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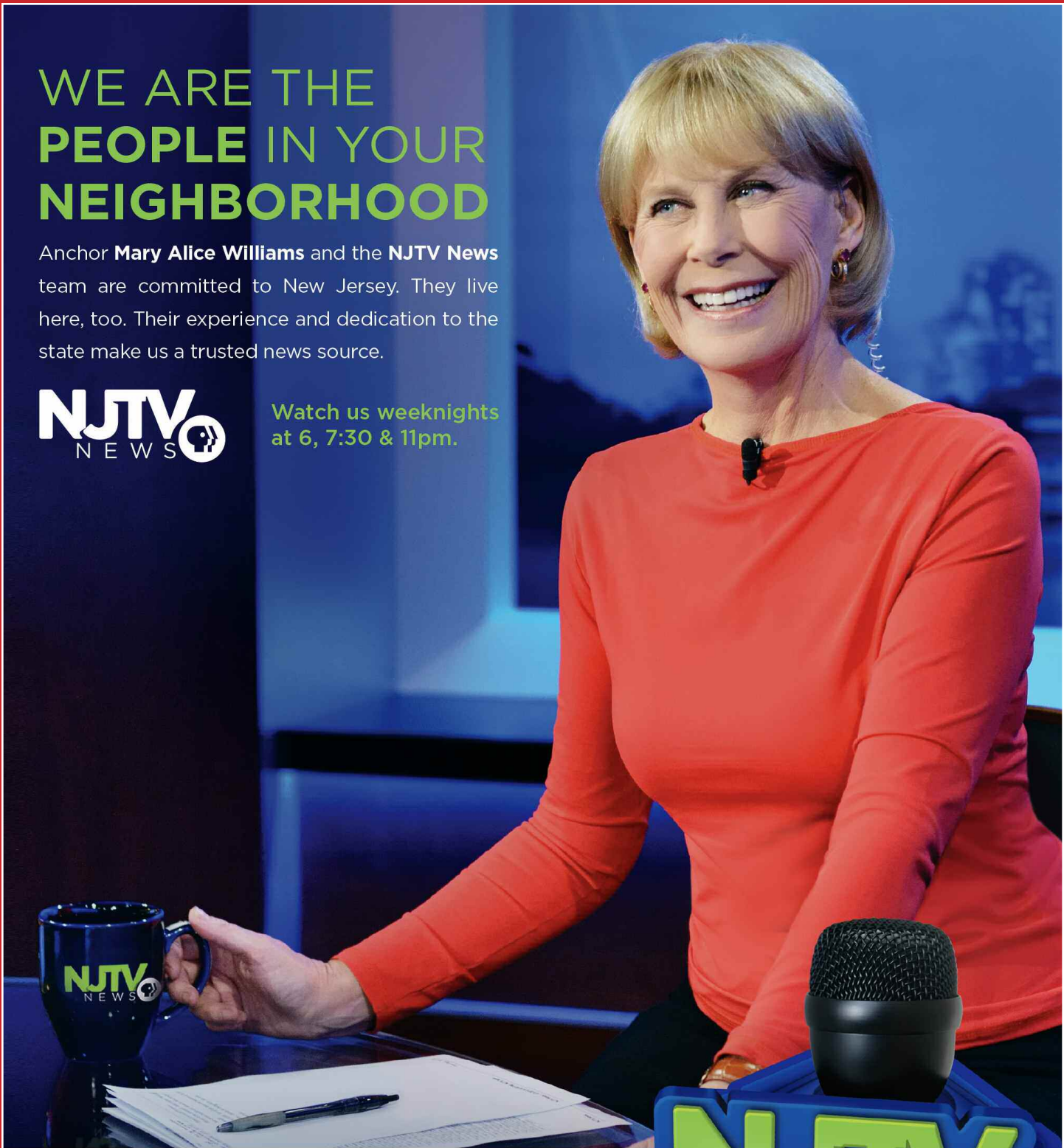
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**INSIDERNJ YEAR IN ADVANCE INTRODUCTION**



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Heading into 2020, the thought was President Donald J. Trump – whatever his national eventualities – would simply drag Democratic incumbents back into office in New Jersey while perhaps even giving them a shot at the ever-elusive 4th Congressional District.

But New Jersey decided to hatch a little surrealistic surprise, in the form of U.S. Rep. Jeff Van Drew’s defection (R-2) from the Democratic Party, just in time for a presidential election year. The stated reason? Van Drew couldn’t support the Democrats’ impeachment of the Republican President, who had solicited foreign interference in the 2020 election.

Even with the uniform change, Van Drew, it should be noted, is the favorite in a district Trump carried by single digits in 2016. The congressman’s Democratic allies – running as “The Van Drew Team” – lost in LD1 last year, failing to withstand a challenge led by a candidate

simultaneously serving as the co-chair of Trump’s 2020 New Jersey reelection campaign. Still (see below) the defection uncorked a whole series of unresolved dramas.

While CD2 offers its own special prodigious intensity, at least two other congressional districts should prove very competitive in 2020: CD3, where incumbent Democratic U.S. Rep. Andy Kim (D-3) seeks reelection, and CD7, home to U.S. Rep. Tom Malinowski (D-7). Both districts were home to Republican incumbents in 2018 and now the Democrats must defend their respective battlegrounds. Most insiders see U.S. Rep. Josh Gottheimer (D-5) as too-established to defeat in a district he ripped from a movement conservative Republican in 2016. For her part, CD11 incumbent U.S. Rep. Mikie Sherrill (D-11) –

*Continued on Page 5*



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*Message from the Editor Continued*

herself the conqueror of a longtime intergenerational Republican in 2018 – carries too considerable a brand to beat. It seemed unimaginable that Larry Casha, the man who lost to Sherrill conquest Jay Webber way back in 2007, that someone could summon the wiles to improve on the efforts of his own conqueror. And it already proved so, as D.C. lobbyist Rosemary Becchi pushed Casha aside this month to become the Republican option against Sherrill with Casha's support.

While all of that is going on, we will, of course, be watching the Statehouse, where Democrats in the Sweeney-Norcross wing of the party will talk

avidly about sexual harassment while their Murphy rivals will agree with them while attempting to make the overriding story about corruption and those infamous tax incentives under investigation by the state AG's Office and the Philadelphia-based U.S. Attorney. The Sweeney-Norcross wing will, of course, agree that something needs to be done in a general sense about political corruption, not necessarily targeted tax incentives, and – capital s and capital h – sexual harassment. A bad year by South Jersey in 2019, including a fumbling away and sideline observation relegation of the party chair's contest, will only make them recalibrate in more politically

lethal fashion as they attempt to undercut the governor. Several late and critical 2019 wins by Murphy (including the chairmanship) gave him a boost, but his test in 2020 will be consistency, and heading off those deadening efforts by the South; big challenges for the nationally-focused chairman of the Democratic Governors' Association (DGA) in a presidential election year.

Max Pizarro

*Max Pizarro*

Editor, InsiderNJ

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## MURPHY'S EXIT OPTION MAY RESULT IN RE-ENTRENCHMENT



There's a school of thought, particularly given the fact that his former state director now serves as Governor Phil Murphy's chief of staff, that Cory Booker's run for president merely plugged New Jersey until the rest of the country decided the 2020 prez contest.

If Booker were to end his campaign prematurely, he'd put Murphy in the pickle of having to choose a candidate, a task complicated by the fact that in the most bifurcated of times, Murphy has labored to make himself a darling of the progressive movement in New Jersey, even if he personally leans toward a middle class on a good day kind of guy like Joe Biden.

Another Goldman Sachs fellow turned governor, Jon Corzine, faced the awful prospect of having to pick a horse in the 2008 presidential race, and it ended up destroying his political career. He picked Hillary Clinton over Barack Obama, thereby putting himself in the back of the pack when eventual winner Obama assembled a cabinet. Sick of the wretched river town otherwise known as Trenton, New Jersey, Corzine had wanted Treasury, and – twist on an old Neil Kinnock phrase coming up – a platform on which to stand to bash his former tormentors at Goldman. Denied, he found himself prodded into a reelection rundown with Chris Christie, which he lost.

Certainly, the establishment continues to try to drum Murphy out of town, and he could hang around out of spite. But the smart political career money, Gary Cooper tin star in the dirt move for Murphy is picking the right candidate for president and then riding the Hanoi helicopter out of New Jersey before it drags him asunder. The trouble is the field is so chopped up with no clear and defined frontrunner that many insiders see only a brokered Milwaukee convention as the ultimate outcome. While such an eventuality could perhaps plays havoc with his chances, Murphy also could use his strong position within the party (he is, after all, head

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## MURPHY'S EXIT OPTION MAY RESULT IN RE-ENTRENCHMENT – *Continued*

of the Democratic Governors' Association) and finally prove his prowess as a dealmaker, which is how he advanced up the ladder at Goldman in the first place.

It is said that Murphy – a former Ambassador to Germany – would favor Secretary of State and settle for nothing less than Ambassador to China. Of course, Republican President Donald J. Trump – complete with his own little Wildwood, NJ-friendly narrative, could win reelection, thereby propelling Murphy, a la Corzine, into his own reelection posture. The good news (or bad) is that Mur-

phy (unlike Corzine in 2009) would most certainly be the 2021 favorite. Even if he didn't want to be here at that point, he could shake the one and done tag that drags on the legacy of his former Goldman alum, even if they both couldn't get to the bigger dance. Then again, in the minds of Murphy's minders, reelection could position the governor – provided he avoids a Christie-like Bridgegate meltdown – for a 2024 prez run.

With Booker out of the contest now, the calculation appears to be for Murphy to go toward safe bet Biden.



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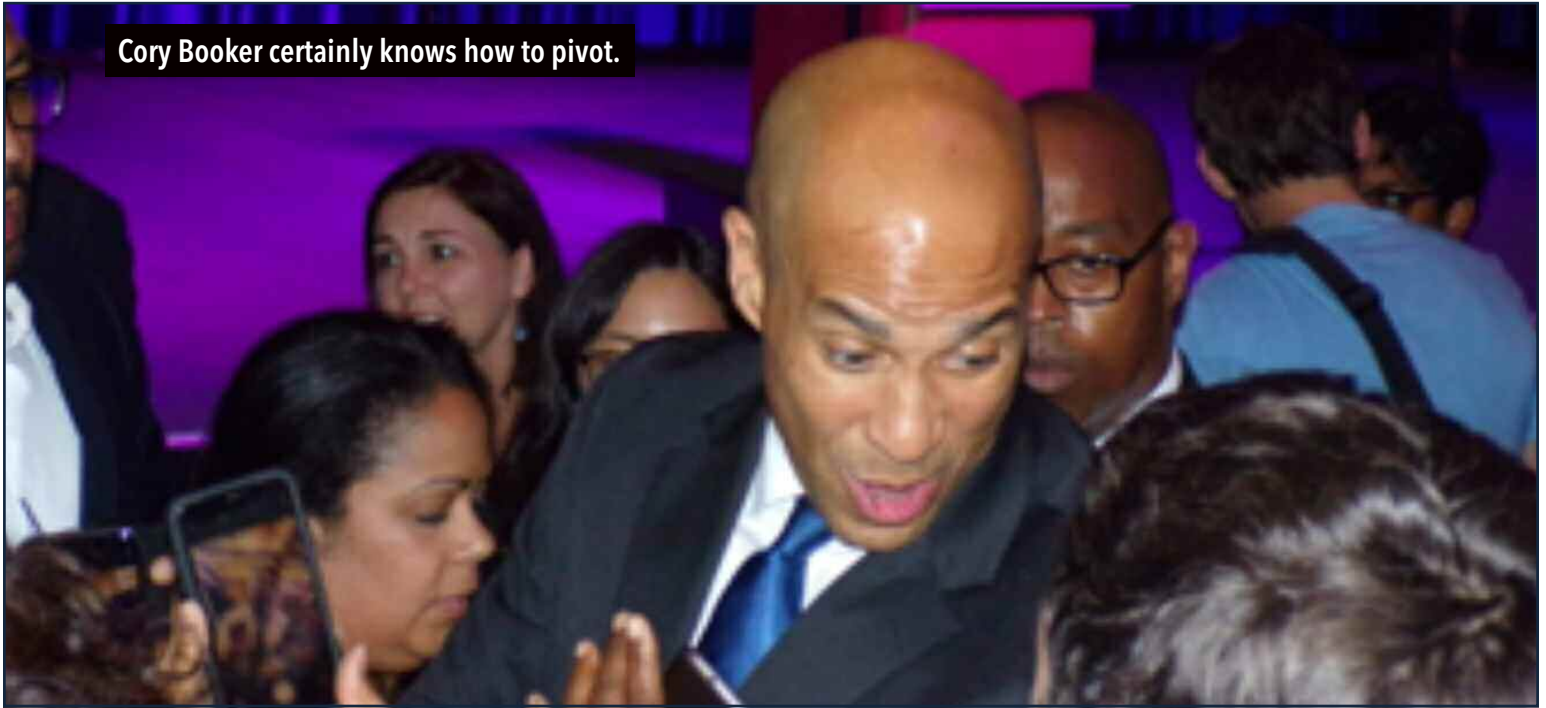
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## THE BOOKER SENATE TO PREZ PIVOT

Cory Booker certainly knows how to pivot.



For months, the Booker camp has been sending out emails to supporters insisting – contrary to reason and fact – that his presidential campaign was alive and well.

Just send Booker a few more dollars and everything would be fine and dandy; that was the message. It seemed not to matter that the senator was now failing to qualify for debates. Ignoring that, the campaign kept on saying that Booker had tons of real people support in Iowa.

And then – it was over.

Booker pulled out of the race on January 13th, less than a month before the Iowa caucuses, where he had positioned himself to compete.

Now it was time for that classic political act – a pivot.

Years ago, I briefly had a state government public relations job that really wasn't for me, but I do remember senior officials saying things like, "We're going to pivot."

Up until then, I thought pivoting was a basketball term, as in, move your pivot foot and you'll be called for traveling.

But in the political world, pivoting seems to mean you stop what you had been doing and – presto – just start doing something else.

On January 13th, the Booker camp was back with a message that said his

work "to make justice and opportunity real for everyone must continue."

And it added, "That's why I'm running for reelection to the U.S. Senator."

Two days later, the Booker campaign distributed another message making sure everyone heard the "exciting news" that Booker is running for reelection as a senator. And it asked recipients to become one of the "founding donors" of Booker's Senate campaign.

One supposes it's good to put a failed presidential campaign in your rear-view mirror as quickly as possible, but

*Continued on Page 11*



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## THE BOOKER SENATE TO PREZ PIVOT

### *Continued*

it still takes some gumption to simply move on to another campaign without breaking a sweat.

A few observations are in order.

One is that Booker technically was running for the Senate at the same time he was seeking the presidency. Keep in mind that the state Legislature passed a bill allowing him to run for both offices at the same time. That was a bit crazy, but it is the essence of politics.

A second observation is that Booker now has to focus on New Jersey after spending just about a year – he launched his presidential campaign Feb. 1 of last year – concentrating on getting to the White House.

The cynicism of Booker's pivot, notwithstanding, his path to reelection doesn't seem all that complicated.

Democrats far outnumber Republicans in New Jersey and Booker's name recognition is pretty good.

And here's a quiz for you – name the Republicans seeking the GOP's Senate nomination.

As of now, they are Stuart Meissner, Tricia Flanagan, Hirsh Singh and Rik Mehta.

If there truly is a serious challenger to Booker in that group, it remains to be seen.



And if one surfaces, Booker may have to redefine his message, or in other words, pivot again.

Whatever occurs, Mehta in particular offered the returning New Jersey junior senator an appropriate New Jersey welcome home, when he said the incumbent Democrat should seriously reconsider returning to the Garden State to run for “another failed Senate term.”

“Cory Booker has been completely tone-deaf in terms of what issues are important to the nation,” said Mehta. “If he runs back to New Jersey after being absent for so many months, I’m sure he will find that the New Jersey

electorate has moved on from him and his failed policies.

“Cory Booker has failed New Jersey residents on every level,” added Mehta. “From the poverty rates and unresolved lead water crisis in Newark, to public health and education which continue to suffer under him, the American public understands that Booker’s failed policies in Newark will also fail the rest of the country.”

Even if miniaturized and in this case the outcome not in doubt, for Booker, the fun would not abate.



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- Transgender Student Guidance (7.21.17)
- Higher Education SOGI Data Collection (1.18.18)
- Gestational Carrier Agreement Equality (5.30.18)
- The Babs Siperstein Law (7.3.18)
- Gender Identity Death Certificate Equality (7.3.18)
- Transgender Equality Task Force (7.3.18)
- LGBTQ-Inclusive Curriculum (1.31.19)
- Ban the Gay+Trans "Panic" Defense
- Bill of Rights for LGBTQ Older Adults
- HIV Criminalization Reform
- Funding for Homeless LGBTQ Youth
- Over-the-Counter Access to PrEP / PEP
- The Equality Act
- Overturn the Transgender Military Ban
- Safety Waiver for Name Changes
- Intersex Surgical Autonomy
- Restore Benefits to Discharged LGBTQ Veterans
- Amend Law Against Discrimination for Health Programs & Activities

## THE RACE IS ON FOR SENATE IN THE GOP



GOP Senate candidate Tricia Flanagan and Grover Norquist

As usual in New Jersey, there's an exciting – and irrelevant – Republican Primary for U.S. Senate. As much as it helps the national GOP (and the individual egos of those running) to believe New Jersey will rise in rebellion of Cory Booker's presidential run by throwing him out of his senate seat, it won't happen.

A big pharma guy with unlimited money who was a pretty good candidate (Bob Hugin) in 2018 lost by double digits to an incumbent Democratic Senator (Bob Menendez) who had been under indictment.

Booker is not losing in a state where Democrats outnumber Republicans by over a million registered voters to:

- **Tricia Flanagan**
- **Rik Mehta** – *Pharmacist, Professor of Law at Georgetown University Law School, Attorney*
- **Stuart Meissner** – *Former Prosecutor and Independent Candidate for U.S. Senate in 2013*
- **Natalie Lynn Rivera** – *Independent Candidate for U.S. Senate in 2018*
- **Hirsh Singh** – *Engineer*
- **Gary Rich** – *Former Monmouth County freeholder*

Still, the crowded, self-convinced field will no doubt make for an exciting (if ultimately doomed to a general election turf) contest.



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## A 'COMMON HOODLUM'S' COMING OF AGE: THE U.S. SENATE CANDIDACY OF LARRY HAMM



The tug of war for the soul of Lawrence “Larry” Hamm between government and activism, pragmatism and radicalism played out in his hometown of Newark, the cultural and political connecting point, where for years activism alone appeared to have the decided upper-hand; that is until now, as he undertakes a street-level statewide run for elected office, 45 years after his power-defying bid for an at-large city council seat.

His direct challenge of U.S. Senator Cory Booker carries multiple layers of dramatic resonance, overlapping storylines and even inevitability.

Both born in Washington, D.C., they came to New Jersey as babies, 16 years apart, Booker the son of IBM executives to Harrington Park; and Hamm the son of a truck driving father and seamstress mother to the Central Ward of Newark. They both attended Ivy League colleges, Booker Yale and Hamm Princeton, and both saw Newark as the proving ground. But while Booker spent a brief time as a tent-pitching protester before winning his first city council seat in 1998 and thereafter leaping upward from one elected office to the next (councilman, mayor, senator, and, he had hoped, president); Hamm lost his 1974 citywide shot

and then, in the early 1980’s, founded the social and economic justice-agitating grassroots outfit, the People’s Organization for Progress (POP).

### ORIGINS

For Hamm it started back in the spring of 1967 when he threw rocks at his elementary school as repayment for the school ejecting his friend.

The school’s principal responded by ejecting him.

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## A 'COMMON HOODLUM'S' COMING OF AGE: THE U.S. SENATE CANDIDACY OF LARRY HAMM

His mother had cried when Hamm's father died when the boy was four years old.

But with little Larry seemingly headed for oblivion on the streets of Newark, his mother broke apart in the principal's office and begged for her son to be readmitted.

"Your son," the principal told her, "is a common hoodlum."

Still, they let him back in.

A mother's tears hit harder than rocks.

Between his elementary and high school careers, in the summer of 1967, long-boiling tensions in Newark spilled with the July 12th police arrest and beating of cab driver John Smith at the 17th Avenue Precinct and subsequent rebellion by blacks against the city's white establishment.

"It happened about a mile away from my house as the crow flies," said Hamm. "All the ingredients were there for an explosion. Someone told me Springfield Avenue was on fire."

He stood on the front porch of the building where he lived and looked across the street at the violent spectacle of people in the sweltering summer heat tearing garage doors off

the front of a dry goods warehouse.

He looked up at his grandfather, Claude Cobb, a boiler man and WWI veteran, and wanted to know why everybody was so upset.

Why were blacks overrunning the streets?



"My grandfather didn't start the discussion with Newark," said Hamm. "He started the discussion with his service in the military when he was in the army and they went to France, and the French people were asking to see their tails. I was like, 'tails?!?!' That was the first real discussion I ever heard about race – the night of the rebellion."

Hamm had gone down south before the riot and was with his mother and aunt on the train out of D.C. when the conductor made them move to the back of the train. But he had

been so young at the time all he really remembered about the incident was the commotion caused by his hellraising Aunt Gladys as she resisted but finally relented and went to the back of the segregated train. Now his grandfather was trying to illustrate how race affected people on a personal level.

"He was talking about his life," Hamm said. "He hated the south. He was from the south. He told my mother he did not want to be buried down south."

Was his grandfather expressing affirmation of the necessity of black resistance?

"I don't know," Hamm said. "The discussion was not that deep. My grandfather was not that militant. He was a hardworking man, who worked his whole life, got sick and didn't go to work for two weeks and then he died. He's buried in Glendale Cemetery in Belleville in the veteran's section five rows from my father, who was a WWII veteran."

But on that night and in the aftermath of the initial eruption, Newark was the warzone.

The regional news networks carried coverage of the "riots".

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## A 'COMMON HOODLUM'S' COMING OF AGE: THE U.S. SENATE CANDIDACY OF LARRY HAMM – *Continued*



“I saw contingents of national guard marching and rolling in, halftracks jeeps and trucks just like in the WWII movies, on 16th Avenue and 12th Street. Martial law was declared. We were under military occupation. Twenty-six people were killed. Then the guard pulled out two weeks after and what was remarkable was the way things returned so quickly to normal. I thought school would be delayed, but they started in September, right on time.”

Before he went to Arts High School, his 8th grade teacher took him to the top floor of Bambergers downtown where a man was signing books in a

crowd amid TV cameras. It was legendary Olympic track star Jesse Owens, who signed one of his books for Hamm.

“I was 13 years old when I met this great man, but the real depth of what he had done – fighting the racism of the Nazis – had not sunk in to me,” he said.

He touched the hand of greatness somewhere within the embers of the rebellion.

### THE MAN FROM UNCLE

Larry Hamm went to Arts High School still thinking about his

mother sobbing in the principal’s office back in junior high.

At student orientation, he felt focused.

He was committed to full redemption, to being a good student and making the most of an opportunity.

Then the student council president – who was at that time called the student mayor of the school – an Ilya Kuryakin-lookalike who wore a blond Beatles-style haircut, climbed onstage. He was expected to talk about student government, the upcoming Halloween party, and UNICEF collections.

He proceeded to rail against the War in Vietnam.

“I was sitting there, and I had this real conscious thing in my mind that I had a second chance,” Hamm said. “I had messed up. This is a personal thing, not a racial thing. But this kid, whose name was David, he doesn’t talk about things asked for. He starts talking about Vietnam. So the principal gets up and tells David to stop talking about Vietnam. The principal comes over and tries to physically drag David from the podium. David and the principal get into a fight onstage in front of the whole auditorium.”

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## A 'COMMON HOODLUM'S' COMING OF AGE: THE U.S. SENATE CANDIDACY OF LARRY HAMM – *Continued*

Suddenly Hamm was thinking something very different from what he thought when he walked into that room as a burgeoning academic.

“I thought, ‘I want to be in student government,’” he said. “I already knew the consequences of opposing authority, having just been suspended. But he was onstage fighting the principal. I couldn’t find Vietnam on a map. But I knew this was important. I knew I wanted to join the student council, because if he could put himself on the line like that, there was something serious going on.”

Hamm became deputy mayor, and by the time he was a senior, he was mayor of Arts High School.

“At that point, I was on the road to political consciousness,” he said.

While he was determinedly campaigning at school, someone else was campaigning citywide against incumbent Hugh Addonizio, and in 1970, Newarkers elected Ken Gibson their first African-American mayor.

“I didn’t work in the Gibson campaign,” said Hamm. “I was not conscious of what was happening in city politics. I was tending to school politics. It was happening around me.”

It was happening a block away, in fact, where stood the headquarters of poet-activist Amiri Baraka (father of



future Newark Mayor Ras Baraka), on the future site of St. Benedict’s.

On his way to school each day, Larry Hamm walked past that headquarters.

Two men stood out front in green dashiki uniforms with black pants and afros.

John Coltrane music flooded the area.

“I didn’t go in, but I knew it was a black thing,” Hamm said. “I saw them as something unusual.”

One day during the 1970’s teacher’s strike, and just prior to the Gibson election, the principal brought Arts

High School’s government reps down to the Latin classroom where a man talked to them about the political situation.

“I never heard anyone talk that way,” Hamm said.

It was Baraka.

A year later in March of 1971, Hamm – now a track and field star in the mile – was organizing a student walkout in the midst of a second teacher’s strike. The students learned that if they missed 35 consecutive days of school they wouldn’t graduate and go to college as planned. Hamm was heading – he hoped – to Princeton. He didn’t

*Continued on Page 23*





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## A 'COMMON HOODLUM'S' COMING OF AGE: THE U.S. SENATE CANDIDACY OF LARRY HAMM – *Continued*



want to be delayed. The principal found out about his planned protest and called him into her office.

If he went ahead with the walk out, he would be suspended, he wouldn't graduate and he wouldn't go to college.

But he and the students were ready to go.

"I didn't want to be called an Uncle Tom," Hamm said.

He went through with the walk out. Ninety-percent of the student body joined him in the street, where they marched to what at that time was the Double Tree Hilton, now the Gate-

way Hotel. Two-hundred students got inside and went up to the sixth or seventh floor and sat down, determined not to move.

Then Mayor Ken Gibson appeared.

"He came and told us he understood why we were doing what we were doing, and told us if we worked with him he would end the strike," Hamm said. "We weren't on the board side or teacher's side. We were kids who wanted to graduate. And yes, that lesson was eminently clear. I tell kids all the time: they have power. The mayor came to us. That was the first time I saw Ken Gibson."

He had been not even a year in office.

Three months later, as their young star prepared to go to Princeton University, the Hamm residence received a knock on the door.

It was an aide to Mayor Ken Gibson. He had a question for Hamm.

"The mayor wants to know if you would be a member of the Newark Board of Education."

There was a vacancy.

"I just got accepted to Princeton University," he told the aide.

"You want to go to school? You'll be able to go to school and go to Princeton at the same time."

Hamm was focused.

"I had gone into the lion's den, survived the teacher's strike that threatened our graduation, I had applied to Princeton, Harvard, and Yale and been accepted at all three."

Still, he couldn't resist.

He would go to Princeton.

But he couldn't completely leave Newark.

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## A 'COMMON HOODLUM'S' COMING OF AGE: THE U.S. SENATE CANDIDACY OF LARRY HAMM – *Continued*

On July 1, the 17-year old assumed the oath of office as the youngest full voting member of a board of education.

“I wasn’t even old enough to vote,” he said.

In four years he went from someone who barely graduated, to a Princeton University-bound member of the Newark Board of Education.

### THE LOCAL COLLISION BETWEEN GIBSON AND BARAKA

Amiri Baraka was not happy with Gibson, however.

The internationally recognized beatnik black power poet and self-professed communist lost faith in Gibson almost immediately.

On the heels of the 1967 troubles, coming out of the 1969 Black and Puerto Rican convention, Baraka and his followers put the pre-condition on Gibson that if he became mayor he needed to appoint a black police director.

Gibson didn’t.

He installed, in fact, an Irish American.

Baraka was livid.

It would take a long time for Gibson to make Lieutenant Edward Kerr the city’s first black police director.

Gibson – through intermediaries, and never in person – was pulling Hamm on one side.

Baraka – personally, face to face – was pulling on the other.

Then there was Latin class at Princeton, which might have well have been the actual experience of the Punic Wars.

“I was unprepared,” Hamm said of his studies.

The Brick City revolution now extended to include Gibson as a major local disappointment – and a political target.

Baraka and his allies summoned their best people to oppose him as they approached the 1974 election.

Newark was too intense.

Too urgent.

Hamm dropped out of Princeton.

With Baraka’s backing and blessing and with his own African name Ad-humu *Chunga* (Swahili for “important youth”) given to him by the poet, Hamm ran for an at-large seat

on an anti-Gibson slate with Ralph Grant, Julia Grant, Jim Nance, and Dennis Westbrook.

He lost.

But he went back to Princeton in 1974, this time with a factory worker first wife and his first daughter behind him, and graduated cum laude with a degree in politics.

Was it all an academic grind?

Hell, no.

“On campus, we formed the People’s Front for the Liberation of Southern Africa, and got Princeton to divest from companies that did business with South Africa,” Hamm said.

Then he went back to Newark.

### THE ROAD TO A 2020 U.S. SENATE RUN

Forty years of radical, unshakeable activism followed.

Jesse Jackson for president.

Reparations for the sons and daughters of enslaved Americans.

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*Continued on Page 27*





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## A 'COMMON HOODLUM'S' COMING OF AGE: THE U.S. SENATE CANDIDACY OF LARRY HAMM – *Continued*



Hamm in a national presidential campaign.

When Sanders reemerged as a 2020 contender, Hamm signed on without reservation as chair of the Vermont Senator's New Jersey presidential campaign.

"I will campaign in every city in New Jersey," said Hamm, ally of former Working Families Director Analilia Mejia of Elizabeth, who is now political director for Sanders's national campaign.

Recreational marijuana legalization.

Expungement.

Abolish the electoral college.

A near-fatal car accident.

A second marriage.

Two more daughters.

A progressive independent bid for the assembly in the 28th District against Senator Ronald L. Rice's (D-28) slate in 1987.

Ongoing anti-war efforts.

Hamm stood on the steps of city hall the day after George W. Bush beat John Kerry and told people not to cry.

"He was trying to out-warrior the warrior," he said, standing at the side of fellow progressive state Senator Nia Gill (D-34), decrying Kerry's fatally compromised eye vote for the use of force in Iraq.



In 2016, Bernie Sanders with his socialist message of universal health-care engaged an always impassioned

"Beating Donald Trump is the floor; it is not the ceiling," Booker said in Adel Iowa on Sunday on the presidential campaign trail ahead of the Feb. 3rd caucuses. "It gets us out of the valley; it doesn't get us to the mountain-top. I am running for president because I want to get to the mountaintop!"

Back in New Jersey, in Essex County, it's not about Booker, Hamm, the Democratic candidate insists, when asked about his likely incumbent opponent in the Democratic Primary, his fellow Ivy Leaguer and Newark doppelganger who went the way of elected office when the founder of POP stayed street only to double back now on the prospect of a collision in his sixties.

*Continued on Page 29*



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## A 'COMMON HOODLUM'S' COMING OF AGE: THE U.S. SENATE CANDIDACY OF LARRY HAMM – *Continued*

It's bigger, Hamm argued.

Sanders is the national-sized expression of the people power agenda Hamm awakened to in the 1960s and dedicated his life to: the fair housing for blacks activist arrested, resurfacing in office with the same uncompromising aims as himself.

The old arcs of history and influence return and convergence.

“Taking Trump out is not enough,” Hamm said. “Normal is what helped get Trump into office. This is the double V sign we have to have here, just like the NAACP employed: victory against fascism abroad and victory against domestic fascism. Candidates that were ‘normal’ brought us to Trump.”

That said, “I am a Bernie Sanders supporter working to make sure he is the nominee, but if he doesn't get it, I will support whoever the nominee is, because we must beat Donald Trump, who is the titular head of nascent fascism in this country.”

But aren't he and Sanders two inflexible radicals from another time, he is asked, two surviving emblems of an age incapable of compromise? “They said FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] – who put people to work –



had an agenda that was too radical,” Hamm said.

It was Tuesday, the morning of Christmas Eve day, and, incidentally, Hamm's birthday.

After he finished his interview, the old high school track and field man who once met Jesse Owens in crisis-torn Newark, went jogging at Brookdale Park in Bloomfield, as he does annually at this time.

Hamm wrote on Facebook on this occasion two years ago a sentiment he said he stood by this week: “I jogged 4 miles, 16 laps around the quarter mile track there. Last year I did three miles. Next year, weather and body permitting, I hope to jog 5 miles on my 64th birthday. My

thanks to my daughter Imani for going to the track with me and taking this picture yesterday. For my birthday she gave me a new pair of running shoes. And to celebrate my birthday we went to the movies last night. It was fun and we both enjoyed the film. It was a good birthday. I am glad to be alive. At this time in my life, I face many difficulties and personal challenges, but I have much to be thankful and grateful for. I have been in the struggle for racial, social, and economic justice for the last 46 years of my life, since I was a teenager. It is because the support and encouragement of so many of you that I have been able to stay in this race, to last this long, and to come this far. This is the last lap and I am going to keep fighting until I cross the finish line.”



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**KEAN, JR.'S QUEST TO ABIDE WHERE LANCE AND FRELINGHUYSEN COULD NOT**

It seems inevitable that it would come to this for that last politically surviving third of an aristocratic triumvirate reduced now to a single-standing totem otherwise known as Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean, Jr., in the era of President Donald J. Trump. In his own endearing way, Trump already contributed to unhorsing those other remnants of the N.J. Republican Party round table.

Scion of a still-surviving former governor respected for his urbanity and never-let-'em-see-ya'-sweat state-house agility, Kean the younger apparently has in mind a different

variation on a theme of perpetually smiling noblesse oblige in the face of an anger management-oblivious reality TV show star turned president than his fellow purveyors of political family dignity.

"I'm very disappointed in Tom Kean," Westfield Mayor Shelley Brindle last fall said of the Republican state senator from her hometown running to secure the Republican nomination to run against Malinowski in 2020.

"We've worked well together," said the Democrat, "but he has jumped

aboard the Trump bandwagon."

The "Trump bandwagon." It amounted to a fairly cavalier dismissal of a name Republicans wanted to believe could project beyond the meaner dimensions of what Trump had come to constitute for most Central Jersey voters. It was the last name of its kind on the landscape; among the last options, in fact, from among that dwindling fraternity of intergenerational gentility that included former Governor Christie Todd Whitman and the eminently 2021 vulnerable state Senator Kip Bateman (R-16).

*Continued on Page 33*





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## KEAN, JR.'S QUEST TO ABIDE WHERE LANCE AND FRELINGHUYSEN COULD NOT – *Continued*

They all had the examples right in front of them.

Sons of fathers who respectively were themselves a former congressman and state senator, former U.S. Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen and former U.S. Rep. Leonard Lance in the fateful lead-up to 2018 grappled separately with the jarring presence of the country's chief executive, who epitomized the opposite of everything they prized in public: restraint, good manners, good breeding, reluctance to indulge in obnoxious endzone dances, self-aggrandizement, and Twitter tantrums.

"I think he ought to leave his tweets at home," a beleaguered-looking Frelinghuysen told reporters in March of 2017, in reference to the president. A year later, amid reports of the Trump Administration opposing the New Jersey Gateway Tunnel project (for which the congressman had secured funding), ostensibly to stick it to the Northeast where support for the president was weak, Frelinghuysen pulled the plug on a run for a 13th term in federal office, gradually disappearing from public view as howls ensued from fellow party members about dereliction of duty and political cowardice in the face of a suburban-stampeding enemy. Leading an anti-Trump movement, Democrat Mikie Sherrill, a retired Navy helicopter pilot, would land-slide her stand-in Republican oppo-



nent in a district owned by Republicans going back to 1984.

Facing his own 2018 reelection prospects as Frelinghuysen folded, Lance, for his part, adopted a different approach, digging in his heels and publicly opposing Trump on critical occasions in an attempt to present an independent-at-all-costs brand name in a 7th District adjacent to Frelinghuysens where the same flames of rebellion roiled.

Unlike Frelinghuysen, who opted out of town halls rather than endure the scourge of progressive scorn, Lance stuck his face in the fire, letting people trample on him and Trump as cohabitants of the same party at Raritan Valley Community College. While Frelinghuysen ultimately voted to repeal Obamacare, Lance delicately tried to thread a needle when he voted the Republi-

can Party's replacement plan for Obamacare out of committee, then opposed the legislation on the House floor along with just 19 other members of his own party. Still, the congressman's opposition to Planned Parenthood funding clung to him at precisely the wrong time, as the president's perceived misogyny motivated women voters to go to the polls.

Prodded by NJTV correspondent Brianna Vannozzi in his debate with Democratic challenger Tom Malinowski, the uncomfortable congressman gave Trump a "B" grade. Malinowski drilled into the incumbent. "We have a problem," said the Democrat. "We are not going to solve that problem by saying, 'oh, I wish he wouldn't tweet so much.'" It

*Continued on Page 35*

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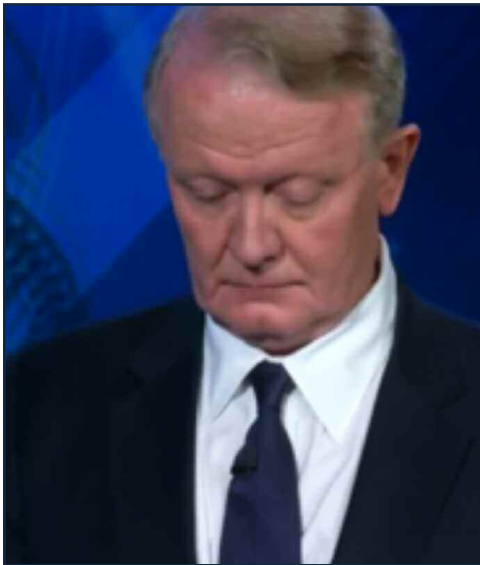
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## KEAN, JR.'S QUEST TO ABIDE WHERE LANCE AND FRELINGHUYSEN COULD NOT – *Continued*

was a running Malinowski theme. Lance wasn't sufficiently muscular to oppose a menacing chief executive, even if Trump's White House seethed over the Central Jersey Republican's gyrations, going so far as to entertain talks with possible primary challengers if Lance didn't simply consistently back their agenda. Then Malinowski himself exposed the congressman's inconsistency when he noted that Lance had voted to gut the Affordable Care Act 60 times before tacking to a moderate position as the prospect of a tough reelection battle loomed.



Lance went down fighting to Malinowski, 47-52%, an ignominious, serpentine-like end to the moderate, originally-strong-on-the-environment Republican who occupied the same senate minority leader seat that Kean did before the younger man's advance up the party seniority ladder.

Now comes Kean (\$1 million in the campaign bank as of late last year, compared to his incumbent opponent's \$1.5 million), the most evident upholder of his father's cross-the-aisle-friendly politics, whose run for office, presumably on a ticket with an impeachment-saddled, reelection-seeking Trump, signifies the denouement of the last circle of New Jersey's intergenerational office-holding Republican families. His decision to run toward Trump by running with Trump signifies not only a departure from Frelinghuysen and Lance, but from Whitman and Bateman, who have repeatedly made their disgust manifest.

Whitman penned a viral op-ed calling Trump unfit for office. Bateman joined state lawmaking Democrats in support of a bill specifically designed to keep Trump off the 2020 ballot in New Jersey by requiring presidential candidates to release

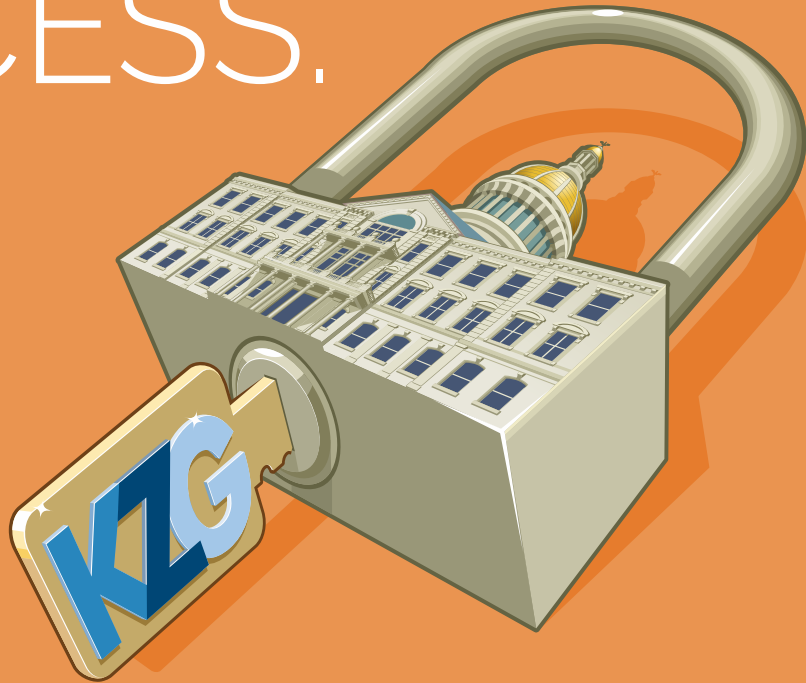
their tax returns. "Kip Bateman needs to look at recent elections," Save Jersey blogger Matt Rooney told 101.5 FM's Bill Spadea. "Ask Leonard Lance. Ask Bob Hugin. Running away from Donald Trump and leading with an apology is not going to win back these people in New Jersey or anywhere else who are voting against the Republican Party. You need to begin to explain to people what we stand for, create a real contrast with the status quo — these nuts that we've got leading us like Cory Booker and Phil Murphy — and then at that point people will begin to take you seriously. [Bateman]'s not going to get any good will that way."

When Kean kicked off, he obviously attempted to emphasize his own family's history.

InsiderNJ columnist Fred Snowflack was in the room that night in Clark.

*Continued on Page 37*

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## KEAN, JR.'S QUEST TO ABIDE WHERE LANCE AND FRELINGHUYSEN COULD NOT – *Continued*

“I’m a Tom Kean Republican,” he said... to an overflow crowd jammed into the local American Legion hall. Kean Jr., was announcing his candidacy for the 7th District congressional seat now held by Democrat Tom Malinowski.

The reference was to his father, Tom Kean Sr., who served two terms as governor in the 1980’s.

The term, “Tom Kean Republican,” is not merely the type of throwaway line one often hears at political gatherings.

Over the years in New Jersey politics, it has come to mean two things – a moderate Republican as opposed to an uncompromising right winger and an official who sees the opposition as just that, not an enemy to be vanquished at all costs.

But to Brindle’s point, especially given the wreckage around him of other genteel family legacies turned to Revolutionary War-era stone, Kean faces the prospect – amid the preponderance of issues aimed by this administration at New Jersey (overridingly on Gateway and SALT), presumably out of political spite – of running against himself, or against his father, by occupying the same lane as the president.

The alliances bespeak of same-fox-hole mindset. Launched in Septem-



ber of last year to help the candidate on the fundraising front, Perfect Together PAC features the advisory presence of Bill Stepien, Trump’s political director, formerly political minder for Governor Chris Christie. A short time later, Snowflack wrote about Christie’s political ally Bill Palatucci, urging people in an email to forget about raising money for CD-7 Republican Primary candidate Rosemary Becchi, who at one time – long before Kean jumped in the 2020 contest – flirted with the possibility of receiving Trump-friendly support to oust Lance in the 2018 Primary. Republicans would later pry Becchi out of the primary with Kean and redirect her to CD-11 and a general election matchup with Frelinghuysen conqueror U.S. Rep. Mikie Sherrill (D-11).

Kean, Jr. and Christie were never overly friendly, the seeds of their political acrimony exposed most dramatically during the governor’s 2013 reelection campaign, when, hoping to coattail pre-Bridgetate Christie fever, the senate minority leader personally selected and championed Republican senate candidates in South Jersey districts. Christie didn’t campaign with those candidates. Nor did his name appear on lawn signs with them as he burnished the North Jersey support of Essex County Executive Joe DiVincenzo and state Senator Brian P. Stack (D-33), both Democrats.

Ironically – or not – one of those South Jersey Democrats he left alone was then-state Senator Jeff Van Drew (D-2), whose Kean-supported and

*Continued on Page 39*



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**KEAN, JR.'S QUEST TO ABIDE WHERE LANCE AND FRELINGHUYSEN COULD NOT – *Continued***

Christie-abandoned rival watched in horror as Van Drew, presumably on the strength of deal-making above Kean’s paygrade, walked back into office with a 59-39% blowout victory. Now, deprived of Christie in the governor’s office in a district Trump won by single digits in 2016, but aided by the political connective Trump tissue of key Christie allies Palatucci and Stepien, Congressman Van Drew, having switched parties from Democrat to Republican, welcomes Trump to a Wildwood campaign rally in a state where the SALT

deduction-limiting tax president was supposedly – but for a golf course and downbeat gambling mecca association – a statewide nemesis. With Van Drew especially, to a lesser extent Kean, and certainly by capitalizing on intra-party rivalries within the Democratic Party, Trump forces hope to use New Jersey as evidence of an enemy territory beachhead.

In forging those closer ties to Trump’s GOP, had Kean – denounced by Christie in the aftermath of 2013 because of his temerity

to actually advance the cause of people in his own party rather than acquiesce to Democrats – become what he beheld in the name of political expediency? Or was he merely the same enduring Republican, so loyal to the party and steadfast in the belief of his own name, that even now he trusted in his ability to transcend – and inspire collective transcendence? Whatever the case, like Lance before him, Kean will have to defend – for all his public expres-

*Continued on Page 41*



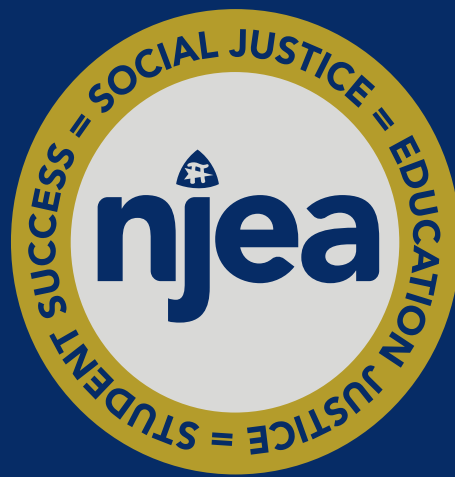
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## KEAN, JR.'S QUEST TO ABIDE WHERE LANCE AND FRELINGHUYSEN COULD NOT – *Continued*

sions of moderation – a basically Republican Party record in a district – Brindle’s 2017 win, not to mention Malinowski’s 2018 victory prime exhibits – changed from the times of leafy yore. Republicans in the district still edge Democrats – 153K to 149K registereds – in a collision for the independent vote.

His allies will deny it but his 0-2 record in federal elections – and the infamy of a very shaky 2006 performance on foreign policy in his match-up with Bob Menendez, now, at precisely the time, given the weightiness of ongoing incoming headlines, when Malinowski – a former foreign service official in the Obama Administration – will be able to speak surgically on Iran in a well-educated district, arguably put Kean in political hail Mary mode. There’s buzz about this Malinowski race being his Waterloo (an unfortunate metaphor given the absence of a Battle of Saorgio or Battle of the Pyramids on his resume), which Assemblyman Jon Bramnick’s (R-21) public mulling of a 2021 gubernatorial run aims to quell. If Bramnick (who has consistently run away from Trump) were to actually run for governor, he wouldn’t run again for the seat Kean presumably would abandon in the aftermath of a win over Malinowski (we assume Bramnick would fill it for the duration of the term), or – amid inevitable internal grumblings – be faced to consider



giving up in the brutal aftermath of his third federal loss.

Over the last few days, Malinowski and Kean made the reorganization rounds, each projecting barely veiled hot stove irritation at the presence of the other, civility in close unwilling proximity demanding their hands dart toward each other, just enough to touch – and withdraw. At its worst a contest of insipid austerity, colorless in its head-to-head

matchup of middle aged white males in an atmosphere of female political radiance, cadaverous traditions close-at-hand; at its best the CD7 contest arguably collides real-impact contradictions, undertaken not only between the two hardly demagogic principals but within a Republican Party within a party, within the auspices of a domineering, seemingly very un-Kean-like personality.

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## MALINOWSKI TO KEAN: 'BRING IT ON!'



**MOUNTAINSIDE** – When Tom Malinowski first launched his reelection campaign about 10 days ago in Hunterdon County, his opponent was unknown. It would have been either Tom Kean Jr. or Rosemary Becchi.

But when Malinowski had a second “launch” of his reelection campaign Wednesday night – this time at the Echo Tap and Grill in Union County – the GOP landscape had shifted. Becchi was now running in the 11th District, so Kean would be Malinowski’s opponent in the 7th.

“Bring it on,” Malinowski said before addressing about 100-150 people in the bar’s dining area.

He said he long assumed Kean would

be his opponent and that he wants “a contest on the issues.”

When he addressed supporters, he joked that he and fellow freshman Democrat, Mikie Sherrill, share a lot of things. Now, they even share Republican opponents, given the fact Becchi’s campaign has relocated from one district to another.

In a more serious vein, Malinowski spoke of Kean as a “big name Republican.”

How “big” a name Kean is remains to be seen. Thomas H. Kean Sr. was a very popular two-term governor, but he left office more than 30 year ago. It certainly can be debated how significant the “Kean” name is to voters

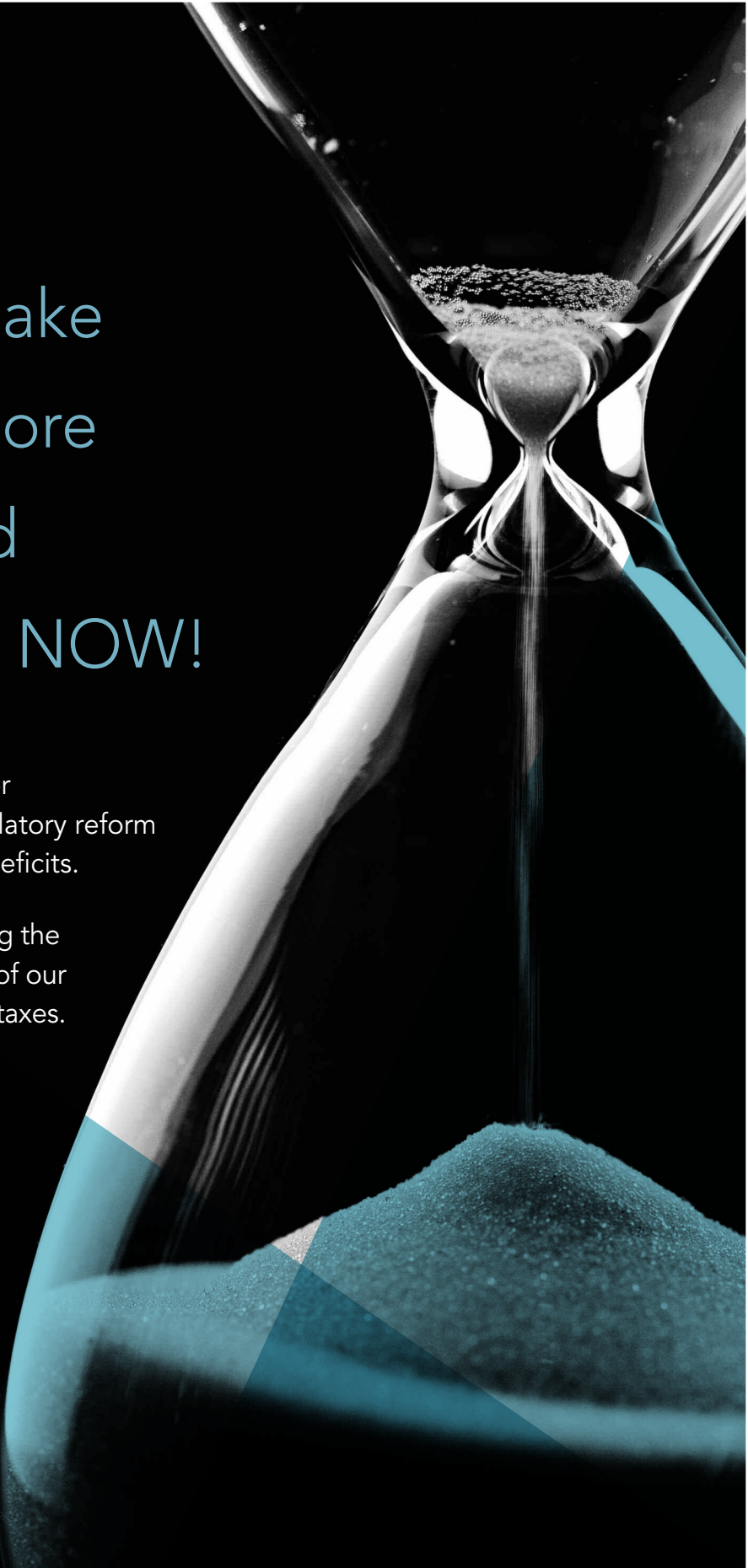
under 40. In what may or may not be instructive, Kean Jr. ran statewide against Bob Menendez in the 2006 U.S. Senate race with less than desirable results.

As he said in his previous campaign launch, Malinowski expects an acrimonious race, noting, “This is going to heat up pretty darn soon.”

He said he’s prepared to be called a “socialist” and a man who backs “open borders.”

In turn, Malinowski said he’s going to demand that Kean explain his support for Donald Trump, or as the congressman said, “a man who is in love with Kim Jong-un.”





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# THE CD2 DISASTER. BUT THEN WASN'T THAT THE POINT?

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Jeff Van Drew's decision to change party affiliation from Democrat to Republican gave President Donald J. Trump a reelection year political toe-hold in an otherwise pretty blue state, one that fielded 11 of 12 Democratic congresspeople in the 2018 mid-term elections.

It also created immediate havoc in both parties, as incensed Republican candidates vying to take on Van Drew (David Richter, Brian Fitzherbert, and Bob Patterson) found themselves at war with the base of their own party, charged up to back Van Drew on the strength of Trump's endorsement of the defected Dem. It must have been very strange, almost like a Stanley Kubrick movie, for someone like Richter, who overnight found himself in lurid debates on Facebook with regional conservative voice Harry Hurley.

The Democrats appeared just as divided, with the South Jersey political machine that helped give birth to Van Drew now mostly backing Montclair University Political Science Professor Brigid Harrison, while progressives ran the risk of cannibalizing themselves among the likes of Atlantic County Freeholder Ashley Bennett, West Cape May Commissioner John Francis, and educator Amy Kennedy. The presence in the developing contest of Kennedy, however, did play to

*Continued on next page*



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# THE CD2 DISASTER.

## BUT THEN WASN'T THAT THE POINT? - *Continued*

an extraordinary reanimation narrative in the imaginations of some New Jersey Democrats. Kennedy also offered the promise of something Democrats would need to compete in a race the president's presence had nationalized: deep pockets.

Van Drew welcomed Trump to a Jan. 28th rally, which prompted public declarations of outrage among the Dems, and private-spilling-into-public agony among Republicans. It was


a mess, otherwise known as the CD2 contest in 2020.

What did it mean in a transactional context?

The feds (headed by a U.S. Attorney appointed by Trump) had Van Drew's former party benefactor under the headlights in an ongoing investigation of tax incentives that benefited his business interests. Was Van Drew tacit public payment in hopes of making that investigation go away, at least on

the federal level? We don't know. It was an intriguing dovetail, on a race that more resembled a tortured albatross.

For the moment, Richter and Fitzherbert – devoid of support in their party that moved fast to Van Drew under Trump's political auspices – dropped out of the race; as the GOP left Democrats to fight over the identity they would project against a completely Trumpified Van Drew.



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## THE CD3 DEBACLE: NO TIME SOON

Andy Kim was never going to win any charisma awards, but then he never promised to be anything other than a good government policy wonk with impressive foreign policy credentials. An added benefit proved to be his fighting qualities as a candidate, as the Democrat dethroned – yes, with some help from a flailing midterm Republican president - incumbent U.S. Rep. Tom MacArthur (R-3).

Now Kim has a reelection campaign on his plate, and the prospect of going up against Kate Gibbs, deputy director for the Engineers Labor-Employer Cooperative, ELEC 825, who will obviously have some Building Trades heft with her as she tries to gut through a primary. Fellow BurlCo Republican, former Hainesport Mayor Tony Porto, is also in the contest. So is Barnegat Township Deputy Mayor John Novak, a self-professed Make America Great again contestant running out of the Ocean County half of the Ocean-Burlington congressional district against two Republicans from BurlCo. Tossed out of CD2 when Trump's backing of Van Drew signaled to Republican organizations to back the former Dem, millionaire businessman David Richter launched his CD3 candidacy in late January, intent on snagging the line in Ocean County. Already in possession of the BurlCo GOP line, Gibbs showed no signs of relenting.



Former Burlington County Freeholder and CD3 GOP primary candidate Kate Gibbs

The 2019 elections showed Ocean's enduring GOP profile, and some schizophrenia in Burlington, which voted in countywide Democrats, but persevered with Republicans in 8th District. If Republicans completely lost their base of operations at ground zero of the county, stars like Assemblyman Ryan Peters and Assemblywoman Jean Stanfield are coming off solid wins.

Overall, the Third was never going to be as Trump friendly as the 2nd, but then it would not quite create the same chords of righteous Gateway and SALT deduction rage stirred up

in 7 or 11. Kim ended up excelling where people thought he would: policy fine-pointing; but his office also proved competent with constituent service. Conventional wisdom pointed toward a Kim v. Gibbs or Richter (on the strength of his financial connections, Trump political connections and the prospect of landing Ocean) general, but Gibbs or Richter would still have to get through the maw of either Ocean or Burlington respectively. It would be an organizational challenge to say the least for Gibbs or Richter, not to mention Ocean County and Burlington County GOP chairs Frank Holman and Sean Earlen.

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## CD4: SMITH V. SCHMID

Multiple candidates remain in the CD4 Democratic Primary, but former Foreign Service Officer Stephanie Schmid mostly had to watch progressive Jim Keady, who had experience campaigning and knew how to appeal to the leftward reaches of his party in a Democratic Primary; and D.C. insider Tiffany Kaszuba.

That changed earlier this month, when first Kaszuba dropped out of the contest after Schmid received the backing of the Monmouth County Democratic Screening Committee;

followed by Keady, who imploded amid the fallout from a profane email he sent to former girlfriends he thought were badmouthing him on the campaign trail.

Again, other candidates remained in the contest, but Schmid had early organization support on the strength of her demonstrated fundraising capacities.

She looked like the smart bet to go up against incumbent U.S. Rep. Chris Smith (R-4).

Only after Van Drew's defection to the GOP, she would no longer be able to describe her opponent as New Jersey's lone Republican congressman.



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**CD5**

When Josh Gottheimer voted in early January on a resolution aimed at curbing the president's unilateral power to launch military strikes, he was one of only eight Democrats to do so.

The vote raised some eyebrows back in the Fifth District, but for Arati Kreibich, it was more than a mere eyebrow raiser, it was a call to action.

"I shouldn't be shocked by Rep. Gottheimer's conservatism anymore, but

I am," said Kreibich, who is challenging Gottheimer from the left in the June primary. She scorned Gottheimer for taking every opportunity "to side with Trump and his warmongering allies in the GOP."

You can expect this type of attack to continue.

Gottheimer, who tries to steer a middle course in an ideologically-diverse district, often is panned by the left.

The political question is, will it make any difference when we get to the primary? After all, Gottheimer has the advantage of incumbency and the bottom line is that the Fifth District, which ranges from the Hudson to the Delaware in northern New Jersey, is not a left wing district. Let's not confuse Newton in Sussex County with Greenwich Village.

*Continued on next page*

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## CD5 - Continued

Gottheimer is fond of saying that he has to always remind himself that he's the first Democrat to represent the district in generations.

He explained his vote by saying the resolution in question mirrored existing law, but more importantly perhaps, stressed that he remains "committed to always putting country ahead of party."

That has been a winning strategy for him in the last two congressional elections.

On the Republican side, there are already seven people expressing interest in the race. It's going to take time before we know who the serious candidates are, but one already lining up party support is Frank Pallotta of Mahwah. Also planning to run is John McCann, of Cresskill, who lost to Gottheimer in 2018.

In contrast to the war powers resolution vote, Gottheimer did vote with fellow Dems in support of impeaching President Trump, which likely

will be a rallying cry for Republicans this fall. Trump slightly won the district in 2016.

But before that happens, it's going to be interesting to see how much traction Kreibich's challenge picks-up. Or in other words, will she be a legitimate opponent for Gottheimer or just an irritant?



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## PATERSON WARD ONE: COMPETING WILLS AT THE HEART OF SILK CITY



In any fight, the victor will exploit a mistake by his rival to get the crucial upper-hand, and in the ongoing Paterson scrap between Mayor Andre Sayegh and Ward One Councilman Mike Jackson, a citywide seesaw of competing visions built on equal parts ego, pride, toreador testosterone, vanity, and political chicanery, all enhanced by a general societal mood of inanity, but bitterly serious finally, each focused competitor undertook his competing agenda while awaiting the other's misstep.

Jackson would routinely pop the mayor on council items: a trailer park the city paid \$1.4 million for that was

only worth \$200k; an Ellison Street property for \$5 million that was only \$1.5 million; allegations of city employee mistreatment by hustler department heads from out of town; or a down-the-throat sewer tax unfavorable to residents. It was a role that seemed to come naturally for the man who had competed unsuccessfully for mayor in the last election: wait for the man who beat him to make a mistake and then rail against him at the scheduled meetings. Sometimes even a perceived mistake could be made to look like a colossal blunder. In Paterson, there was enough going wrong that sometimes it all naturally inevitably blended together on the front

doorstep of the mayor. And Jackson – Jackson could do better, or so he argued.

“When this administration started he had my full support,” the councilman said of Sayegh. “I never believed in anything he did. He never wrote any substantial legislation as a councilmember. But he has relationships with certain people and he put together a pretty good team of individuals I had a great deal of respect for. I voted for things I didn’t necessarily believe in, but I wanted to give them the best opportunity to succeed.”

*Continued on Page 56*



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## PATERSON WARD ONE: COMPETING WILLS AT THE HEART OF SILK CITY - *Continued*

Needless to say, Jackson lost faith early – and utterly.

“A lot of press releases,” he concluded of the Sayegh Administration.

“His intent is not about Paterson and the disenfranchised population of Paterson,” Jackson added of the mayor. “His intent is to help developers and the political classes to enhance his political career to get to the next level – congress, senator – I’ve even heard some buzz that he has in mind governor, which is the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard. Me? I have ab-



solutely no political ambition. I am not interested in scaling political heights. I’m interested in Paterson.” Sayegh, of course, hit back.

“It’s unfortunate that after the [2018] election he decided to be a perpetual obstructionist,” said the mayor. “In fact, he’s such an obstructionist that people have taken to calling him ‘Stonewall Jackson.’ We have \$130 million in state tax credits and all of them are targeted to the First Ward. Mr. Jackson wants to vote out of spite, not what’s right. It’s sour grapes, and for someone who has a background in professional football, he’s not a team player.

“Not to mention,” Sayegh added, “he

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## PATERSON WARD ONE: COMPETING WILLS AT THE HEART OF SILK CITY - *Continued*

never misses an opportunity to offend anyone.”

More on that in a moment.

An old jock – a football quarterback – turned businessman whose restaurant went belly up, who jumped into politics when Anthony Davis cracked up on corruption charges in 2014, Jackson came in a distant fifth when he tried to run for mayor, posting 1,028 votes behind 2,597 for Third Ward Councilman Bill McKoy, who decided to partner with the mayor ahead of this year’s elections.

“I’m no longer competing with Andre Sayegh,” McKoy told InsiderNJ last month. “We had the campaign for mayor. Some have not known when a campaign ends.”

He didn’t name names.

But the mayor’s moment in his ongoing turf tussle with the naysaying Jackson came this past September, when the First Ward councilman, criticizing the administration’s performance on the renovation of the city’s historic Hinchliffe Stadium, uttered this widely condemned remark in his effort to convey a conversation between himself and the Paterson Armory developer: “I said, ‘Mr. Developer, I respect you, I appreciate you for valuing our city, for offering the best price possible and not trying to go backwards to Jew us down.’” It was

less a slip than an awful, ugly stumble that left the wildly swinging councilman open for a well-timed Sayegh counter.

“You offended a lot of people. A lot of people. You may not know it – you are smirking,” said Sayegh as Jackson smirked from the dais, according to Paterson Times reporter Jayed Rahman.



So now it’s an election year, and at least three challengers have already submitted their names to take on Jackson for his ward seat. With city-wide influence and a chance to reshape the council to better suit his own will at stake, one presumes Sayegh will find a way to back a candidate not named Jackson in the contest. Both School Board Member Nakima Redmon and Mosleh Uddin have either political or friendly ties to the mayor. A third challenger, Demetrius Davis is a local firefighter. “For now, I am not endorsing a candidate in the First Ward race,” the

mayor told InsiderNJ.

“However,” he added, “Nakima Redmon is a very viable candidate.”

While it remains to be seen how the sting of Jackson’s remarks return to haunt the coming campaign (will considerable outside money go against him to ensure that he pays for the bigoted comment), others who also criticized him on that one score nonetheless see his independence and rubber stamp resistance as pluses on the governing body, the sitting council president among them. Jackson backed Maritza Davila for council president, and as part of the deal obtained the position of council vice president. “I back Mike 100%,” Davila told InsiderNJ. “He is a real advocate for the residents of the First Ward. But I don’t plan to merely support him with words. I will walk and go door to door on his behalf.”

Jackson has a ready message to his constituents as the rest of the city gazes in on the First Ward, aware of the contest’s larger implications. “The necessity to have checks and balances is essential,” the incumbent said. “If not, then you have potentially a runaway of one group controlling the city.”

The race here relates to the 2nd Ward contest, and to McKoy’s Third, where potentially other opportunities exist

*Continued on next page*

## PATERSON WARD ONE: COMPETING WILLS AT THE HEART OF SILK CITY - *Continued*

for Sayegh's allies to rid the council of Shahin Khalique (who usually lines up with Davila); or the mayor's antagonists to eject McKoy. As with those other ward races, the outcome could impact citywide power and give an advantage to either the mayor or Davila (and conceivably Jackson). But for the moment, in the First, the challengers just want to harvest enough signatures to get on the May ballot.

Dissatisfied with what she sees in her ward, Redmon served as vice president of the school board during Paterson's transition from state to city control. Her knowledge of government extends to her job with the Passaic County Planning Board, and as a member of the city's historic preservation commission.

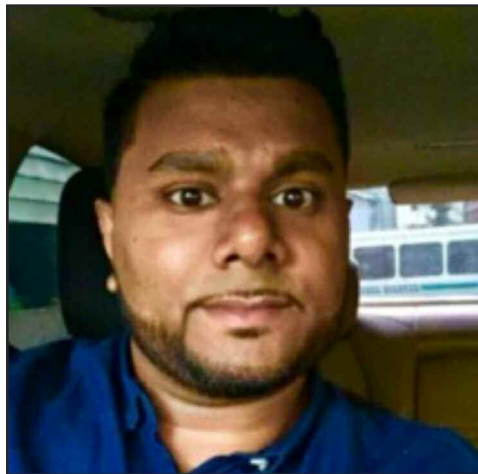
"I am a community-based person," Redmon told InsiderNJ. "I have always been involved in the community."

Born and raised in Paterson and product of the Paterson Public Schools, who served on the school board while the city made the transition from state to city-run schools, Redmon admitted, "It's going to be a hard fought race. It won't be handed to any candidate."

For the moment, she elects to stay positive.

"The time we have is going to be short

to run, and I respect the men in the race," said the fledgling candidate. "It's going to be a tough race, run at the height of politics."



Another lifelong Patersonian, Mosleh Uddin said if elected he would be much more pro-active in the First Ward. "I would focus much more on public safety," Uddin said. "We need police and fire personnel to reach out to constituents faster and improve response time. Sometimes residents feel hopeless, and that needs to change.

"I absolutely believe I could make allies in the administration; whoever is there I believe we can work together," added the educator, who works with middle school students and volunteers his time as a substitute teacher and assistant coach for the basketball team.

Young Uddin comes from an influential political family in the Bengali community led by Taj Uddin, with

roots going back to the 1940's, when Mosleh's great uncle came to Paterson from Harlem after leaving East Pakistan. "Politics has always been a part of my life," the 31-year old candidate told InsiderNJ. "My father used to help the council and he has been very supportive of the mayor. My father came in 1990, and he always had the impetus to help people, and advocates to help improve our community."

Sources describe Uddin potentially – whether intentionally or not – spoiling a chance for Jackson to regain support he once had within the Bengali community that resides in the First Ward. Then again, Demetrius Davis could help the incumbent cohere his own base and impair Redmon.

For his part, Jackson said he trusts in his own presence within his ward as a guy on the ground, to counter anything Sayegh shows up with in effort to get him out of there.

As for "the Jews down" comment, "I didn't mean it," the councilman said. "It was a term frequently used as kids growing up but it never had any malicious intent. A longtime Patersonian is someone I lean on, a great man, who is Jewish. He owns a store on Broadway and I always fell under his tutelage. I've gotten so many calls after that night, calls from Jewish

*Continued on next page*



## PATERSON WARD ONE: COMPETING WILLS AT THE HEART OF SILK CITY - *Continued*

community members, who told me they didn't feel any insult by my comment. Everyone makes mistakes. I'm not exempt from that.

"The mayor's office and the media are making a bigger deal of it than the residents," he added.

Whoever emerges from among the developing candidates will have the challenge ultimately of drawing Jackson into a legitimate and sustained one on one, even as the councilman and the mayor cannot refrain from a rivalry bigger than the ward. "He is a completely compromised councilman with countless conflicts of interest," said Sayegh, who sees Jackson's slips as more considerable than those of the tongue, whose allies writhe under the gritty public interest superman narrative Jackson indulges, as though his cape doesn't merely cover a multitude of other missteps, mostly at the gray nexus of politics and business.

From the Paterson Times: *A company connected to Alma Realty, owners of Center City Mall, provided a \$450,000 mortgage when councilman Michael Jackson sold his property on Grand Street that houses his restaurant Jacksonville more than two years ago, according to court records. ... The lawsuit raises questions about Jackson's ardent support for the Center City Mall expansion at a time when the mayor and the City Council are engaged in pitched battles over who should receive a chunk*



*of the \$130 million in state tax credits. Pro-decriminalization and expungement but against recreational marijuana legalization, Jackson sees Sayegh shackled to moneyed and powerful interests that include the influx of marijuana grow facilities in Silk City. "My opinion on how the mayor has chosen to handle this is it reveals a great failure on his part," the said councilman, pointing to the dearth of six-figure salary jobs as the new industry expands locally.*

"The potential impact skipped over Paterson," he told InsiderNJ.

If the men remain on their feet for now, the next misstep could prove more problematic, to say the least, in the context of a contest, for Jackson more immediately, but for Sayegh too, if the councilman remains politically alive when originally wounded (if it wasn't politically fatal than what was it?), and reanimates, or gains as a specific consequence of the campaign.

## MCKOY V. MENDEZ: THE DIMENSIONS OF PATERSON'S 2020 3RD WARD RACE



The ongoing rivalry of Paterson 3rd Ward Councilman Bill McKoy and former At-Large Councilman Alex Mendez has less to do with divergent styles than it does with the substance of citywide power, their opposing personalities and now their acrimonious history simply making their next collision convenient, even if it was already inevitable.

While livery driver turned realtor Mendez channels perpetual incandescence – “A game show host,” one of his detractors deadpans, hardly in the mood to concede bombast as a public virtue; auditor McKoy, by contrast, refines the art of public austerity and reserve, always using dignity, not necessarily effusive likeability, as an organizing principle.

“Competency is a real issue,” McKoy, the master of ironic understatement, grimly told InsiderNJ in

2018, when he ran for mayor, evidently hoping his myriad backslapping nemeses would create such a blur of excitement that finally the voters wouldn’t see them alongside a stately – if unerringly sedate – alternative.

It didn’t work out that way, as McKoy’s increasing frustration on the citywide trail found outlet in soaring, righteously indignant oratory, climaxed by his extraordinary debate takedown of a candidate well on his way to winning, who, in fact, did win. And now rather than have the second floor of city hall from which to observe the unfolding 2020 ward races, McKoy, immigrant son of a Jamaican cooper, must defend that Ward 3 seat he has occupied for 20 years, in the face of a man who sees him as a warm-up act for a showdown with the mayor who defeated them both.

Each deprived of his own right to sit on the throne, McKoy and Mendez must fight to remain in the throne room.

“Fortunately we don’t have any new combatants,” McKoy said Friday (but, in fact, a third candidate will get in the race: community activist Sharieff Bugg). “Paterson knows both myself and former Councilman Mendez. They will judge us on that.”

“Each ward is different,” the councilman added. “The 3rd ward is a little more considerate of the record.”

He let the word stick.

Mendez, meanwhile, spent Christmas in New York.

*Continued on next page*

## MCKOY V. MENDEZ: THE DIMENSIONS OF PATERSON'S 2020 3RD WARD RACE – *Continued*

“Since I left the council I focused all my energy on my foundation and working on issues related to citizenship and services for people,” he told InsiderNJ. “They want me back on the council because they value my fight against tax increases, and so a month ago I sat down with my family and received their blessing again to run.”

The word “again” has special resonance here.

It started nearly eight years ago, when Ward 3 incumbent Councilman McKoy struggled to attain victory.

He would survive, but Mendez shocked him, sending a message to the city in narrowly losing to a ward icon: “I’m coming.” Two years later, in 2014, Mendez won an at-large council seat as a come-backing Jose “Joey” Torres felled ambitious Ward 6 Councilman Sayegh.

The Dominican community had officially arrived.

By the time the state attorney general’s office separated Torres from city hall on corruption charges, Mendez was ready to personally vie for the mayor’s seat.

Of course, so was McKoy.

And so was Sayegh.



They scrapped, and the presence of a financially well-connected and organized Pedro Rodriguez (17% of the vote) in the contest inhibited Mendez from defining a coalition of Hispanic voters. Sayegh beat him in a landslide, 41-22%. Still, Mendez beat McKoy (12%) to come in second citywide.

Unofficially, that made them one and one.

McKoy beat Mendez ward-wide in 2012, and then Mendez beat McKoy citywide in 2018.

Now they’re back in the 3rd Ward, where the allies of Sayegh have fastened themselves to the sitting councilman, seeing his fourth place finish as less of a threat than second (albeit distant) place finishing Mendez, whose presence on the council would give him a restart runway toward a 2022 run for mayor.

Sources say McKoy recognizes the political advantage of allying with the mayor. The councilman has a solid base of 1K voters. But Sayegh will undoubtedly give him structures connected to the Passaic County Democratic Party. “Bill doesn’t have a strong operation,” a source noted. “He has strong supporters but lacks boots on the ground. Andre will provide that for him.” In Sayegh’s favor, a friendly McKoy will potentially stop Mendez, while presumably giving the mayor a voting ally on a council occupied by numerous individual personalities where the front office sometimes struggles to find a majority.

There’s some irony there.

Part of McKoy’s resentment of Sayegh in the lead-up to the 2018 mayoral election stemmed from the 6th Ward Councilman voting last on

*Continued on next page*



**MCKOY V. MENDEZ: THE DIMENSIONS OF PATERSON'S 2020 3RD WARD RACE – *Continued***



difficult budget votes and opposing tax increases, sticking McKoy with a record that included aye votes on those increases. When McKoy ran for mayor, Sayegh used his rival's votes on property tax increases to score points and ultimately stagnate the 3rd Ward Councilman's candidacy.

When Sayegh became mayor and announced that he would have to raise taxes, McKoy volubly bristled.

He never liked that kind of slippery gamesmanship.

Still, he made his point.

Time to move on, particularly with Mendez lurking.

"I'm no longer competing with Andre Sayegh," McKoy said. "We had the campaign for mayor. Some have not known when a campaign ends. Well, it did end."

The council is ordinarily too individuated to present a united front against the mayor, but Council President Maritza Davila, and Council-

*Continued on next page*

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## MCKOY V. MENDEZ: THE DIMENSIONS OF PATERSON'S 2020 3RD WARD RACE – *Continued*

men Shahin Khalique (Ward 2) and Flavio Rivera (at-large) often run together. Sometimes they join routine Sayegh rival Ward 1 Councilman Mike Jackson as part of the opposition, such as it is. There's talk that Sayegh's allies wouldn't mind breaking that up by getting behind former Councilman Mohammed Akhtaruz-zaman to take out Khalique next year. The others tend to buck the mayor when they want. Strictly on the political front, At-Large Councilwoman Lilisa Mimms is all in with her colleague, 4th Ward Councilwoman Ruby Cotton.

Forget about his future intentions in 3 – Mendez back on the council could at the very least present a significant vote-to-vote obstacle to Sayegh.

McKoy?

He's willing to work with the mayor.

“My job as a councilman is to provide advice and consent,” he said. “That has been my approach: to recognize when the campaign ends and governance begins. Mayor Sayegh and I have had our disagreements,

but I look to support those things where I can shape the direction of the city.

“There's an adage in retail, which is that the customer is always right. Well, the voter is always right, and as councilman I have an obligation to work with that individual who is mayor for the good of the voters,” the councilman added.

A source familiar with the developing race told InsiderNJ to expect –

*Continued on next page*

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## MCKOY V. MENDEZ: THE DIMENSIONS OF PATERSON'S 2020 3RD WARD RACE – *Continued*

as if there were any doubt – a dogfight. Changing demographics may appear to favor the always auditioning Mendez (no to mention the presence in the contest of Bugg), and eight years ago “Alex almost got him. But this is the precursor for the mayor’s race.

“This is the mayor’s race right here,” the source added. “For Sayegh, this is his [2022] reelection. You beat him [Mendez] here, you keep him out of the way. I’m not saying Mendez beats Andre if he beats Bill, but he will have moved a step closer to keeping himself in the public eye in city hall, and the mayor can’t want that. And of course,

Bill wants to keep going, so they’re good, Bill and Andre. They both see a common opponent.”

Of course, Mendez has a template for how to beat McKoy: Sayegh’s 2018 mayoral campaign. His early attacks on his opponent sound like the stories that sank McKoy citywide.

“I think my biggest concern about how government is being run right now is how many tax increases we’re seeing, including a new way of billing the residents for sewer,” Mendez said. “The councilman has been voting in favor of tax increases since he was

there. I think he has done enough damage for 20 years.

“These are complaints that are not coming from me only,” the former at-large councilman added. “They are coming from the taxpayers.”

If Mendez is fighting the mayor-allied McKoy with the mayor’s message in an effort to eventually get back at the mayor, questions persist about the role Rodriguez (who finished third in the 2018 race) will play next year.

Mendez is somewhat coy on the subject.

*Continued on next page*

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## MCKOY V. MENDEZ: THE DIMENSIONS OF PATERSON'S 2020 3RD WARD RACE – *Continued*

“Pedro, since he left, they see me as a new leader working very close with him,” he said. “I am blessed to have the full force of the community behind me.”

Sources say the ebullient Mendez could vastly benefit by having Rodriguez with him.

“He’s not a great fundraiser,” a source said in reference to the former councilman. “He’s simply pure energy, a great retail campaigner, but beyond that there’s not much to him. Pedro would give him what he lacks, which is what McKoy lacks without Andre: a great operation.”

Vote by mail will play a big role, too, everyone agrees.

Unexcitable McKoy said he’s ready, his indignant outsider’s message from the 2018 race tempered by mild, conciliatory praise for the establishment. Of course, he can’t resist an almost William Carlos Williams “every man is a city” flourish. “I’m always optimistic about my city, because I am part of it,” he said, before hastily adding, “We have made strides with Mayor Sayegh, working with the DCA [Department of Community Affairs].”

“The governor has been supportive, too,” he added dutifully.

Crime is stubborn, of course.

“We need to improve on the economic conditions at the grassroots level,” the

3rd Ward Councilman added. “Gun violence is plaguing the entire nation and we too are all wrestling with those problems.”

Finally, he said, the people will judge him alongside Mendez and see a more consistent philosophy. “One of service,” McKoy said. “I was elected five times not because of popularity but service; while Mendez will always be challenged in terms of being honest and transparent.”

Finally, it will come down to the 3rd Ward, he pointedly added.

“This is not a business for people making a name for themselves,” said the longtime councilman.

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## **THE GREATEST GRUDGE MATCH OF THEM ALL: PATERSON'S WARD 2**

There was no more bitter collision in 2016 than Councilman Mohammed Akhtaruzzaman versus challenger Shahin Khalique in Paterson's Ward 2. Mail-in ballots proved the difference, as Khalique removed the first Bangladeshi-American from office in a contest decided in court. Now Akhtarruzzaman is back, seeking not only his old seat – but political revenge. Certainly, the city will be keeping an eye out for the presence of Henry Sosa, mail-in ballot provocateur, who's worked with both councilmen, and on the winning side both times.

## **SON OF JOE VAS WANTS TO TAKE ON DIAZ IN PERTH AMBOY**



Perth Amboy's Joe Vas intimidated other men. Broad-shouldered and big and intellectually imposing, he would tower over them. City Hall took on a quasi-religious significance when people began referring to the sprawling, unfinished edifice as the Vas Mahal.

In 2008, only a Catholic daily communicant bankteller named Wilda Diaz – no prior political experience – dared run against the powerful incumbent, stunning New Jersey's political establishment (Vas pulled double duty as an assemblyman in Trenton) when she detonated his

Arthur Kill-Raritan cross-river empire with a 58-42% win.

His 18-year local run broken, the humbled intimidator later went to the slammer on corruption charges,

*Continued on next page*

**SON OF JOE VAS WANTS TO TAKE ON DIAZ  
IN PERTH AMBOY - *Continued***



including money laundering, misuse of his mayor’s office, mail fraud and illegal campaign contributions.

Now, 12 years later, the former disgraced mayor’s son, local attorney Joseph B. Vas, wants to topple Diaz, as do others, Councilman Joel Pabon, Sr. among them, in a developing local contest with murky rules of engagement as the consequence of an unsettled ballot question case conceived by Diaz’s enemies to cast her out of power. Last month, allies of the younger Vas updated his Face-

book page with a campaign-style photo accompanied by the slogan: “Together Perth Amboy can do better.” One source said senior was pushing junior more than junior is pushing junior and doubts junior ultimately runs.

But the young fledgling candidates says no.

“All I can do is stand on my merits,” he told InsiderNJ. “The sentiment in Perth Amboy is Perth Amboy can do better. I am motivated by being a

*Continued on next page*

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## SON OF JOE VAS WANTS TO TAKE ON DIAZ IN PERTH AMBOY - *Continued*

lifelong resident. I have two children we are raising here, I am a business owner and a local attorney who has successfully done over 1k tax appeals to help people lower their property taxes, and I get to hear from the people. If you look at last year's election, it told a lot about the mayor, as all the councilpeople – former allies – went against her. It signified a parting of ways with this administration.”

He cites the usual issues: taxes, crime, the overall condition of the community.



Of course, comparisons to his jammed-up father are inevitable.

“The first thing is I’m my own man,” the younger Vas said. “I have confidence that Perth Amboy voters will judge me on my merits. They will try to put a little stigma on my name but the positives cannot be forgotten either. There are a lot of positives.”

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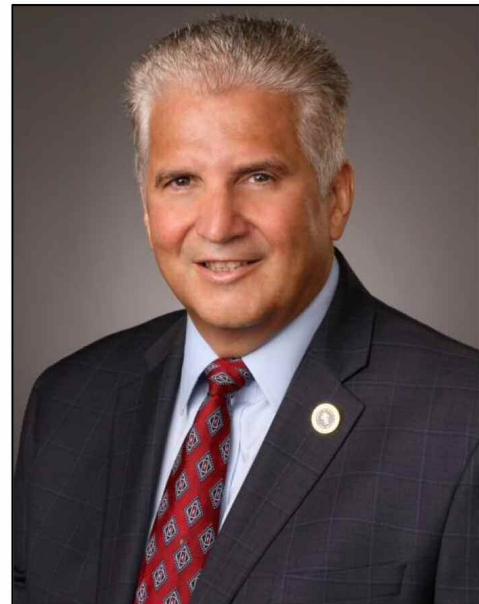
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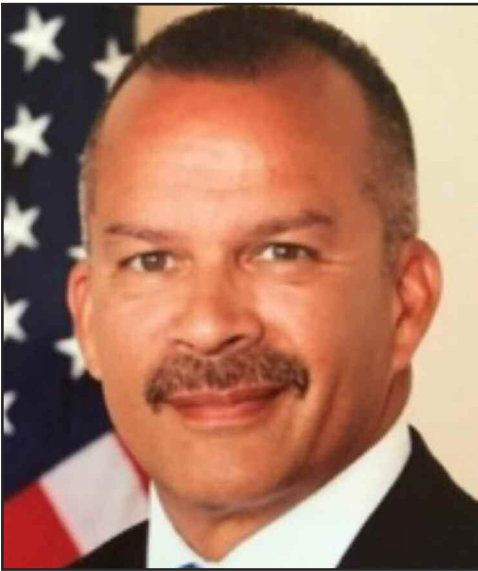
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Once a tentative Diaz ally, Pabon, too, this month unveiled “Joel Pabon for Mayor 2020: Character, Loyalty, Family man, Experience, Retired from US Post office and an Veteran of our Armed services that will tell us when Joel stands up Perth Amboy we have a tested Mayor at table who we can finally say is a leader of utmost integrity, honesty and compassion for all of the citizens near and far.” He lost once, in 2016, leaving insiders also jittery about Vas looking elsewhere for a champion. Some have their eye on Councilman Helmin Caba, chair of the local Democratic Party, regarded as another mobilizing challenger, whose presence could split the city between core Puerto Rican support for the mayor and Dominicans behind the councilman.



More people could get in the developing race, muddying and making that much more intriguing an unresolved ballot question advanced by Councilman Fernando Irizarry, which would require the winner of the 2020 mayor's contest to receive

50% of the vote to avoid a run-off between the top two vote-getters. Insiders interpret the move as a way to nail the mayor, who has won two citywide reelection campaigns against divided opposition without receiving a majority (37% against Billy Delgado and others in 2012 and 48% against Pabon and others in 2016). The public question passed on Nov. 5 of this year, however, the city subsequently filed a lawsuit against the Middlesex County clerk seeking an invalidation of the results on grounds that some mail-in ballots did not contain the public question.

#### **This from Gannett:**

“The lawsuit, filed in the civil division of Superior Court in New Brunswick a week before Election Day, claims that the public question asking voters if they want runoff elections for municipal races when no candidate receives more than 50% of the vote did not make it onto some mail-in ballots. ...If the court grants the city's wishes in its lawsuit, the results would be invalidated and the question would have to be placed on the ballot next November — and the county would have to cover the costs associated with the public question and the legal fees.”

Right now, that court challenge is the contest hanging over the contest, and conceivably a significant dividing line between loss and conquest.

Diaz has gutted through years of infighting in her waterfront city, beating Vas then overseeing the removal of much of his entrenched political

machine from City Hall; going toe-to-toe in public with an operative who turned against her; starting out as a Senator Joe Vitale (D-19) ally before that relationship fell apart; and fighting either Hurricane Sandy, the local Democratic Party Organization, the county, both, and maybe even all three simultaneously over the course of her time in office. She started with Joe Vas, upending a power-monger who proved corrupt. But in a way, the defiant, scrappy Diaz — the only Latina mayor of Puerto Rican descent in the state, has ended up fighting the male-dominated New Jersey political establishment, preparing for next year's showdown in part by backing progressive Bernie Sanders for president over Garden State party machine goldenrod Cory Booker. Perth Amboy takes on added political relevance as a backyard 7-1 Democratic-advantage burgh in the District 19 sandbox of Speaker Craig Coughlin (D-19) of Woodbridge, who in lame duck released the subsequently signed into law driver's licenses for undocumented workers with one eye on Amboy, where the machine — at times apoplectic over her independence — is ever aware of the mayor's refusal to kowtow.

What started with Diaz versus Vas, could end that way, in another mano-a-mano amid freaky echoes of 2008 (her detractors continue to voice irritation over her backtrack on an initial promise to serve only one term) or simply prove yet one more opportunity, despite reanimated former local imperial name ID, for scattered casualties.

## REVELLE FOR SWEENEY: THREE BILLS REVEAL NEW LEVELS OF 2020 COMPLEXITY

Senate President Steve Sweeney's (D-3) unique powers of juggling the often cross purposes of labor, in addition to the state's financial troubles, the politics of a bicameral legislature, a party divide on the heels of a bad year for South Jersey Democrats, and his own lingering (in this case probably inevitable) bitternesses, will be tested in the coming months as he specifically handles three complex and stalled (or recently pulled for reassessment) labor bills.

An ironworker by trade, Sweeney has always shouldered the labors of labor with a particular sense of movement relish, even if his brothers and sisters on the public sector side of the equation began calling for his ejection from the ranks as early as the mid 2000's, long before he landed the senate presidency in 2009. But at his ten year mark leading the senate, and arguably himself in a less than commanding position in the aftermath of a party chairmanship fight that occurred without the input of his region, Sweeney faces herculean tasks indicative of fractures in his professional franchise far beyond the usually easy to identify Building Trades versus public sector variety.

To put it gently, he has his hands full, perhaps never the intended object of organized labor as it undertook over two decades to completely control the state legislature under the considerable auspices of a labor-molded senate president.



### SENATE BILL NO. 4219

The bill expands the permissible use of project labor agreements (PLAs) beyond contracts for building-based public works projects, which boiled down to its essential political parts pits Building Trades on trades, specifically the Laborers versus Operating Engineers and, to a somewhat lesser extent, plumbers and carpenters. Greg Lalevee's Operating Engineers supported the bill in Senate Committee when it came up for a vote and are looking forward to the bill being posted in both the Senate and Assembly. Ray Pocino of the Laborers, however, shot off a letter to lawmakers firmly opposing the legislation.

"In the original PLA statute, certain types of work were exempt from the use of PLAs, namely transportation

projects, pumping stations and water and sewage treatment plants," wrote Pocino, whom some sources say is the target of the bill. "These categories were exempt from the law, because while the projects can be large in scope, they usually only involve a few of the trades. These particular trades have worked together and for the same contractors for many years, so that the work issues that a PLA resolves are not present in these industries. Additionally, in this case, legislating the use of PLAs won't even have the added benefit of unionizing the workforce on these projects, as unions already maintain a significant share of the work in this sector in New Jersey.

"Given that this sector is already highly unionized, it is difficult to see

*Continued on next page*



## REVELLE FOR SWEENEY: THREE BILLS REVEAL NEW LEVELS OF 2020 COMPLEXITY - *Continued*



how adding the use of PLAs in this area would benefit New Jersey’s workforce, infrastructure, or the taxpayers paying for these projects,” the labor leader noted. “What it would certainly accomplish is to diminish the bang taxpayers get for their dollars spent on these projects by creating costly jurisdictional disputes between unions in a sector that is currently stable and efficient. It is unclear what problem, if any, this legislation is aimed at solving, but the disruption it would create in this sector is easy to foresee.”

In conclusion, Pocino pointed out to lawmakers how any position on the measure would force them to pick a side in a dispute, conceivably worse than a political pile-up but a train-wreck for Democrats, which Speaker Craig Coughlin (D-19) is certainly aware of as he mulls over options on his side of the legislature.

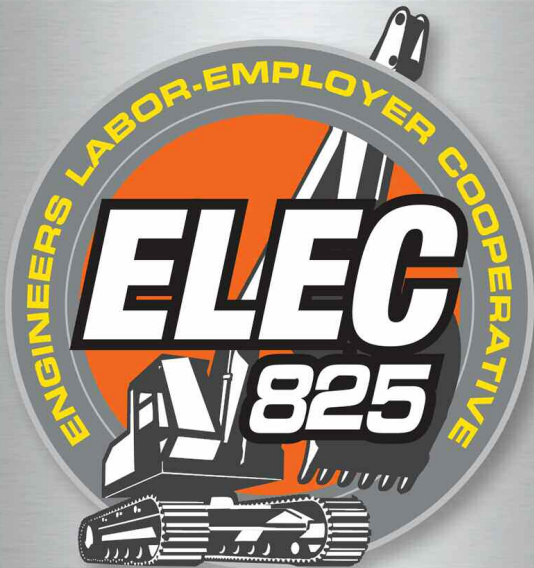
Sweeney wants it done.

Coughlin, heeding Pocino’s point about splitting his entire caucus into

*Continued on next page*

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## REVEILLE FOR SWEENEY: THREE BILLS REVEAL NEW LEVELS OF 2020 COMPLEXITY - *Continued*

hostile Building Trades encampments, wants time and contemplative space.

What good could there be for his caucus fixing bayonets on either side of a Lalevee-Pocino divide?

“Craig doesn't want to get in the middle of that,” a source told InsiderNJ. “He wants to put jobs in the pipeline, not fight over a shrinking pie.”

It's a problem.

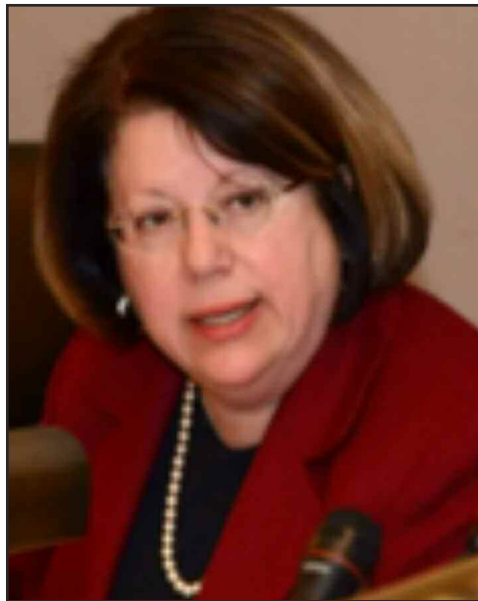
### S-4204

The bill fairly staggered out of the senate Labor Committee, with Chairman Fred Madden (D-4) solemnly bearing multiple panels of critics, Senators Linda Greenstein (D-14) and Joe Lagana (D-38) heavily caveating their “aye” votes, and Senator Tony Bucco (R-25) opposing.

Aimed at management misuse of independent contract labor, the bill is a national AFL-CIO hand-me down, dropped directly into Sweeney's lap by the coast-to-coast-sized allies of President Richard Trumka. Written in the same vein as a recently enacted controversial California law, the bill requires a designation of individuals who perform services for remuneration as employees, not independent contractors, subject to the provisions of employment law, and entitled to all remedies for any violations.

Trumka and company want beachheads in California and on the East Coast.

But on-the-ground critics pushed back strongly in committee.



Sweeney's allies say of the three big labor bills on Sweeney's plate, this one has the best chance of passing sooner rather than later, the consequence of a stepped-up PR campaign aimed at educating opponents about the bill. If Communications Workers of America (CWA) red shirts remain Sweeney's most vociferous critics going back to his partnership with Governor Chris Christie to overhaul public pensions and benefits, a whole new antagonistic flank in the form of indie contractors took shape against this bill, reanimating an old message of Sweeney – the suspenders-wearing

ironworker – being “anti-worker.”

“He has to go back to the drawing board with the narrative,” a source admitted. “This is not an anti-worker bill. It is a worker protections bill.”

The source said Greenstein and Lagana are less jittery about the legislation now than they were in committee.

Still, there's some work to do, the source acknowledged as Sweeney pulled the bill in the current session, grumbling about the hazards of miniaturizing national labor politics into a state like New Jersey.

### S-5815 (The so-called Chapter 78 Relief Bill)

This is the big one, reflective of long-standing labor bifurcation in NJ.

Tired after eight years of his partnership with Governor Chris Christie, the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) in 2017 undertook the most expensive legislative fight in the history of the country to budge Sweeney from power.

They tried to bully, and in the process, got bullied.

Building Trades Boss Bill Mullen grabbed a bullhorn on the morning of

*Continued on next page*

## REVEILLE FOR SWEENEY: THREE BILLS REVEAL NEW LEVELS OF 2020 COMPLEXITY - *Continued*



Election Day and – like a suspenders-wearing soothsayer, ominously warned of consequences for the teacher’s organization.

Sweeney won, and proceeded down a path of political payback, his own quest to place New Jersey on stronger financial footing dovetailing beautifully with his own crystallized Count of Monte Cristo conviction to get revenge on the union that tried to do him in, and their allies, among them Governor Phil Murphy, who incidentally had outdueled Sweeney to become governor.

Mischief runs amok until it fuses together with politics.

The caucus was game, too.

Sweeney for years had given them what they wanted, and possessed a talent for handling competing egos.

A longtime senate ally of the NJEA in the aftermath of the organization’s derailed effort to derail Sweeney told InsiderNJ that if he had to pick between the two, he’d pick Sweeney. While Murphy picked the millionaire’s tax as his main instrument to tackle a pension payment-saddled state facing the prospect of a \$50 billion unfunded liability and reeling amid 11 credit downgrades during the Christie years, Sweeney rolled out what he dubbed his Path to Progress plan.



From Politico last year: “One bill would switch newly-hired public employees or those with just a few years on the job into a pension plan that more closely resembles a 401(k). The other would reduce the state’s share of health care costs. They estimate the proposals could save hundreds of millions of dollars in the short term, and billions over the long haul. Sweeney declined to say how the proposals might impact the budget process. He said he’s waiting to see Murphy’s spending plan, which will be unveiled Tuesday. But the Senate president has drawn a line in the sand, declaring that action needs to be taken to rein in pension and health care costs and that the days of raising taxes to place a Band-Aid on the state’s finances are over.”

But Coughlin (and certainly Murphy) appeared less than enthusiastic.

In the words of one statehouse source, “The speaker has not been comfortable with Path to Progress, and the governor is not happy with it beyond some of the low-hanging fruit in the proposal.”

Coughlin, in fact, is much more amenable to Chapter 78 reform, that major piece of legislation sought by the NJEA.

On the same week the NJEA issued its 2019 legislative endorsements, the speaker dropped a skeletal bill that

*Continued on next page*



**REVEILLE FOR SWEENEY: THREE BILLS REVEAL NEW LEVELS OF 2020 COMPLEXITY - *Continued***

met the benchmark of some of the labor organization’s longstanding pen-ben worries.

Significantly it (S-5815) would provide relief from Chapter 78. According to NJTV Correspondent Brenda Flanagan: “Public school teachers claim a 2011 law called Chapter 78 forces them to pay a share of insurance premiums that have increased so quickly that it’s outpacing their annual raises so they’re losing money. To fix it, they’re backing a bill that would link their premium share to a percent-

age of their salaries, not to health care policies negotiated by school districts. The bill also requires a cap.”

Sweeney wasn’t very happy about Coughlin dropping the bill.

Sweeney and NJEA Prez Marie Blistan had been talking, meeting, trying, in fact, to sing something salvageable out of that 2017 debacle but it was hard. Sweeney knew the organization was ultimately (and even incrementally, let’s face it) be with Governor Phil Murphy. They had made that

clear. But what made things harder for Sweeney was the labor organization’s late in the year alliance with South Jersey Power Broker George Norcross III ahead of 2020 federal elections and Norcross’ brother, U.S. Rep. Donald Norcross (D-1) on the ballot amid threats from the left.

Not only Coughlin, but presumably other Norcross allies, liked the bill. Saves money. \$300 million, the speaker said.

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**REVEILLE FOR SWEENEY: THREE BILLS REVEAL NEW LEVELS OF 2020 COMPLEXITY - *Continued***

Chapter 78 relief.

That made the NJEA happy.

But Sweeney still hates it.

He's got his Path to Progress plan.

This would step on it.

The bad blood went too deep.

A band aid bill.

He won't post.

Not the version floating now.

Was there a deal at hand, or to be had?

Would Coughlin absorb some elements of Path to Progress in the Assembly, in exchange for Sweeney moving Chapter 78 relief in the Senate? But what key elements of Path to Progress wouldn't critically alienate Coughlin north of the state's dividing line?

And how could Sweeney, nearly chariot-wheeled by the NJEA in 2017, demonized by public sector workers in

every town he set foot in with an argument to reform, turn around and move their homerun legislation without looking defeated, in bad weather already for the South, given Senator Rob Andrzejczak's (D-1) loss last year and U.S. Rep. Jeff Van Drew's (R-2) defection to President Donald J. Trump's GOP?

No one was ready to give Sweeney a ten count. He personally had engendered good will based on perform-

*Continued on next page*

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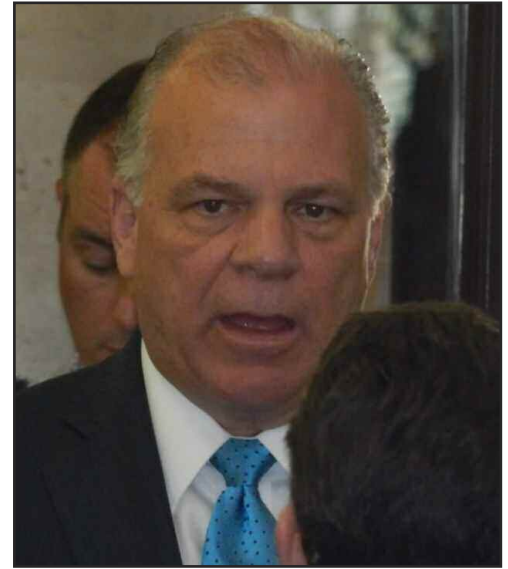


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## REVELLE FOR SWEENEY: THREE BILLS REVEAL NEW LEVELS OF 2020 COMPLEXITY - *Continued*

ance. The South had access to too much money. They still had five solid senate votes (Sweeney, Cruz-Perez, Madden, Singleton, and Beach; and if they stood to lose a sixth, Addiego, in 2021, they looked to go all out in LD2, a source said). But the resolution of the Democratic chair battle suggested the potential for other developments that did not always include the South and Sweeney inevitably occupying an advantageous position vis-a-vis all other organiza-

tions; and the wars with labor were bigger than they were once, demonstrably convergent in the paths of three labor bills, unresolved in the new year, with a state hanging in the balance.



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**REPUBLICANS TO WATCH IN THE (DEVELOPING!)  
2021 GUBERNATORIAL CONTEST**

With a million more registered Democrats than Republicans living in the Garden State—some thriving, others not—it seems like any GOP aspirant looking to warm the seat presently manned by Governor Phil Murphy is in for an uphill battle. The long shadow of Chris Christie on the state and Donald Trump on the nation as a whole continues to blanket New Jersey's centrist, libertarian, neocon, paleocon, and just-leave-me-alone Right. When Christie left office, he was polling at historic lows,

a tremendous flip from the days of surfing the high waves brought on by Hurricane Sandy. Even multi-millionaire executive Bob Hugin, despite a heroic effort in time and capital, was unable to oust a scandal-embroiled Senator Bob Menendez, facing a federal trial while on the campaign.

Nevertheless, as Christie was able to turn his high into a low, Democrats have often proven capable of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. Perhaps, with the Forever War—no,

not Afghanistan, the one in Trenton between Sweeney and Murphy, or Norcross and the North—Republicans have some reason to feel optimistic about taking a chance for the state's chief executive post.

Enter, then, five contenders to watch: NJ GOP Chairman Doug Steinhardt, former Assemblyman Jack Ciattarelli, Assembly Minority Leader Jon Bramnick, Assemblywoman Holly Schepisi and businessman Joseph "Rudy" Rullo.

# THE CAPTAIN



Chairman **Doug Steinhardt** is a partner with Florio, Perrucci, Steinhardt & Cappelli, a firm he helped create. As a partner with former Democratic Governor Jim Florio, Steinhardt is immediately seen as someone who is capable of interparty business, something Americans who are weary of bitter partisan politics—especially on the national level—may find appealing. But more than this, Steinhardt has executive experience under his belt. The Belvidere product studied law in Pennsylvania and returned to New Jersey, serving as the Mayor of Lopatcong from January 2000 to January 2015. He became the Warren County Republican Chairman in 2004 and was elected unanimously to captain the party as state chairman in

November of 2017. Steinhardt was in command when the Blue Wave of 2018 crashed over New Jersey, eliminating all of the Republican congressmen but Rep. Chris Smith. The wave may have been a victory for Murphy, but it was also seen by many—perhaps unfairly, but just the same—as a referendum on Donald Trump, who has largely ignored New Jersey until Congressman Jeff Van Drew turned in his blue card for a red one. The 2019 elections, however, saw some gains for the battered Republican Party, most notably the ascension of State Senator Mike Testa in LD1. Steinhardt lashed himself to the wheel and can take credit for leading the Party through the storm. A storm, as it was, whose winds may have been largely blown up

by the bluster from the Oval Office. But under Steinhardt's watch, the Republican Party has arrived with reefed sails. It seems likely that the ship will stay afloat and continue to navigate the tempestuous New Jersey political waters, regardless of whether or not Blue Waves crest over the bow. The question remains to be seen whether or not Steinhardt can take that executive experience, as well as survivalist political leadership, and drop anchor in the Governor's Chair. Moreover, his presumed timed departure from the state party chairmanship more than casually intrigues party members who wonder who can substantially take his place at the tiller.

# THE BUILDER



**Jack Ciattarelli** – a former member of the General Assembly – has already announced his intention to run for governor. Between 2011 and 2018, Ciattarelli represented Assembly District 16 and from 2014 served as House Minority Whip. Ciattarelli comes from a business background, earning an MBA from New Jersey’s Seton Hall, and owning and operating a medical marketing firm, Galen Publishing. Now 58, Ciattarelli entered politics from the ground up, starting as a councilman in Raritan in 1990 for five years, becoming council president. Twelve years later, Ciattarelli was elected a Member of the Somerset Board of Chosen Freeholders, a post he occupied until 2011 when he entered the General Assembly. Always

one to aim higher, Ciattarelli then threw his hat into the ring for the governorship at the end of Governor Christie’s term, running in a primary against Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno, Hirsh Singh, Joseph Rullo (see below), and Steve Rogers. It was there his ascent ran out of steam. The rest is history. A good businessman knows time is money so Ciattarelli has been making his rounds and taking ‘outside the position’ views to focus on campaigning, but with an insider’s experience. He has fired a number of salvos at the governor and his progressive agenda, and is immune from at least one attack from the left: he’s no Trump shill. He declared in 2015 that “he is not fit to be President of the United States” following Trump’s allegations of sexual

misconduct with women. A double-edged sword? Ciattarelli could be an attractive candidate for conservative Democrats tired of Murphy’s hard left agenda, or Trump-weary Republicans who want to be back to business as usual. But his condemnation could come back to haunt him should Trump win re-election in 2020. Further, Ciattarelli’s strength is derived from his on-the-ground business experience. As a self-made man not tied to huge financial firms, he can tout credibility with those Republicans who constitute the majority of the party—the ones without six-figure incomes. His campaign platform also called for a number of ambitious reforms with education, the root of so much of the tax burden, at its core. He has also kept in the public eye—outside the exclusively political readership—by participating in columns such as “Straight Talk with John & Jack” where he and Democrat John Wisniewski discuss civic and political issues from different perspectives to a more “everyman” audience than the wonkocracy. The marketing publisher has indeed been marketing himself. If it is sufficient to bump past fellow Republicans and then the well-heeled Democrat Machine in 2021 is something only time will tell.



# THE SURVIVOR



Assembly Minority Leader **Jon Bramnick's** roots are in Plainfield, and they run deep. A partner in Bramnick, Rodriguez, Grabas, Arnold & Mangan, he obtained his J.D. from the Hofstra University of Law and began his political career in his hometown, sitting on the Plainfield City Council from 1984-1991. He was the Municipal Chair for Plainfield, keeping a local perch. When Tom Kean, Jr. entered the senate, Bramnick was able to fill the vacancy for District 21 in 2003. He rose to Whip and succeeded Alex DeCroce as Republican Assembly Leader on the latter's death in 2012. Fast forward to Election 2019 and Bramnick was politically marked for dead by some smug Democrats and

pessimistic Republicans, but he managed to successfully navigate the campaign trail as his own man, ultimately retaining District 21 in the besieged Republican sphere. If Bramnick can be characterized as anything, it's as a nuts and bolts New Jersey Republican. Extolling the need to return to a civilized dialogue, Bramnick does not fit the Trump Republican model and has wanted to put the grown ups back in charge of the conversation. In short, he's the Republican your parents knew and loved—or at the very least respected. Bramnick lamented the Democratic legislative priorities during the lame duck session, asserting that property taxes and more crucial bread and butter issues were being ignored

by a leadership with no regard for thrift. In December, Bramnick said, "The legislature didn't have a voting session in six months. And when we returned the Democrats posted bills giving criminals voting rights and financial aid, driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants, and make independent contracts jobless." Bramnick made it clear that his race was not to be categorized in a national context, where Trump dominates all. He parried and dodged Democrat efforts to dislodge his incumbency and, like Cyrano, managed to pull it off with grace, without pomposity but the occasional demonstration of his quick wit—a true survivor.

# THE FIGHTER



**Holly Schepisi** has yet to confirm or deny whether or not she has plans to run for governor, but if she does, any primary opponent would be in for a spirited scrap with the savvy River Vale based attorney and Assemblywoman for the 39th District. With her background in poli-sci from Catholic University of America and a J.D. from Fordham, she sharpened her sword first as Township Attorney for River Vale, as a public defender in Oakland, and as an alternate prosecutor for both Westwood and Old Tappan. With the retirement of Charlotte Vandervalk,

the Bergen County Republican Organization tapped Schepisi to take her place for the 2011 election. She held her own against Anthony Iannarelli and Michael McCarthy, holding the seat ever since. When she suffered a brain aneurysm in March of 2015, she fought her way through and, after recovering from surgery, continued her public service. In the 2019 election, she slugged her way successfully through a campaign against John Birkner and Gerald Falotico with Robert Auth as her running mate. The campaign took an ugly spin and jaws

wagged when a video appeared of a campaign volunteer being accosted by Birkner himself for signs allegedly on property leased by the Republican campaign. In the end, Schepisi dealt a blow to her opponents that, while not necessarily a knock out, took them out of the ring with a memorable bruising. If Trenton does, in fact, fall into her sights — she is known to say “nothing is impossible”— the Bergen lawyer might well have the stamina and strength to mount a serious primary challenge.

# THE OUTSIDER



In the lead up to Governor Phil Murphy signing into law expanded opportunity for non-New Jersey residents to obtain driver's licenses (a law that expressly targets undocumented workers living in the state), failed 2017 gubernatorial candidate **Joseph "Rudy" Rullo** took to social media to excoriate

Trenton Democrats. A movement conservative who is again trying to claim that statewide lane, this time in 2021, Rullo is a graduate of the College of New Jersey and a self-employed businessman. While he lacks the baggage associated with established elected officials, he arguably lacks the organiza-

tional weight and conventional base construction possessed by the other candidates. Such a foundation would be critical for any challenger attempting to dislodge a millionaire sitting governor, but the Facebook-hyperactive Rullo persists in making the case for his frank, everyman candidacy..

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *There will be others. But one name that recurs in GOP circles with some regularity is that of Monmouth County Sheriff Shaun Golden, chair of the Monmouth County GOP, whose statewide ambitions stirred perhaps as he watched Lieutenant Governor Kim Guadagno - herself a former Monmouth sheriff - scale the dizzying heights of power only to plummet in the disastrous aftermath of Christie's Bridgegate flameout.*



**AN OCEAN OF RED MAGA HATS AT THE WILDWOOD CONVENTION CENTER IN WILDWOOD WELCOMED THE PRESIDENT TO A PACKED HOUSE.**

The Center was said to have a capacity of 7,500 but over 100,000 tickets had been requested. The chosen few managed to score a space inside to listen to the president speak for about an hour.

Earlier, President Trump and Congressman Jeff Van Drew arrived together on Air Force One and drove in by motorcade. This was the president's first time holding a re-election rally in New Jersey, a state typically seen as hostile to Trump, but he arrived to a cheering crowd. Protesters and hecklers were no where inside the venue, only the true faithful. Any opposition was relegated to the streets, amid throngs of Trump supporters who had been unable to gain entry.

The president was announced and entered to the song "Proud To Be An American." He opened by saying, "I love New Jersey and I'm thrilled to be back in the Garden State, together we're achieving historic victories for New Jersey families."

He spoke of a booming economy, record employment rates for New Jersey and the nation as a whole, touted the destruction of ISIS and hailed the killing of Iranian General Solemani.

"Thanks to the courage of our warriors," Trump said, "the ISIS caliphate has been totally destroyed and its savage founder and leader al Baghdadi is dead." He referenced the death of

Iranian General Solemani, saying he was "a man actively planning new attacks, but we stopped him cold. Yet Washington Democrats like Crazy Bernie and Nervous Nancy Pelosi opposed our action to save American lives."

While the Trump administration was "creating jobs and killing terrorists," Trump said "Democrats are obsessed with crazy witch hunts and partisans crusades" and asserted that the "opposition party" was unable to win elections, so they were determined to steal the 2016 election.

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**AN OCEAN OF RED MAGA HATS AT THE WILDWOOD CONVENTION CENTER IN WILDWOOD WELCOMED THE PRESIDENT TO A PACKED HOUSE. – *Continued***

“Radical rage filled socialists,” the president declared, “the Democrat Party is the socialist party, maybe worse, voters are making a mass exodus and we are welcoming them to the Republican Party with wide open arms. And the Republican party is doing great.” With that segue, and with Democrats thoroughly trashed, the president then welcomed the architect of his visitation to New Jersey: Congressman Jeff Van Drew. Van Drew, who had been a Democrat until he switched parties, was hailed as “very brave” and “a courageous leader who has had enough of [Democrat] extremism, socialism, vile hoaxes and scams.”

With Congressman Van Drew on his side, Trump may have seen him and his change of party as a doorway into a previously untouchable blue state. It seems fitting, then, that Trump attempted to establish a political beachhead at a shore town in New Jersey. “I have to tell you a few weeks ago Jeff was one of the few brave and principled Democrat lawmakers who stood up to the House Democrats and their outrageous abuse of power,” Trump said. “...they can’t win an election so they’re trying to steal an election, it’s not happening folks, Jeff had the guts to stand against the left wing fanatics....”

Van Drew spoke briefly to the audience, praising the president and exalting the achievements to which he lays claim. Van Drew said, “He is a man

who kept his word to ensure that the eyes of the world are on South Jersey and all of us. The USA is a great nation, the greatest that civilization has ever known, do we want to keep it that way?”

The president denounced the media from time to time during his speech, the first time eliciting a response of boos and downward thumbs as the crowd turned to heap scorn on the cameramen and journalists broadcasting the rally to the wider country. Unsurprisingly, he spoke of “fake news” and said they were “very dishonest.”

Trump resumed the podium and acknowledged NJ GOP Chairman Douglas Steinhart and Trump campaign co-chairs Senators Pennachio and Testa. He also saluted Kellyanne Conway, herself a New Jersey native, and said former Governor Chris Christie was a “great guy.” Aside from Van Drew, Conway was the only other person to speak.

“Mr. President,” Conway said, “I think South Jersey is Trump country.” Conway cited achievements including “two dead terrorists” and said “that’s two terms.”

President Trump did not directly mention any New Jersey politicians other than Van Drew, Steinhart, Christie, Testa, and Pennacchio. He did, however, blast immigration-related policies established by Trenton. “Right here in New Jersey, your state’s Democrat

leaders have instituted sanctuary policies’ that result in ‘dangerous predators’ begin released.” He took aim at sanctuary cities—a staple of Gov. Phil Murphy’s platform—saying that ICE was being hindered in its work to arrest and remove “criminal aliens.” “What the hell is going on? The criminal aliens are free to continue their crime spree.” During his speech, Trump spoke of Cumberland and Middlesex County incidents where illegal or undocumented immigrants had been arrested, released, and committed crimes again but without mentioning specifics.

Trump thanked ICE and law enforcement, saying they were “tough” and it wasn’t “a job you want to do.” He also thanked the president of Mexico who he said had deployed Mexican soldiers to protect their northern, or the American southern, border.

The bulk of the speech consisted of equal parts achievement on the part of his administration, and condemnation of the Democratic Party. On the economy, Trump blasted Presidents Bush and Obama, saying under “your favorite president” individuals were earning more than ever. From topics on healthcare reform, manufacturing, immigration, and national defense, Trump said that he had accomplished more in the first three years than any other president in American history.

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## AN OCEAN OF RED MAGA HATS AT THE WILDWOOD CONVENTION CENTER IN WILDWOOD WELCOMED THE PRESIDENT TO A PACKED HOUSE. – *Continued*

“The US lost 60,000 factories because of stupid trade deals and bad leadership,” under Bush and Obama.

“US is now the number one producers of oil and natural gas anywhere in the world,” he said to cheers. “We don’t need anybody else’s anymore, it’s so nice.” He said, “what happened was incredible” but “extreme liberals” were imperiling progress through initiatives such as “The Green New Deal.”

On healthcare, Trump cracked the whip, saying, “Washington Democrats have never been more extreme than they are right now, these people are crazy. They’re taking their cues from socialists like Bernie, pushing a government takeover of healthcare to strip 180 million Americans of their private plans. The plans of every Democrat would demolish the economy of New Jersey.” He couched the situation in simple, stark terms. “Healthcare is finally working and [Democrats] want to destroy it.”

Democrats were in no uncertain terms, the bad guys. He described them as the party of high taxes, high crime, open borders, late term abortion, and corruption. “Democrats stand for crime, corruption, and chaos. Republicans stand for law, order, and justice.”

While relatively little of the president’s speech was New Jersey specific, he did



incorporate elements of New Jersey into what was really a national address. “From Morristown to Vineland, and Paterson to Pennington, and Camden to Clifton, all the way down the shore to Ocean City and Sea Isle and Stone Harbor, and right here in Wildwood, this has always been the home of the proud, loyal, and very very incredible Americans, and my friends. They’re tough, they’re smart, they’re great people, it’s called Jersey. This is the state that pioneered the boardwalk, the diner, and the motion picture, and gave the world American greats like Thomas Edison and Frank Sinatra, Old Blue Eyes,” Trump said, “he was a piece of work!”

Without any doubt, Trump was master of the stage and the occasion. New

Jersey was his vessel, and Trump was very explicit in terms of his word choice that New Jersey was not the problem, but specifically the Democratic leadership—although he never mentioned anyone in particular, nor did he address issues such as the state’s strict gun control or high taxation. Only on sanctuary cities and immigration policy did the president seem to incorporate a particular state-level issue as part of his speech.

Trump closed his rally saying, “Together, we will make America wealthy again. We will make American strong again. We will make America proud again. We will make America safe again. And we will make America great again! Thank you New Jersey!”



# A VIEW FROM THE BAR

*A column by Fred Snowflack.*

The bartender had a t-shirt reading, “Trump, finally a President with balls.”

This was in a gin mill across the street from the convention center. Rather than watch the rally in the arena, I chose to hang out with those who could not get in.

The crowd, just about all of whom sported some type of Trump attire, was psyched. This was a big moment for them indeed.

And in a bizarre coincidence, or maybe it wasn't a coincidence, Fox News ( it had to be Fox News) aired a clip of Hillary Clinton. It made no difference what it was about; the crowd responded in predictable fashion, chanting “Lock her up, Lock her up.”

And then the president appeared on the screen. He was actually just across the street, but in this venue, he was only on TV.

The crowd whooped it up. But then a curious thing happened. Many didn't even seem interested in listening to the speech.

They kept on chatting and drinking, drowning out the sound from the TV sets, which were on full volume.

There were exceptions. The president brought up a beaming Jeff Van Drew and there were cheers all around.

The guy standing next to me at the bar said to no one in particular that Van Drew was a very “courageous” fellow.

And soon thereafter Chris Christie was shown sitting in the audience.

The crowd in the bar booed. So much for party loyalty.

Sure, some did listen to the speech, but to many it seemed not too matter. And in some ways, that is what Trump is about. It's not really what he says. It's a feeling of his supporters that in this world of sleazy and elitist politicians, here is one guy on their side.

Much of what he did say were things he has said before.

He repeated his racist slur about Elizabeth Warren, calling her Pocahontas.

Remember when Trump talked about American carnage at the 2016 GOP convention? He was at it again, talking about how horrible some of the nation's cities are. This from a man who at least in theory has now had three years to do something about that.

And then there were a series of remarkable assertions that skewed – to say the least – reality.

One, naturally, was that “illegal aliens” were running wild committing crimes

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## A VIEW FROM THE BAR - *Continued*

when every conceivable study suggests immigrants of all kinds commit fewer crimes than native Americans.

And then we came to “the wall.” The president said it was being built and Mexico was paying for it.

Now, Trump’s infamous wall across the entire border is not being built. And of more importance, the president has been taking money from the Defense Department to pay for it. That would be the U.S Defense Department, not the Mexican army.

Then there was health care. The president talked about how Republicans

care so much about protecting those with pre-existing conditions from insurance company discrimination. Really?

That provision is a key part of Obamacare, which Trump wants to repeal.

None of this matters to those who simply feel a connection to the president.

Another man at the bar told me he was feeling “as good as can be” because his “friend” was on TV.

When it ended and the crowd began headed to their cars, some of which were parked blocks away, I heard yet

another Trump backer say this was one of the greatest evenings of his life.

I have no doubt these feelings are genuine. But here’s the problem. The MAGA hats, the shirts picturing the president as Rambo and other over-the-top paraphernalia aside, Trump’s poll ratings remain at a ceiling of 45 percent.

There is an obvious reason for that.

Unlike your more conventional types from both sides of the aisle, Trump does absolutely nothing to expand his base.

And that can be a fatal blunder.

