

*Long Island Unions, Economic Development,  
And The Fight for Middle-Class Jobs: A Conversation with  
Labor Federation President John Durso*

*by Niev Duffy and Gregory DeFreitas*

**O**ne in four working people on Long Island is represented





Q: D u 10 1 837, n 8 8 9( ) 15 u i n c 0 1 u09( i)-8( n 81(r)-31( )-8(i)-8( n)-8( 815 i n

But I was very, very pleased to be a part of the council. It showed that the governor has a lot of respect for the labor movement. And there were a number of people on the subcommittees from labor. We had about ten different subcommittees and there were a number of labor representatives. But it was a very good experience. I say this to Kevin Law, one of the co-chairs, all the time. I support labor being involved so that business people see that we don't have horns. You know, that we're not gonna come in the middle of the night to steal their children. That we're just like them; we just want a better life for ourselves and the people we represent.

And I think that jobs will be created by this, by the money, by the leveraging. That was one of the criteria: that a small amount of money from the state would be leveraged to create jobs. And the governor made it very clear and Lt. Gov Duffy made it very clear that this is about jobs. So each one of the projects was about what it would do in the community and the jobs it would create.

I think there are great opportunities. You know, when the project in Ronkonkoma gets going, there'll be thousands of jobs there. That project, with MacArthur Airport and that whole area, will do such wonderful things for that community. It'll be good-paying union jobs created, and then opportunities for permanent jobs afterwards.

Wyandanch Rising is another project that this is funding. There'll be thousands of jobs there. The project can break the stranglehold of poverty in that community, because people from within that community will be able to get some of those jobs and be trained in new careers. So that in itself is just fantastic.

And if we ever can get the Hub in Nassau County going. If they can stop the politics of it – the Republicans don't want to support something the Democrats like; Democrats don't want to support something the Republicans like. In the meantime, the community and the people are suffering. You've got over 50 acres of cement with a crumbling building on it and nobody going to work. Because nobody wants to get their act together and do what's right for the community.

Now, there was a proposal that was put forth that the voters of Nassau County voted down. That proposal would have cost the average resident, I think, the price of a cup of coffee and a buttered roll each month. And it would have put thousands of people to work. But the people spoke. It could have been packaged a

different way so that people understood it. But, you know, people automatically see a billionaire and "Why are we helping him?" Well, you're not helping him; you're helping the community. You're putting people to work. You're keeping that facility. You're keeping that team, which generates \$240 million a year into the Nassau economy. Plus, all of the other ancillary things that come along with it.

You have a facility that is one of the worst for conventions in the country. We need to grow, because now we only get a couple of crumbs from New York City. You have an ice skating rink that can barely keep the ice frozen enough for the players to play upon. What do you want to do? The attitude of some people is: "Why don't you put everybody on the bus and ship 'em out? But we have an opportunity here in Nassau County to put thousands of people to work and create a destination location.

We've got young kids that won't stay here, because they don't have jobs. They have no place to live. They have no reason to stay here, other than their parents holding onto their pants legs and not letting them go.



and processing down South. We have thousands of members. And



Q: How can we ensure that the rights of the working men and women of this country? How can we help working men and women maintain the dignity and respect that they deserve? And how can they enjoy a piece of the American dream and be able to have free association with people that they want to associate with?

JD: If I had to ask the president one question about labor, about working people. I would ask him how can he help protect the rights of the working men and women of this country? How can he help working men and women maintain the dignity and respect that they deserve? And how can they enjoy a piece of the American dream and be able to have free association with people that they want to associate with?

And then, if I was asked to have a follow-up question, I would ask him this: How would he ensure us having a level playing field? Because you already know that the American worker can outwork anybody in this world. And we're all in favor of the employer making a profit. But all we want is our fair share of it. I'd love to be able to ask him that question.

Q: How far has his son come? He made his money off the misery of people. He didn't build something, he didn't create something. He made his money off of people's misery. I believe he doesn't care about working people.

JD: I'd paraphrase what they said to Joe McCarthy: "Have you no decency? Have you no soul?" You know, Mitt Romney's father, the governor of Michigan? He wasn't the greatest labor guy in the world, but he understood the labor movement. He had respect for the labor movement. How far has his son come? He made his money off the misery of people. He didn't build something, he didn't create something. He made his money off of people's misery. I believe he doesn't care about working people.

Q: I think, in the next couple of years, we have an incredible opportunity to change the face of our region. To have our own little version of Silicon Valley, to make an educational Mecca here, with the medical schools, with the colleges.

JD: I think, in the next couple of years, we have an incredible opportunity to change the face of our region. To have our own little version of Silicon Valley, to make an educational Mecca here, with the medical schools, with the colleges.

But, if we don't come together, business and labor, as equal partners, for the betterment of our community, we're going to lose a whole generation of people. A whole generation. And all that will be left here are the very poor and the very rich. And that would be an absolute disaster.

I worry about our community. It's a real concern. But, at the same time, I think we have a unique opportunity to change this place for the better and make it wonderful. Because we have so many brilliant people and great natural resources, and a really smart workforce. But we need to harness that for the good of the people.

*Niev Duff is Visiting Assistant Professor in Politics, Economics & Law at the State University of New York, Old Westbury. Gregor DeFreitas is Professor of Economics at Hofstra University, Director of its Labor Studies Program, and Director, Center for the Study of Labor and Democracy.*

*REGIONAL LABOR REVIEW*, vol. 14, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2012).  
© 2012 Center for the Study of Labor and Democracy, Hofstra University



## Making Trouble in the Workplace and the Novel

*Troublemakers: Po* (S)2((c)-20pan <<MCID 2429)3(g2(r t)-16(m63OOK R: P)Span <<)>[(.4333 T2 22R3N1Sphe F0p

