said. "I just want to decompress a bit and give others the same incredible opportunity I have enjoyed to serve the people of New Jersey. I know this is the right time to do this."

The Speaker plans to serve the remainder of his term, which expires in January.

"I'm not going anywhere yet," Roberts said. "I will serve out my term and I remain as committed as ever to the success of Governor Corzine, New Jersey Democrats and progressive policies. The next few months will be very busy, and I will be in the thick of it all."

Roberts, 57, graduated from Rutgers University and received his Masters of Government Administration at the Fels School of Government at the University of Pennsylvania.

He served on the Camden County Board of Freeholders from 1980 through 1987, and was the freeholder director for four years. He served on the Bellmawr school board and the borough council before becoming a freeholder.

From 1979 to 1984, he was an aide for then-Congressman James J. Florio.

Roberts also served as a board president of Big Brothers-Big Sisters of Camden County, a director of the United Way of Camden County, a board member of the South Jersey Performing Arts Center and a member of the Bellmawr Fire and Rescue Squad.

Roberts won a special election to fill the unexpired term of former Assemblyman Francis J. Gorman. He joined the Assembly on Sept. 10, 1987.

"I've always loved public policy and helping change people's lives for the better, and I have not lost that passion," Roberts said. "That fire still burns within me, so I want to remain involved in policy in some capacity still to be determined.

"This position is obviously one way to change public policy for the better, but it's not the only way, and I'm going to take a few months to consider what I will do in the years ahead to ensure the progressive ideals so near and dear to my heart remain vibrant and forward-thinking."

Roberts, as Speaker, championed a package of laws targeting autism and developmental disabilities. New Jersey has the nation's highest autism rate.

"I've recently remarked how I have never -- in all my years in the Legislature -- been so moved by the heartrending testimony I heard last spring from parents struggling to provide crucial therapy to help their children with autism and development disabilities," Roberts said. "Fortunately, we were able to champion a wide-ranging package of new laws to improve the detection, treatment and awareness of autism and developmental disabilities. This effort will help many children breakthrough these mysterious disorders and live productive lives."

Roberts also led the passage of a comprehensive legislative package that strengthened the state's campaign finance and ethics laws. He also spearheaded legislation aimed at curbing medical malpractice cost and preserving patients' rights and access to health care.

Roberts also helped authored the landmark Municipal Rehabilitation and Economic Recover Act to revitalize the city of Camden and other distressed urban areas.

As the Assembly's presiding officer, Roberts helped spearhead an unprecedented special legislative session to confront property taxes. He authored the CORE reform law that promotes the

sharing and consolidation of services among municipalities and school districts. He also supported record levels of property tax relief.

The Speaker also wrote a law aimed at expanding housing opportunities for hard-working low- and middle-income families.

Roberts also helped lead efforts to repeal New Jersey's death penalty in favor of life imprisonment without parole, and wrote a law that legalized needle exchange programs to combat increasing rates of HIV and AIDS in the state's cities.

The Speaker said he was personally pleased at the way the Assembly has conducted itself during his tenure as Speaker.

"We've had debate without discord," Roberts said. "We haven't agreed on everything, but civility has been the rule, not the exception, and that shows respect for the institution and the people of New Jersey."

Roberts expressed gratitude to the many people who made his experience in the Legislature possible.

"I've had the chance, thanks to the people of the 5th Legislative District, to bring real change to people's lives, and I am so grateful for the opportunity the voters and my colleagues in the Assembly have given to me, and to all the people who provided advice and support over the years," Roberts said.

For photos of the Speaker's announcement please visit:

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