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InsiderNJ is a nonpartisan website dedicated to political news in the state of New Jersey.

Veteran award-winning reporter and editor Max Pizarro is contractually in charge of all news content and professionally focused daily on making InsiderNJ the Garden State's number one trusted source for political news. We will be out here on the streets of our cities, under the Gold Dome, and in the suburban town halls, fair grounds, marketplaces, county conventions and diner booths of political inquiry and intrigue. We will find our way into the conversation.



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DEPARTMENT OF LABOR COMMISSIONER KEVIN JARVIS'S LABOR DAY ISSUE WITH INSIDERNJ



InsiderNJ: Six months into the job, what are your impressions of the job and its challenges?

Kevin Jarvis: I was here 20 years ago. The state was still reeling from the great recession. Unemployment was up. We couldn't hire unemployment examiners even though the federal money was there, because everyone else was laying people off and it doesn't look right for state government to hire. I came back to a department 16 years later that is leaps and bounds better than it was. This is, I dare say, the Department of

Labor, that former commissioner [David] Socolow and I dreamed of having. It has expanded. It is viewed by other state departments of labor as the gold standard and oddly enough, not just in one program area. New jersey is regularly looked upon as a leader in wage an hour, in workplace standards, unemployment insurance, in workforce development. What I have seen here from the department is not only a level of professional knowledge and expertise but absolute empathy and a real commitment and desire to do the job to help

people in the state. There is always a knock on public sectors employees and these old tropes and stereotypes. What I've seen here is worlds different. There's always room for improvement. We're looking for ways to better deliver unemployment insurance. To make workforce development better. We're always looking to do more occupational health training and inspections. We're examining all those program areas for ways to do it better. At the end of the day, this is a department of dedicated professionals who really believe in the mission and what they do every day.

InsiderNJ: Why did you want to come back?

Kevin Jarvis: It's interesting, when I left 16 years ago to return to private practice, I never anticipated coming back. I had followed the campaign. I had supported Governor Sherrill. I believed in her and believed in what she was saying about affordability as a labor lawyer. I have seen for the last 20 years and my entire life efforts to chip away at workers' rights and, along with those efforts, a chipping away to pay and benefits. When I was a kid and we had to go to the doctor, there was never a question of affordability. My mother presented an insurance card. I grew up in Vineland. My dad worked as an IAM member in the glass houses. Most of my family members were UFCW members. The reality is unionized workers make 16% more than nonunionized workers. Governor Sherrill's emphasis on affordability spoke to me because I've seen over time how people are working harder and harder and not able to afford basic necessities. Luckily, New Jersey is one of those states where we grew our union density last year. It increased by 22,500. But those not in a union, they're working harder. They're working longer

hours and they're not able to survive. The cost of healthcare is constantly going up. The cost of pensions. As someone who worked representing unions, to me affordability was always the reason you formed and joined a union. You get better pay and better benefits and I viewed this as an opportunity to try to continue helping people do that, but from a different angle – from the angle of public policy and government as opposed to organizing.

InsiderNJ: What are your priorities?

Kevin Jarvis: Two priorities include our efforts to modernize our systems here. We touch so many lives here. There are 4.4 million working New Jerseyans. Obviously, we touch all their lives, whether through wage and hour enforcement or job training programs or if they apply for unemployment insurance or disability insurance. We have 297,000 employers in the state. Obviously, we touch every one of them. So having modernized systems, not reliant on 1970s mainframes, is critical to providing services more efficiently. Getting unemployment dollars into people's hands faster is so

critically important because those unemployment and insurance dollars are economic development. They don't go into an offshore account to be saved for some future time. They don't get invested in a 401(k). Those dollars go into people's rents, their utilities, their groceries, their car payments, their insurance payments. Those dollars go right back into the economy, thereby generating more economic activity. So it's critically important, both for our employers and for our workers and for economic development generally, that our systems work as efficiently as possible. The other priority we're working on is workforce development, mapping all of our training programs throughout the state. The Lieutenant Governor has shown an interest in doing this and we are working closely with the administration, mapping those training programs so we know where the dollars are going, how are they being spent, and are we getting the return for our investment. Are people getting jobs that are supporting families? Are they working two quarters after they finish their training program? Are they still working a year later and if they are, are they doing better financially? Training people for a job is one

thing. Training people for a career that can sustain their family and that has long-term benefits is completely different and we want to make sure the training dollars we're using are training people to support themselves and hopefully find that family sustaining career for the rest of their employment.

InsiderNJ: The state DOL reported 25.6K jobs lost in July. Please explain.

Kevin Jarvis: Those are preliminary numbers. We're always very cautious about preliminary numbers. Every month we get more data and revise the prior month's numbers. For instance, of those 25.6 job losses, 93% of them come in three separate sectors. That employment data comes from employers' surveys. In other words, they don't go out and count every single job, in terms of what's been added, what's been lost. They are surveys of different employers. In one of the sectors, it involved temp agencies, which hire substitute teachers and we always see that adjusted. It gets a little higher and it gets seasonally adjusted. The other factor there, though, is they added two new large employers to the survey, which kind of skewed the data. Our people, our research and information office, are already in

contact with BLS to talk about the numbers and what we're seeing. We anticipate those will be adjusted. Another one was in private education, which had a bad survey response. It all depends on the data you get. You send out 100 surveys, and you only get two responses, your information is not going to be as robust and as accurate. So, we have concerns with the survey responses. The final sector that really showed those losses was leisure and hospitality. Now that's obviously affected by the affordability crisis, by increase in costs, in tariffs. If people don't have as much money in their pockets to spend because of inflationary pressures they're not going out and spending money in the leisure and hospitality sector and that's going to affect hiring. More importantly, though, you can never look at just one factor. You have to look at a multitude of factors. I tell people all the time, don't just look at the unemployment rate. You've got to look at other factors. Although you've had this preliminary report of 25.6 job losses, the unemployment rate in New Jersey went down by a tenth of a percentage point, down to 4.4%, based on a household survey. That survey shows 9,800 jobs added to New Jersey. So, you really have to look at all the data, and you can

never look at one month. You have to look at trends. Our labor force participation rate remains higher than the nation. Obviously, our unemployment rate went down. I expect these numbers will be revised next month and we have to look at the long-term trends so I do think it's a mix of some seasonal stuff that we expected, some survey results, and certainly you're going to see an effect from what's going on in the country. War. Increased gas prices. The uncertainty that comes with it. And I also remind people all the time. Investors invest when they feel their money and investment is safe. Uncertainty dissuades investment. So, when you have lots of back and forth – tariffs are on, tariffs are off – it dissuades investment, it dissuades job growth, it dissuades companies from opening up different facilities and hiring new people. I think it's a confluence of factors. We don't take just one month. We have to wait and see what next month brings and look at those long-term trends.

InsiderNJ: Can you anticipate where we might be gaining jobs?

Kevin Jarvis: I'm not in the habit of trying to predict the market. I never think that's a good idea but what I can tell you from what we see from our training

programs and our apprenticeship programs – we’ve been training a lot of healthcare workers. The life sciences sector is absolutely a sector where we’re seeing growth, where we anticipate continuing to see growth. There’s a great need for nurses throughout the state and that’s where training goes. We’re hopeful we’re going to see that tick up. Also places like IT and cybersecurity as well as teachers. Construction probably in the next month or two but then into the winter months you start seeing the downslide of that because the weather affects the ability for continued building. That’s the closest I’m going to get to making a market prediction. I’m not a market analyst. I don’t want to get in that game.

InsiderNJ: Data centers. Their longer term impacts. Proactive steps by NJ to ensure A-I does not harm workers?

Kevin Jarvis: The governor has been very proactive and also taking a very balanced and nuanced approach. Things are usually not black and white in the real world. The building trades are right. There are members of the building trades whose livelihood depends on things like building these data centers, and the state already has 80 or

so of them. There are concerns about how they will affect utility rates, and what’s going to be the impact on the environment, from the water usage. The Governor has been very proactive in taking an approach that allows for the building of A-I data centers, protecting good jobs, good union jobs, prevailing wages project labor agreements, while also taking into account separating the data center usages from the ratepayers and also requiring transparency on reporting the amount of water that is being used. That thoughtful, nuanced approach is what is needed as opposed to an emotional reaction on either side – you’re either all in or all out. I think we need to be mindful that things are never black and white. On A-I generally, the numbers we’ve seen – and we have an office of research and information that studies a myriad of different industries – the data so far is very preliminary. We don’t have really firm answers yet and part of that is because a lot of companies are just figuring out how to use A-I in their processes and so as they’re figuring out, you’ll see that effect. We’re trying to be proactive. We’re studying it. Our office of research and information is participating in a national science foundation study to

study the impacts of A-I. They’re doing their own data mining of what we see about how A-I is impacting the work force. We’re also integrating A-I literacy into our training grants. We’ve funded a grant program between Rowan University and the state AFL-CIO to teach workers how to use A-I to make sure HR decisions are not being made by algorithms but are being made by actual human beings.

InsiderNJ: Does this last point merit a change in the law to strengthen safeguards?

Kevin Jarvis: We need to take a look to see if current laws are sufficient. Nobody’s livelihood should be based on algorithms. People need to know decisions impacting their lives are being made not by a computer, but by a human being.

InsiderNJ: Some contractors and developers have become so powerful that they’re simply eating state workforce protection penalties or factoring time in court to fight penalties as business as usual. What can NJ do to combat this?

Kevin Jarvis: For a lot of businesses, they’ve been able to make flouting the law just the

cost of doing business. ...When it comes to that kind of money, the penalty that the Department of Labor or even all 50 departments of labor throughout the country could give, just becomes the cost of business. So, we have to continue robust enforcement, including those penalties, but I also think we need to start looking for those companies that we can prove or that we have evidence, that they're using the penalties as a cost of business. In other words, where the violations are intentional and or knowing, I think we need to take a look and see is this something we can look to refer criminally. At a certain point in time, there is a difference between violating the law because you weren't familiar with it or you thought you were in compliance, and violating the law just knowing you're going to pay the penalty. It seems to me that once you get to that point where it's intentional or knowing, civil penalties and civil remedies are no longer the option and we may need them to start looking at potential criminal referrals for people who are just knowingly flouting our laws, and whether or not the existing laws allow for that. That's also something we're going to have to take a look at. At the end of the day you would prefer compliance over enforcement but if people

aren't complying then there have to be penalties.

InsiderNJ: Does the DOL have adequate capacity at present to police?

Kevin Jarvis: We would always love to have more enforcement tools. When I was here at the Department of Labor as the chief of staff 20 years ago, I think we had three inspectors for the state, three prevailing wage inspectors for the state. By the time we got done, we had ten. We had gotten as high as the mid-60s – 65 or 66. We've had some retirements. We would definitely like to add to our enforcement capability at the end of the day, all of the funds that come to the department come from the taxpayers. There is a balance we have to strike between being good stewards and making sure the taxpayers get value for their money, and ensuring employers are playing on a level playing field. We're in a good place on enforcement. We have some postings coming and we will add some people. Those resources are always going to be a challenge. We will always be looking to add to enforcement capabilities.

InsiderNJ: Please assess the health of apprenticeship programs, and PLAs.

Kevin Jarvis: The Department of Labor does not enforce PLAs. The law has been expanded. PLAs help because what's been shown is they expedite the completion of projects. More projects are completed on time or close to on time than projects without them. As far as the apprenticeship programs, with respect to prevailing wage jobs, there has been some debate whether all the programs are training apprentices. Building trades spend a lot of money every year hiring professionals to train and to educate people in their apprenticeship programs to become journeymen. I don't know as much about other groups that are training but I have heard discussions they may not be and it may be something we look at it in the future.

InsiderNJ: Please discuss independent contractors and employees in NJ.

Kevin Jarvis: The law has been in place for 90 years, since 1936. The law - the ABC test itself - has not been amended. There have been some exemptions added but the test itself has remained the same for 90 years. And it has been interpreted by this agency, by our appellate courts and our New Jersey Supreme Court.

The regulations that we adopted earlier this year did not change the law in any way. They didn't add to it. They didn't remove the fences. That was one of the other things I heard. The only thing they did was canvas the 90 years of case law and take the factors that courts have said – 'these are the factors we will consider' – and wrote those factors down in regulations. Ultimately, at the end of the day, we view this as helping businesses because if you're a new business and you're trying to structure a new business, you would have either had to hire a business consultant or a lawyer to scour those 90 years of case law to come up with the factors to tell you these are what the courts

consider in order to structure your business to get whatever result you want. Now you don't have to do that. You can literally go right to the regulations and look at the very factors that we the DOL look at every time we do a case. So, I feel like I'm swimming upstream against this flow of misinformation. At the end of the day, it's in black and white and it's as clear as it ever was.

InsiderNJ: How can the state better protect undocumented workers?

Kevin Jarvis: Attorney General [Jennifer] Davenport and the Governor are doing a phenomenal job taking the

[Trump] Administration on where they can for the abuses that are happening. Our laws protect workers and that's the way we interpret the laws. We don't ask about immigration status. We ask, 'What is the allegation?' Quite frankly, our way of doing it has been backed up by the Supreme Court. New Jersey labor laws are unaffected by the federal immigration laws. We enforce the wage an hour laws. We don't even take that status information into account. If you are a worker whose employer has violated the wage an hour laws, we are going to investigate that and we are going to defend your rights, regardless of your immigration status. We don't ask.

Interview by



Max Pizarro
Editor, InsiderNJ



**SEIU NJ State Council
salutes our **Brothers and
Sisters** in Labor**

Congratulations
**to the 2026 InsiderNJ
NJ Labor leaders!**

The Council represents over 20,000 workers across the state, including healthcare workers, resident physicians, warehouse and industrial laundry workers, school cafeteria staff, motor vehicle inspectors, and municipal employees.

Our affiliated unions include: 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, Laundry, Distribution and Food Service (LDFS) Joint Board of Workers United, Committee of Interns and Residents (CIR) and 32BJ Motor Vehicle Inspectors.



EDITORIAL



By Max Pizarro

One of the labor leaders said it best when he said no one would want to shut down a project that benefits a union worker. But based on conversations we've had with a lot of significantly impacted people, we have reached the conclusion that New Jersey urgently needs a deeper more substantive conversation – and action plan - about data centers and their impact on our citizens.

The legislature undertook hearings on artificial intelligence and routinely probed the intentions of data center drivers, but we need a much more comprehensive

authoritative executive agenda. We believe Governor Sherrill (who to her credit has already begun the conversation and put in place some guardrails) should lead a conference to pull all the people together, from labor unions to industry leaders, big and small tech, to environmentalists, to community activists, to local business owners, and elected officials at all levels, to scrutinize the impact – and not only environmentally. We need facts on the table. We must – with all expedition - consider the long-range implications of data centers on our population.

We don't want to hurt a single job.

But certainly, we do not want to create an environment where human labor gets crushed by an unregulated and rushed industry.

We don't want Hal the computer locking us in suspended animation, outside the pod bay door of our own cherished Garden State. The fact that Trump and his big tech allies (see essay, below) want to get this up and running without delay and without substantive community input and absent regulations provides no comfort.

So, Governor Sherrill, please take heed. Understand, with so much misinformation out there, and people drawing their own conclusions, we do need a very well organized, and very well-covered, public conference. Appreciating the work already done, the guardrails to date put in place, we also recognize that the public still has significant gnawing questions about this industry and its impact on the environment, labor, and humanity.



AUTUMN LABOR ISSUES

New Jersey contains one of the most substantial and complex union work forces in the country. As we head toward mid-fall this year (Senate President Nick Scutari has nothing on the schedule in September, while Speaker Craig Coughlin does), the separateness of our federal and state governments anew creates a tremendously challenging environment.

Looking ahead, New Jersey (see editorial) will have to harden its

understanding of data centers. This is an ongoing Trenton conversation and examination in the Legislature and at the executive level. This is a giant issue.

On the public workforce front, we will once again need to resolve issues at the heart of public pensions and healthcare. Both the senate labor committee chair and assembly committee chair see this as their top priority.

Other priorities for the legislature in the fall include reexamining how the Department of Labor enforces some of the best labor laws in the country. A widening shift to greater corporate power emboldens many powerful developers to simply eat fines imposed by the DOL, punishing workers in the promise. How we toughen our laws, law enforcement, and powers of prosecution, while not alienating investment – always a significant point – will dominate.

At the heart of labor, we see a divide too often between labor leaders and the rank and file. Various grounded leaders demonstrate how to occupy ground and connect (see the list), getting their arms around their members' thorniest troubles.

Consistently bridging that divide will define the effectiveness of labor – and the survival of labor. The SEIU will look to unionize uber drivers just as the ATU will continue efforts to minimize unregulated busing in places like Jersey City. LIUNA will put the DOL's and the legislature's enforcement efficiencies to the test as it pursues unscrupulous and predatory general contractors. Building Trades and the Sherrill Administration may find new breaches by the feds, requiring more legal counter offensives, as we have seen with Gateway. Police and fire will fight for COLA and healthcare. EMS systems will seek greater protections. The NJEA will look for ways to keep and augment its workforce.

All of it will take place against the backdrop of New Jersey complex, frequently irreconcilable worlds of business, the environment, the economy, NIMBY, and Labor.



THE REAL NEW JERSEY GIANTS

At the heart of the human species, we run the risk of killing one another and in the process empowering those who would only too happily enslave us.

This is a critical time to prioritize a unified front, the mindset of coming together as people. You can talk to Jim Ford to get a better sense of how that works. Or Wayne DeAngelo. Certainly, in New Jersey, we have engaged in the splintering of public and private sector labor, just as one example, only to ultimately weaken workers in the process. We have to get over that.

We have a lot of people who came before us who show us the way.

Tony Mazzocchi truly underscored how environmental interest and labor should not be mutually exclusive. In fact, they stand at the core of worker protection. He demonstrated that in the formulation – now grievously rolled back by the Trump Administration – of OSHA. In a state where the workers at the Johns Manville asbestos plant went to their graves pleading with us to ensure not fewer but stronger environmental workplace protections, we must keep this at the forefront as we try to balance labor and the

environment with data centers. Also, never underestimate, in Jersey, the toughness factor.

Big Bill Haywood and the textile strikers in Paterson, where the townspeople, according to local legend, once beat up the Jersey Devil and cast him into the Great Falls, weren't a whiny bunch, to say the least.

We must never forget those labor leaders who raised their voices with such force and effectiveness. We have lived in times where electrical worker leader (and Assemblyman) Tom Giblin (pictured below) stood in front of the Statehouse in the face of public workers getting picked apart, and said, "When you're getting kicked in the ass, you have to fight."



Well, that fight never stops. In addition, we must heed Giblin's warning that if politicians choose

to solve problems without involving labor they do so at their own peril. We must never forget the work of Hetty Rosenstein of the CWA, who in her position as a labor leader never gave an inch on pensions and benefits for public sector workers, especially as we look at our present circumstances, when costs crush working people.

We must not forget, especially coming out of COVID, the work of HPAE founder Ann Twomey or the soldierly efforts for the environment and labor (because he never allowed one to stand against the other) of former Sierra Club Director Jeff Tittel. These and other leaders in New Jersey – the ongoing work of Ray Greaves of the AMT, for example - gave us a blueprint for not only how to live by prioritizing labor but how to prioritize humanity and the very earth that nurtures all of us.

"We must always prioritize working families and teach the next generation the value of work and the value of organized labor," the late CWA Local 1087 President (and Trenton Councilwoman) Marge Caldwell-Wilson (pictured above) told InsiderNJ. "We must not allow the movement to become divided."



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INSIDERNJ SPECIAL REPORT



DESPERATELY SEEKING DATA:

A History of Trump's Rush Jobs - and New Jersey's Cautionary Seaside Tale

THE TERRAIN

While his opponents tried to warn the country about Donald Trump without guardrails, they perhaps did not wholly grasp the degree to which a second Trump presidency

would empower big corporate tech – *without guardrails*.

Most didn't foresee the dull, droning stealth campaign by Trump's enabled allies to blanket the landscape with data centers.

The Garden State electorate could rail against the high-visibility president all it wanted, even as massive data facilities (80 in the state already and counting) staged an efficient and emotionless invasion.

From one presidential administration to the next, priorities starkly shifted in New Jersey.

The Biden Administration championed public works labor, committing \$12 billion to the Gateway Tunnel, a project that his successor subsequently tried repeatedly to kill. Only lawsuits filed by the Sherrill Administration and court interventions enabled Gateway to continue over Trump's attempts to halt funding.



“Gateway was fully funded by the previous administration and this president on a whim wants to withhold funding,” said Mike Hellstrom, LIUNA. “Thank

God Mikie Sherill is governor. “It shows that this president will go to any means to play politics with people’s livelihood, a president who is looking to undermine the middle class with a forever war in Iran – something we will all pay the price for. This is not a vanity project. This is a critical project. This is an affordability issue to give commuters fair rail and to make sure our goods and services travel in a safe and effective manner.”

Gateway wasn’t the only Biden initiative Trump tried to unceremoniously scrap. As soon as he took office, the new President went diligently to work on behalf of big tech to accelerate the production of data centers. Just as he had tried to junk the tunnel, he scrapped Biden’s executive order establishing “a government-wide effort to guide responsible artificial intelligence (AI) development and deployment through federal agency leadership, regulation of industry, and engagement with international partners.”

“We want to have one central source of approval,” Trump said in December 2025.

Troubled by Gateway, the Trades

nevertheless believed they could take a degree of consolation in union jobs supplied on the front end of the data center equation. After all, many of the facilities supplied union jobs, labor leaders said. If the public learned more about them, they wouldn’t oppose them.

But the public’s vociferous opposition rose sharply in the summer of 2026, as regular people in towns across New Jersey – both Democrat and Republican – aware of the data center construction trend, expressed not only anger, but skepticism about the implications of their expanded presence. Even above and beyond environmental impacts, critics of unregulated tech had deep and probing questions about the longer-term impact on the job security of human beings. Building Trades liked them early. But what about later?

Might workers now celebrating jobs they get from data centers discover tomorrow that they fashioned their own gallows?

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PRIVATE PRISONS AND DATA CENTERS...PERFECT TOGETHER?

Trump had a terrible record with Labor going back to when he stiffed Atlantic City casino workers in 2016. A thousand workers lost their jobs overnight at the Trump Taj Mahal.

“I knew workers who worked at those casinos, when they came to work on Monday morning, and there was a sign on the door that said, ‘We’re closed,’” Eddie

Donnelly told InsiderNJ. “Never talked to the staff. Never talked to the workers. Never gave them a package. Never gave them a buyout.”

It was all about looking great at first and then falling apart.

“He was a great showman at the start,” said Bob McDevitt, former UNITE Here! Prez. “But you

realize, it’s like the glued together gold in the Oval Office with this guy. It’s all a veneer. That whole place – and I worked there as a bartender in the beginning – it just disintegrated.” Trump cut pensions, healthcare. Everything but wages. A thousand union workers limped incrementally off the premises. The thousand who held on to the end got guillotined all at once.

“He needed a million dollars a day to make it work, and any sensible person knew that wasn’t going to happen,” a source, who worked in Atlantic City when Trump owned the Taj, told InsiderNJ. “A lot of small operators – contractors - ran over there for the glitter and got trapped. They were ruined.

“I still remember the atmosphere of guys running up to the roof when Trump landed in his helicopter. It was scary to see all those guys running to try to carry his bags. You know where I was? In my office, with the door locked. It was a disaster from the beginning.”

Carl Ichan, subsequent owner of the Taj Mahal, got a shell. Years later, just as the short end money once seemed beneficial at the front end of Trump’s Taj Mahal premise, data centers looked good a few months ago, too, when the President issued his breathless executive deregulation order – and, on the heels of his pardoning of 1,500 Capitol Hill rioters, stepped up his round-up of undocumented workers.

There was a clear-cut, unifying anti-worker theme.

Trump reasoned the people who worked in the casinos never raised

a significant political ruckus to stop him from becoming president. If they couldn’t put up a sufficient stifling stink, he figured, who would really complain if he made the people employed in donut shops and on grass cutting jobs and other vulnerable populations his primary second-term target? This is a country, after all, for the powerful, not the shlubs whom George W. Bush once described as “doing the jobs ordinary Americans won’t do.” So, as he savaged healthcare, SNAP benefits, public television, higher education, phased out the U.S. Department of Education and kicked Building Trades repeatedly while throwing them a data center bone, Trump directed billions to ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) to incarcerate undocumented workers, perceived easy targets on the labor spectrum.

Since December of last year, three men died while in custody at Delaney Hall, a private detention facility by the GEO Group, one million donors to Trump’s campaign coffers. But the business end, of course, boomed. GEO this year reported revenues up to “\$732.1 million — an increase of nearly \$96 million or 15%,” according to NPR, while their former consultant, Tom Homan, now serves as Trump’s border czar.

As Trump attempted to expunge the country’s immigrant worker class and reward GEO and fellow private prison giant CoreCivic, he rearranged the National Labor Commission with cronies and processed the cash forked over by big tech in exchange for giving them unhindered expansion opportunities.

“President Trump will lead our country into the age of AI, and I am eager to support his efforts to ensure America stays ahead,” OpenAI CEO Sam Altman announced in December 2024 when giving a \$1 million donation to Trump’s inaugural fund, according to Tech Policy Press.

Since Election Day, Trump’s allies raised an historic amount – well over \$200 million – “for a constellation of groups that will fund his inauguration, political operation, and, eventually, presidential library,” according to Common Cause. “The tech sector is seeking policies favorable to artificial intelligence and cryptocurrency. Artificial Intelligence, or AI, poses a direct threat to our democracy, leaving us vulnerable to deepfakes and disinformation.” These donors include OpenAI CEO Altman (\$1 million) and Ripple [Cryptocurrency] (\$5 million).

It contained a grand design, and an ongoing grand deception to appear populist, while sticking it to people who work for a living. Fronting a vulgar, supposedly “regular guy” demeanor, Trump shifted a greater cost burden on working people while lavishing rewards on the private prison industry and – critically - big tech, hallmark of the biggest economic shift rewarding investors over workers in the country’s history.

Now, neck deep in an affordability crisis, Americans tally the impacts of an aggressively unlawful immigration policy resulting in the destruction of habeas corpus and killing of U.S. citizens in Minneapolis, a costly war Trump started go on with no end in sight, and the exploding demand for luxury goods as the President prioritizes a new White House ballroom and counts the cool, \$2.2 billion he made from – newsflash coming up – the tech industry. His largest tech investments, according to U.S. News and World Report, include ownership stakes totaling over a billion in crypto, \$15.9 million in Alphabet Inc (GOOG, GOOGL), \$14 million in Apple, \$12.5 million in Nvidia Corp., \$9.9 million in Broadcom Inc. and \$9.1 million in Microsoft.

Meanwhile, the Gateway Tunnel wasn’t the only Building Trades project getting the cold shoulder from Trump. Jeopardized by one of his temper tantrums and trying to placate him, the state dropped project labor agreements (PLAs) from contracts tied to New York’s I-80 public works project in Syracuse. Those bewildered by what was happening and looking for clues could go back to Atlantic City and that sign on the door.

It all went back to Atlantic City, in fact.



DATA CENTERS TAKE SHAPE

Quietly at first, data centers eventually grabbed people’s attention – and alarm. As Trump slid into the political abyss (33% approval rating in mid-August, the lowest of his presidency, according to a Reuters/Ipsos survey and battleground Republicans faced increasingly long odds in November), even his allies sought harder contrast on a key strategic point.

Data centers.

With bipartisan support, the U.S. Senate refused to back a full, ten-year ban on states developing their own data center regs. A growing number of people in Trump’s own party bucked the President. When Texas Governor Greg Abbott in August called for a comprehensive verification and audit of all data centers prior to state authorization, Trump fumed, “For Texas to say no to data centers is a mistake in the sense that it could be bigger than oil.”

“Data centers could be bigger than oil,” he predicted to Punchbowl News.

Of course, the President wasn’t alone, not by a long shot, and certainly not initially.

Not to beat a metaphor to death, but just as Democrats in New Jersey once believed in the transformative economic powers of casinos, they saw the healing potential of data centers.

Former NJ Gov. Phil Murphy, after all, subsidized them, authorizing – in one instance – \$250 million for CoreWave in Kenilworth. NJ state officials’ failure to react more aggressively to an upsurge in questions from

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the public – in part – stemmed from their reluctance to step on an industry contributing to the livelihood of powerful unions. If those Building Trades members felt the anxiety of Trump’s attacks on the public Gateway Tunnel, they too felt the seamless, reassuring buttressing of work at private data centers. Just as Trump’s casino investment in New Jersey would provide jobs (and tickets to the fights for the political class who granted him tax breaks), data centers would provide – another newsflash coming up – jobs.

But in New Jersey, as elsewhere, growing public outrage over a profusion of data centers, and a lack of transparent information regarding their use and societal impact, finally began to cause lawmakers to reconsider their hands-off – or, at critical times, enabling – position. Each data center uses as much energy as a town of 100K, as much water as a town of 50k, and poses chemical drift risks to water supply. Then there are the environmental impacts of noise and lights. In that context, 40 municipalities (and counting, both Democrat and Republican) imposed local moratoriums on data centers.

“The Howell community came together and made this ban

happen because people are sick and tired of Big Tech companies coming into their towns and destroying them for profit. We’re proud that Howell stepped up to protect their residents,” said Ben Dziobek, Executive Director of CRAN. “These bans are happening in every corner of the state because this isn’t a partisan issue. Whether you’re a Democrat or Republican or an independent, data centers make you pay more for utilities and will pollute your neighborhood just the same.”



U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone (D-6), ranking Democrat on the House Energy and Commerce Committee subcommittee, in June notably addressed the growing impact of AI data centers on America’s electric grid. “This simply cannot continue,” said the Congressman. “That is why I am in favor of a national AI data center moratorium until we can find a way to ensure they don’t

harm our nation’s air, water, and power bills.”

He noted that “data center electricity consumption doubled between 2017 and 2023 and could account for more than 15 percent of all U.S. electricity demand by 2030” and warned “that the growth of AI infrastructure is already driving up utility bills for consumers and placing unprecedented strain on the nation’s power grid.”

“...Congress should take this political groundswell seriously with a data center moratorium,” Pallone said.

In a competitive Democratic Primary in CD-2, where Democrats see a 2026 opportunity to pick off Trump ally U.S. Rep. Jeff Van Drew (R-2), candidate Bayley Winder targeted a controversial Vineland project while calling for a data center moratorium. “I think Congress has a key role to play in this when it comes to oversight and asking those tough questions,” Winder said in May on CNN’s Laura Coates Show. “We know that this White House is working with the ultra-wealthy and big corporations to make sweetheart deals happen. And Jeff Van Drew, the congressman for New Jersey’s

Second District, shrugged and said the federal [government's] role does not have a part to play in this. But that's not true at all. This is actually something that is uniting people across the country.

"They're getting a lot of benefits," Winder added. "The red carpet rolled out. Why is that the case? These corporations do not need the tax breaks, and working families are really, really worried."

He would lose the primary to Cape May Mayor Zach Mullock, after his opponents questioned the sincerity of his position on data centers. "Mr. Winder is invested in these data centers and he's drawing a dividend check," Tim Alexander said at the May 20th Stockton debate just prior to the election.

"This is a lie and Tim knows it," Winder shot back. "I am not invested in data centers. I am not in the pocket of big tech and I am here to hold them accountable." [Editor's Note: An ally of Winder's later told InsiderNJ that the candidate owned Google stock totaling \$2,800, which he divested earlier in the campaign cycle and dismissed the attack as

desperate and unreasonable.] Was it the reason he lost? No, but the fight factor and the trust factor in a fast-changing political environment at least gave pause to those looking for a champion.

As significant questions linger heading toward Nov. 3rd, Jeff Tittel, former long-serving director of the NJ Sierra Club, said of data centers, "It's a big sleeper issue in the general election. In CD-2 (home to Atlantic City, of all places), the populist MAGA class don't want it because of local disruption to farmland and water. It will also play big in CD-7 [where incumbent U.S. Rep. Tom Kean, Jr. seeks reelection] where people are already upset about warehouses. The issue will rub against Kean, who has blocked federal regulations. Hopefully, Rebecca Bennett [the Democratic nominee] will exploit that."



REACTION TIME

To date, Building Trades labor and the Murphy and Sherrill administrations form the backbone of a solid working relationship with data centers.

"Data centers are keeping my members working and putting food on their tables," said Assemblyman Wayne DeAngelo (D-14), IBEW President/Assistant Business Manager. "The data center industry has done a horrible job communicating to the populace, and the result is another level of fear."

DeAngelo notes the degree to which we unthinkingly already rely on data supplied by the industry, and tremendous societal benefits in areas like healthcare and surgery.

Adds Mike Tranberg, president of the NJ Pipe Trades, "Data centers have gotten a bad rap, and it's our job to start educating public about them. We're not looking to shove anything down the public's throat."

The pipe trades leader applauded Governor Sherrill, who met with Tranberg in her office to go over her data center plan. "She understands labor on one side and the Sierra club on the other and the need to sit down and use the

guardrail system to educate the public,” Tranberg said.

“Up front the jobs are good,” agreed Senator John Burzichelli (D-3).

However – and this is the critical point - “On the back end, they don’t seem to be.”

“The market will find its own level,” added the South Jersey Senator, a key ally of the Trades. “We have to get a framework that municipalities can manage and if they want it [data centers] it should happen.”

Unveiled in May, Sherrill’s rules contain four pillars:

- **Establishes fair-share rules** to ensure data centers bring new clean energy online and contribute to the grid infrastructure needed to support their growth, shifting costs away from residents and ratepayers rather than to them.
- **Improves transparency** starting with requiring reporting on energy and water use so the public has greater visibility into the impact of large-scale facilities.

- **Develops strong statewide standards for Community Benefits Agreements** and providing state resources to ensure municipalities can negotiate from positions of strength, ensuring data centers address impacts like light, noise, and pollution while making meaningful local investments.

- **Delivers good paying jobs** by ensuring these centers leverage local trades and pay prevailing wages.

“Data centers are among the biggest drivers of energy costs, which I am working tirelessly to bring down,” Sherrill said in a statement. “While many states are approaching this issue piecemeal, this is the first comprehensive plan to tackle it holistically. At the same time, New Jersey will take a thoughtful approach to harnessing investment, lowering costs for ratepayers, and leading on AI innovation. By establishing these guardrails, we will hold data centers accountable, ensure they contribute their fair share, and make sure our communities not only benefit from the AI innovation happening in our state, but have a real hand in shaping it.”



Critics of “the plan” describe it as hardly adequate, and significantly devoid of details. Or more to the point, the effectiveness of Sherrill’s stated goals will come down to how New Jersey implements details, and its specific enforcement of measures requiring the data center industry to pay utility tariffs and ensuring longer term worker benefits. Of course, devoid of details, the landscape could end up looking a lot like the rubble where the Trump Taj Mahal once stood on the Jersey Shoreline.

Wrote Tittel in a New Jersey Vindicator op-ed:

“Governor Mikie Sherrill says New Jersey needs ‘guardrails’ for data centers. The problem is that her guardrails are not guardrails at all. They are little more than lane markers painted on the Turnpike while a convoy of bulldozers barrels toward our

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communities. The Governor's plan calls for monitoring, studies, six-month reports, and transparency requirements. That may make for a good press conference, but it does not make for good environmental policy. A six-month report is not protection. It is a receipt for the damage.

"By the time Trenton finishes studying the impacts of these facilities, dozens of data centers could already be operating across New Jersey. The trees will have been cut down, transmission lines expanded, power plants proposed, aquifers depleted, and electric bills sent to every household in the state. Monitoring environmental destruction after it happens is like installing a smoke detector after the house has burned to the ground."

In neighboring Pennsylvania, Governor Josh Shapiro – up for reelection in November - signed an executive order, according to WHYY, "dramatically shifting his stance on data center development in Pennsylvania, calling out 'predatory' data center developers who are 'running roughshod' over local communities.

"While there are no AI data centers up and running right

now in Pennsylvania, and only five have the permits they would need to begin operating," Shapiro said at a press conference, "these speculators are nevertheless scaring our communities — being aggressive with township officials, bullying our neighbors and refusing to listen to the people of Pennsylvania."

Then there's that other little matter about jobs, for just as workers and politicians alike in Atlantic City heralded tax breaks for Trump that enabled him to put people to work for the fast money, not too many celebrated when more than 3,000 workers lost their jobs – 1,000 in one burst - as high roller Trump pulled out after the Taj Mahal closed.

The data center industry needs workers to build its facilities on the front end but how many will automation expunge in the years ahead?

LABOR INTENSIVE

The umbrella organization that oversees all organized labor in New Jersey, home to one million members, the AFL-CIO dreads the deleterious impact of AI. It's here to stay, let's face it. But how do we ensure it constructively

works for people and doesn't simply tighten the noose of corporate power?

In its demand for greater and more effective regulation to protect jobs, the AFL-CIO's public position on AI contains the following observations:

- *This is just the beginning: The New York Times reports that nearly half of all jobs will be exposed to some form of AI automation that will disrupt and displace workers in the coming years.*
- *Of those who will see their jobs erased in the next 10 years, **nearly 80% could make less than \$38,000 annually.***
- *Without protections, working women and people of color will **experience the worst social and economic outcomes** of this technology.*
- *Labor unions do not oppose AI. AI has the potential to unleash prosperity that improves working conditions and lifts us all up. But if left unchecked in the hands of corporate profiteers, AI will increase economic inequality, curtail our rights and undermine our democracy.*

Unions under that AFL-CIO umbrella hone on details pertaining to AI, to ensure greater and stronger protections for members in the digitized age. At its August convention in Chicago, ASCME leaders, for example, passed a resolution opposing arrangements between the Medicare program and private for-profit entities that “explicitly incentivize the denial of prior authorization for medical care, such as by giving those private vendors a share of the ‘savings’ by denying coverage.”

While the Labor movement offers gradations of either support or resistance depending on the job quotient, the public has an overriding data center message: “Not in my backyard.” If not as adamant as Pallone or Assemblyman Will Sampson (D-31) (see sidebar) in their opposition, many lawmakers in the Democratic majority in Trenton recognize the public anger out there and the need for action.

“What’s next?” asked Burzichelli. “The Legislature will play a role, as far as statutes go, to ensure a level playing field. Jobs are good. The data center industry has not done a good

job [communicating]. Again, there are not many real jobs on the back end. I’m told there’s maintenance. And there will be an ongoing tug of war cost between the cost of doing business in New Jersey and Labor and the environment.

“The one thing I know is the people behind data centers, they’re after big capital investments, and they will figure out how to make those processing centers work with less electricity.”



“Everyone’s excited to get the next driverless car, but no one’s talking about the next drivers,” said State Senator Joe Cryan (D-20), who notes the need for the state to do a better job going forward to define the terms and conditions of the data center universe.

Eric Richard, legislative director for the NJ AFL-CIO, said even opponents can’t ignore the internet infrastructure, just as one example, sustained by data centers. “But they have to be done responsibly, and that includes community input, guarantees that they won’t exploit resources, and strong provisions for good union jobs. I think the controversy has developed mostly from communities getting taken by surprise.

“We don’t support a moratorium on data centers,” Richard said. “That’s bad for economic development. But is there a middle ground? AI cuts both ways. You have the construction of data centers and maintenance for members who work in them. But AI too has the potential to destroy jobs on the other end.

“We have a bill, S-4075,” he added, “and we are working with Senator [Andrew] Zwicker on a bill, the workforce AI-centric guardrail bill.”

One thing they all agree on:

Trump’s total deregulation formula spells disaster.

There’s a history here, in case you didn’t know.

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CONCLUSION

Building Trades groups like the Carpenters continue to ride a long work wave, going back to 2010, built on jobs across a diverse sector of industries, including office spaces, education and medical facilities, and – yes - data centers. As always, back to Burzichelli's point, New Jersey finds it hard to strike a balancing act among labor, business and the environment satisfactory to all players.

Democrats in charge have been slow to react to a developing crisis around data centers, and enabled the industry, much the same way their forebearers enabled, with tax breaks, Trump, the Atlantic City casino kingpin. Now, as he tries to turn the nation's capital into the gold-painted gardens of Nebuchadnezzar and starts unconstitutional foreign wars he can't finish and unconstitutional

domestic wars with the weakest among us, Trump makes the rushing ramrodding of data centers, with as little public input as possible, one of his top priorities.

But it's catching up with him.

The stench of his Atlantic City misadventure now permeates the atmosphere elsewhere.

In Boulder City, Nevada, according to The Salt Lake City Tribune:

The Trump administration unilaterally approved a data center on a tract of public land within the city's jurisdiction this summer without giving residents a say in the matter and without conducting an environmental assessment specific to the project.

"Tyranny," one resident described it in front of the City Council in July.

That's just one example.

Having cut his teeth on stifling labor back in Atlantic City, Trump knows how to keep the movement pitted against itself. He knows the most obvious divide lies on the faultline between public sector and private sector members. He understands the presence of more women and minorities among the members of the former, and more white males in the latter. He manipulates the culture war to keep workers at odds and buy himself time to make as much money as he can for himself, while tightening big tech's and the billionaire class's stranglehold on the rest of the population - in perpetuity. He and his allies for the moment

bank on the profusion of AI in the culture and – to a much lesser extent – temporary benefits to the Building Trades. Convinced Fox News, its attendant propagandists, and his own Twitter feed, can keep at least one segment of labor momentarily neutralized, he hurls "crazy enviros" and "illegal aliens" into the breach to all but guarantee a big tech, private prison field day.

Even the most complacent, however, increasingly nurse grave doubts. One thing was men in masks nabbing a guy who works at the local gas station. Another is dropping a buzzing data center next to someone's inground swimming pool.

Labor itself has changed. Much of its political organization now hinges on internationals in Washington, whose leaders lack the connectivity to members of the best leaders in the past. Too often, they don't know, for example, when a rank-and-file member has had a kid or a grandkid. The politicians in both parties sag in the despair of corrosive longevity, as the public rages at structures impairing the common good, an enormously enabled data center industry most clearly visible right now, at the top of the heap.

But if the social vacuums inevitable perhaps in the post-COVID era, led some workers to believe Trump and his cronies would deliver on the long-term Labor haul, others caution, "Don't place your bets on the tables of the Taj Mahal, or we've got a bridge to sell you." As he lays his money where corporate power coalesces to run over the rest, certainly no one could depend on Trump to supply a public works tunnel, that's for damn sure.

"Just whatever makes sense financially, is how he reacts, and that sentiment and that way of working, thank God, that's not winning right now," Eddie Donnelly told InsiderNJ. "And thank God, we are starting to see that the fan base he built and the rhetoric he spewed, America's not buying it anymore, brother."



Max Pizarro
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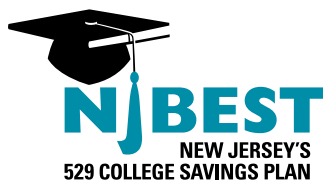
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Will Sampson:

“I always wanted to be a change agent, to help others climb the ladder.”



Community-based through his work with the union, as a volunteer, and in politics, Will Sampson worries about the future of working people up against big tech and the ongoing influx of data centers throughout his home state. Like his fellow elected official, U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone (D-6), Sampson wants a moratorium on data centers.

“I’ve seen my mayor, Sharon Nadrowski [of Bayonne] take swift action with a local moratorium and I am very proud of her for that resolution,” Sampson told InsiderNJ. “I think the data centers are dangerous and not what we need at this time - or ever. They’re building them and they’re trying

to do it very, very fast, before people catch wind of it. That tells you everything you need to know. We need legislation to make sure we don’t have them. We need a moratorium for the state, like the one we have in Bayonne.”

Asked if he would support a Governor’s Commission and Conference to pull together leaders to design strict rules governing data centers, the Assemblyman said, “Absolutely. Our job is to represent people and make their lives better. We must make the best decisions we can, to be a model for the country with what’s best for people.

“Understand,” he added, “I would never want to get in the way of any labor organization having more work. However, when it becomes detrimental to society – and what we say is we’re against automation when it takes jobs away from people and when technology replaces a human being, a worker, a family, a taxpayer. We are afraid of these centers being used in the wrong way.”

A crane operator and political liaison for the ILA, Samson

started on the bottom at the Bayonne Terminal, in the warehouse division for six and a half years, before moving up steadily to become a deep-sea longshoreman, working on the big mega ships, where they stack the containers eight high. “Once you are a longshoremen, you get all the training you can handle from craning, driving trucks and other heavy machinery, to transporting cargo,” he said.

Asked by the local president to be a part of the A. Philip Randolph Institute, Sampson immersed himself in soup kitchens, toy drives, and other local endeavors to forge stronger communal connections. When he first won his Assembly seat in 2021, “My union was behind me 1,000 percent,” he said.

This year’s most controversial budget supplemental bill awarded a loan in the amount of \$105 million to Jersey City, to close a budget deficit and blunt the impact of local tax hikes. “I think there was a lot of ambition in Jersey City with the last mayor,” Sampson said, referencing former Mayor Steven Fulop, who ran unsuccessfully for governor last year. “We can honestly say Jersey City residents

weren't done right."

This past budget season, the Hudson lawmaker stood with the governor to combat consumer junk fees. "I'm seeing a lot of scams on our most vulnerable," he said. "So many seniors, in particular, are getting scammed. As chairman of consumer affairs, I am always looking for innovative ways to protect taxpayers."

Going forward, Sampson said he wants to make sure Jersey City – an Abbott School District – does not get negatively impacted statewide reform of the schools funding formula.

"We're losing money every single year, and we cannot have a tale of two cities, where we have a downtown area that's thriving and an urban area that sees a rapid drop in funding," he told InsiderNJ.



Eddie Donnelly:

The Loyalty of Labor

Track records.

They're important to FMBA diehard Eddie Donnelly. Like Mike Hellstrom, Donnelly – 14 years president of the over 6K-strong union – got on the Mikie Sherrill train early.

Why?

She had a record.

He could look at her work in black and white – her work and advocacy as a congresswoman – and make an educated guess about how she would serve his members as governor.

Now, "I'm very proud of the almost one year she's been in office as she works hard on complex issues," Donnelly told InsiderNJ over coffee. "I respect the communication lines between the FMBA and her administration. It's exactly what we wanted from the next governor. Strong lines of communication."

What would have happened if Jack Ciattarelli became governor?

"Look, when we made the

decision to back Mikie Sherrill, we made it solely based on track record," he said. "The way we are working on the issues, what's most important to us is public safety. And if it were Ciattarelli, we would not be at that table. We would not have the ability to negotiate. I'll tell you what else would have happened. All the folks who were prominent in the legislature during the Chris Christie years, they would all be resurrected.

"Frankly, I was deathly afraid," added the firefighter. "I made that point very clear to our members. And I'm very proud of the turnout of our members in the election last year. When politicians spew lies, it's my job as president to explain why that person would not be good for our members."

How's Donald Trump been for Labor?

Donnelly did a double take.

"We are battling with this guy a lot more than we want to be, but it's for all the right reasons and thank God we have a governor and a legislature and folks in our state that stand up to this federal government and protect folks

like us,” he said.

Issues upcoming:

“Volunteerism is down, yeah, let’s face it - EMS and fire service volunteerism – down,” he said. There’s an EMS (emergency medical services) essentials bill in the fall that would make EMS an essential service in New Jersey.

“It’s mind-boggling that police, fire and sanitation are all designated essential and EMS is not,” Donnelly said. “I believe that will be done this session, which will be a huge accomplishment.”

Ultimately, it will create stronger lanes for different services, so that firefighters, for example, can fight fires, and not worry about taking up the slack in towns where EMS volunteerism has hit the fan. “It’s a different economy now – it’s not the 50s, 60s and 70s,” Said the FMBA leader. “Everybody’s got to work. They don’t have the time to cover those fire houses and those squads.”

So, that’s one issue.

Any others?

Well, sure.

“The biggest elephant in the room is healthcare,” said Donnelly. “We’ve had countless meetings over the summer about how to tackle this issue but it’s very important to maintain the benefits we have, when you consider the abuse on the mind and body. That’s when you need those benefits.”

Right now, firefighters, as with other public sector union members, must give up salary to obtain lower healthcare premiums, even as local towns struggle to defray rising costs to taxpayers.

It’s a nightmare – and obviously unsustainable.

“The 2027 projection is a double-digit hike [in healthcare contributions by members], and that can’t happen,” he said. “We’ve got to sharpen our pencils.”

Firefighters, police, EMS and dispatchers – “We’re dying,” said Donnelly.

So, that’s the big one.

Twenty-six years a firefighter in his beloved Union Township, the town where he was born and where he grew up, Donnelly still rejoices in the feeling of effecting

good for his members. A career highlight, the 2018 carve-out of the FMBA pension system has allowed his members, in his words, “crush it on investments.”

But the longtime politically active labor leader does worry about fracturing and a political primary trend that may create the increasingly unwitting pitting of labor against itself. “I’m very concerned about the fracturing and splintering I see,” Donnelly said. “Let me be clear. I believe in elections and primaries. But I also believe that Labor needs to unite to survive. Labor has to unite around a candidate’s track record. Just putting someone up there because they’re not part of the machine, or the establishment, is not the answer. I think we all have a similar ideology. But understand. Firefighters are very loyal. If you’ve been with us, why would we turn our backs on you, just because you’re part of some sort of so-called establishment? We check the boxes that need to be checked. A person who’s been with us for years, we back that person. If we don’t do that, we will wind up with someone in there who has no position on public safety, on public healthcare, on public employees, or the public welfare.”



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Is there any other primary elections remedy?

“The answer is our party and our unions coming together and having conversations, real conversations,” Donnelly said. “We should all be in the same mindset. I would like to see more getting together and coming up with a plan. And understand. We don’t support every incumbent. Not at all. If we stood with you and fought for you and you didn’t represent working class interests, we’ll go in another direction. But just to throw people out for someone who’s supposedly progressive who was never in a real fight for Labor – it’s not right.”

It comes down, Donnelly said, to really studying a person’s track record.



Jim Ford: **COLA and Healthcare** **the Top Priorities for the** **New FOP Prez**

Gathered at the Golden Nugget, members of the New Jersey Fraternal Order of Police in August elected Jim Ford president of the 12.5K-strong union organization. A retired cop from Florence, Ford had made his formal announcement to succeed Bob Fox a year earlier, at the organization’s national conference in Miami.

The NJFOP staged its Atlantic City election on a Thursday. The following Monday, Ford sent a letter to every member of the New Jersey State Legislature. “Among our immediate

legislative priorities, two issues stand above the rest,” wrote the new president. “Restoring a meaningful cost-of-living adjustment for our retired members and protecting access to quality, affordable healthcare for our active and retired law enforcement families. For many of our retired members, the continued absence of a meaningful COLA is not an abstract pension issue. It affects their ability to keep pace with the increasing costs of housing, food, utilities, healthcare, and every life.”

Ford also walked across West State Street from the FOP’s downtown office and hand-delivered a letter to the governor outlining the same two priorities.

(She has since responded).

“Those are the two most important issues to our members,” Ford told InsiderNJ. “Whether it’s the retired guy, or the guy who just got out of the academy. They work hard. They put their lives on the line. They earned it. They deserve it. Period. End of story. The only way we get it done is legislatively.”

Ford wants to work collaboratively with all friends of public safety to get it done. “The rising cost of healthcare is exorbitant,” he said. “More and more money is coming out of our checks. COLA is going to be a great thing, and we need to align COLA and healthcare. We need to sit down and have productive conversations on both sides of the aisle. We can do that going forward. The FOP has ideas in place. We have a strategic plan, a viable strategic plan. You can’t stand on the bank and hope a fish jumps into your net. We have to aggressively cast our line.

“I have a lot of energy and commitment and I will say - I can make a promise – that I will not stop until it gets done,” Ford added.

A former teacher, Ford got the law enforcement bug, graduated from the academy at 33, worked a full career, and retired as a detective sergeant. “Education is important to me, and I want us to do a better job of educating our members about what they need to survive,” he said. “I want them to be educated about legislation, and everything available to them financially.” To that end, he will furnish members with an FOP online training and education academy. Saluting his predecessor, Bob Fox, and the leaders of labor who built the organization, Ford said the FOP will continue to prioritize wellness and the best legal defense plan for police that money can buy. “We will build on the strong foundation of this organization to take care of our members,” said the organization’s new president.

Legislative allies already include Senators Linda Greenstein and Mike Testa, and Assembly people Alex Sauickie and Carol Murphy.

Multiple bills slated for action in the fall contain FOP impact points.

Ford will be there.

The so-called Massachusetts bill (A-1167 and S-1502) increases

the disability pension for officers assaulted with a weapon.

It’s a big FOP priority.

So is A-1171 (S-200), or the waiver of the juvenile designation in cases where juveniles commit violent crimes against police officers.

In addition, the FOP wants to expand designations under the PERS LEO (Law Enforcement Officer) category to create opportunities for uncovered brother and sister officers.

Going forward, Ford said he wants the union to come together.

“We’ve just wrapped up a long election for the FOP,” he said. “People take sides in elections. At the end of the day, one of my goals is to make sure we are unifying behind one mission for every member. There is so much divisiveness in politics, in the legislative hallways, everywhere. We don’t need divisiveness in our organization. We need unification, and that is my invitation to all members – to unify.”

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1. Mike Hellstrom, Jr.

LIUNA Vice President and Eastern Region Manager



Stunned by Steve Sweeney's last place finish in the statewide Democratic Primary last year, the Building Trades had difficulty coming together to back Mikie Sherrill in the 2025 general election. That's no surprise, or

a break from precedent. After a pretty rocky 2017 start following Phil Murphy's pre-primary kayo of Sweeney, the trades enjoyed a rosy relationship with then-Governor Murphy for the most part, built on necessity. Whatever

their differences, Senate President Sweeney and Murphy had to work together. When Sweeney lost his 2021 reelection bid, that caused problems with the trades. The organization returned to a situation where

no one person gave off resident alpha male vibes. In short, there was a little bit of a statewide leadership void.

On the political front, Hellstrom stepped into the breach as an early and active backer of Mikie Sherrill's gubernatorial candidacy. He would end up speaking at her victory party, underscoring the esteem and importance of his alliance with the Governor-elect. By their actions, the Laborers, under the leadership of Hellstrom, catapulted themselves to the top of the Building Trades power heap. Because of that relationship, the larger network trusts that she won't hurt the building trades. But she also knows the old guard – notwithstanding a robustly supportive Hellstrom – will take some time to come around.

Mike Hellstrom: Fighting the Great Dismantling

The election of Donald Trump to a second term brought about what LIUNA labor leader Hellstrom describes as a nefarious dismantling of the protections for organized labor. It started, he said, with Trump's rearrangement of the National Labor Relations

Board, to make it management – not worker – friendly, his administration's efforts to gut OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration), education and energy and critical federal program defunding, and tax priorities giving breaks to the rich and powerful while failing to alleviate the price of goods and gas for workers.

"Working families are taking it on the chin, we're feeling the impact of this economy, and as organized labor, we're better positioned to weather the storm," Hellstrom told InsiderNJ. "It's challenging, but what we're seeing, of course, is the power of government harnessed into the hands of few and Congress placating this president."

He also sees the power of Labor and state government to fight back, especially when it comes to the Gateway Tunnel. Thankful for Governor Mikie Sherrill's legal efforts to fight off the President's repeated attempts to shut down Gateway and pull the plug on thousands of union jobs, Hellstrom toured the site earlier this month.

"This Governor used all her resources to take this president

to court for a breach of trust, and she prevailed – the workers prevailed," said the LIUNA leader. "The courts have sustained the argument of both New Jersey and New York. Contracts are contracts when we sign legal bonding contracts, and for the president to think he can rip up a contract – it's preposterous. The courts have said, 'You can't do that.' Look, when you start boring under the Hudson riverbed, you're at the point of no return. I think it's going to be challenging for them, but if he tries again to shut down the project, we'll see him in court. We'll fight it out on the street."

A Navy veteran, and a veteran of heavy civil labor, Hellstrom and his union's support for Sherrill not only placed them at the forefront of the Building Trades, but ahead of most other unions (with the obvious exception Eddie Donnelly and the FMBA). Hellstrom naturally enjoys a very close relationship with the front office, and with Sherrill.

He will be there going forward, advising on issues pertinent to his union and to Labor, including the theory subject of data centers.

“We’re in favor of building data centers the right way, which will require guardrails,” Hellstrom said. “The governor laid out a plan. And we don’t want to see developers getting huge tax breaks. There is a pathway to build them the right way here. The recklessness out of the White House, by contrast [total deregulation] demonstrates a lack of caring about working people. Given the environment we’re in, to be clear, we are in favor of doing that [moving forward with regulated data centers]. We’re a pro development union. Why will be developed, if not here, then overseas. This is a modern day gold rush moment for working people but we have to get it right.”

On another front, the Laborers in August announced the filing of a lawsuit seeking more than \$2 million in unpaid wages and liquidated damages on behalf of construction workers who helped build two major Jersey City developments, but who allegedly never received pay for weeks of their work. The lawsuit marks the first known action filed by a labor union under New Jersey’s up-the-chain liability statute, a groundbreaking law designed to ensure that workers can recover

wages even when their direct employer is unable or unwilling to pay.

“This particular lawsuit, the state department of labor had done an investigation into these projects and had reached settlement here in the State of New Jersey, where we have some of the best labor laws on the books,” Hellstrom said. “But these developers keep pushing the liability up the chain, and the laws on the books don’t apply to these developers, or that’s how they act. They have no rail guards and have operated in an environment where it’s ok not to pay workers. They’re rationale is ‘We’ll pay a little bit of a fine’ to break the law.

“We are fighting greed,” he added.

The contractors in many instances have so much money (and Steve Gardner elaborates on the subject more in the labor list), they treat state Department of Labor (DOL) fines like speeding tickets and simply eat the penalties while stiffing labor regulations governing worker protections.

“The bottom line is every worker deserves to be paid their

wages and these workers were robbed,” Hellstrom said. “The way construction is performed in Jersey City and across the state in the private sector, employers are shifting liabilities from one employer to another employer to the point where workers sometimes don’t even know who they’re working for.

“The responsibility,” the labor leader added, “lies with the general contractor.”

In difficult circumstances federally, but fortified by relationships in the Garden State, starting with his own union and Governor Sherrill, Hellstrom, a second-generation laborer from New York with 42 years in the trade, wants to build on the strength of the hard-working members of LIUNA to help create a stronger and more justly served American middle class.

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2. Wayne DeAngelo

President/Assistant Business Manager at IBEW



Veteran LD-14 Assemblyman. Powerful chairman of the Telecommunications and Utilities Committee. Expert on all issues pertinent to labor and energy.

Wayne DeAngelo: Pragmatic with a Human Heart

A union guy to the core, DeAngelo weathered numerous political wars in what was once

New Jersey's most reliably battleground district, to get to a point in his career where he can drill down on issues with total focus.

Accessible, candid, and educated, as only an electrician by trade can be educated, as in – situationally aware, knowing at any moment, a wrong move might cause a hazardous electrical reaction – DeAngelo

doesn't tell anybody what they want to hear.

Finally, he wants to turn on the damn lights.

So, trying to demagogue issues serves no purpose, he explains, making his case for data centers and more personal and societal responsibility amid all the public agony around the exploding private sector industry.

“A lot of groups are setting up rallies against data centers, without acknowledging that our world is driven by data centers,” he told InsiderNJ. “Give a speech, and when you look out at the audience, you see people looking down at their phones. What holds data for the classrooms? Data centers. Facebook, social media. It’s the new way we’re socializing, and the way our kids are socializing. Everything from zoom to critical data for hospitals and surgeries. And these groups want them gone. It’s like complaining about cars and driving around in them. Look, at a certain point, we have to recognize our part in the equation, our behavior.”

Do data centers need a larger scale, more intensive public hearing?

Yes, DeAngelo said.

Just as the Legislature has had with energy bills and with nuclear power.

He trusts a deep dive into data centers will reveal an uncomfortable newsflash.

“We’re the problem,” the Assemblyman said. “We’re the

reason why our electrical bills are so high, not data centers.”

We consume more, and more, and more. And then cry about someone else creating an uncomfortable situation.

But that’s only part of what’s going on.

The ultimate in-person guy, who in 2007 won a battle royale for his assembly seat in the local VFW hall by four votes, where the late party chair Richard McLellan raised his hand like he had just won an old 15-round middleweight smoker, DeAngelo says if we want to change the world away from data centers and phones, we have to do a better job of interacting.

That’s what union organizing is, he argues.

It’s getting out there and talking to people, on the work sites, in the halls, in the convention centers, in the taverns, on the rail platforms and in the shopping center parking lots.

If we’ve decided all of it is just unhip conditioning from the 20th Century, we do so at our own peril, says DeAngelo, who maintains an avid labor-centric

social schedule, even now, after COVID, amid so much cold cloud storage.

“If Labor is going to be relevant, and lead – and truly lead – we’ve got to be out there, out here, for the movement can easily fracture and does, aided by disconnectedness and lack of human contact, and when the Labor movement comes together, we move mountains,” he said, delighting in the legislative prospect of enhancing more labor diversity, especially in the area of repurposing urban areas with green energy, like solar power. Just one example, DeAngelo says, of what NJ can do, if we just don’t lose a human priority, and – critically - the human touch.

“Data center discussions expedited, sure, let’s do it,” affirmed DeAngelo the data center proponent, a pragmatist who gets the virtual trend, who really would prefer – and even insist on, for maximum effectiveness, an in-person meeting on that subject and others.

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3. Charles Wowkanech

President, New Jersey AFL-CIO



Head of an umbrella organization serving one million workers, the labor leader this year announced the kickoff of the AFL-CIO's AI legislative campaign, calling on elected officials to take action to protect workers from harmful applications of AI in the workplace such as threats to their livelihoods, safety and privacy, and civil and labor rights.

Wowkanech's work falls within the dedicated priority of the AFL-CIO, as the organization fights to preserve workers' rights against unregulated tech.

"Without commonsense rules and a true commitment to boosting worker voice, there is a different future where good jobs, working conditions, safety, economic security, and worker and civil

rights are at risk," according to a position paper by the AFL-CIO. "Already we are seeing threatening uses of AI as we live during a time when elected officials are trusting AI developers—many of them the world's largest technology companies—to act responsibly when we know they are failing to protect people from harm, with few guardrails in place. There is an urgency to have a meaningful national conversation about how to both propel innovation and adopt sensible policies that protect working people and the general public from the well-documented negative consequences of unregulated AI.

"Harmful AI is not inevitable—the choices we make today will determine the future of cutting edge technology and work. And

doing nothing, as Big Tech special interests would recommend, is a choice—the wrong choice. The AFL-CIO has adopted principles for fair, safe, responsible, and worker-centered AI. We choose a future where progress and opportunity benefit everyone and where AI isn't used against us or to weaken the protections that a fair and thriving democracy demands."

Wowkanech began his labor career as a second-generation member of International Union of Operating Engineers Local 68. At 21, he was the youngest member ever appointed to the local's Executive Board in its more than 100-year history. In 1990, he joined the New Jersey State AFL-CIO as Assistant to the President. He then served as Secretary-Treasurer before becoming President in 1997. Unanimously re-elected to four-year terms in 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016, 2020, and 2024. In 2017, during the 28th National AFL-CIO Constitutional Convention, Wowkanech was elected to a four-year term as one of 55 vice presidents on the AFL-CIO Executive Council.

4. Kevin Jarvis

Acting Commissioner, New Jersey Department of Labor



Son of a unionized Vineland glass worker, labor lawyer and prior chief-of-staff at the Department of Labor, Jarvis came to the job – perhaps unsurprisingly – recommended by the Laborers. Expert in

contract negotiations, grievances and arbitration hearings, Unfair Labor Practice matters and Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) litigation, the Seton Hall and Rutgers-educated lawyer served as partner

with the Firm of O'Brien, Belland & Bushinsky (see full interview sidebar, above).

Jarvis litigated cases impacting workers, many from the building trades, injured due to their

workplace exposure to asbestos. He also represented railroad workers injured by their workplace exposure to asbestos, diesel exhaust fumes, and other carcinogens before numerous State courts.

This summer, Jarvis, in concert with Attorney General Jennifer Davenport, reached a settlement with STG Logistics, Inc., STG Drayage, LLC, and other subsidiaries resolving allegations that the shipping and logistics companies misclassified hundreds of truck drivers as independent contractors in violation of multiple New Jersey labor laws. The settlement resolved the first lawsuit filed under New Jersey's 2021 law that permits the State to file suit in New Jersey Superior Court against employers who have misclassified workers as independent contractors.

According to the AG's Office and the NJDOL:

Under the settlement agreement, truck drivers and the State will receive at least \$2,775,000—despite STG having filed for bankruptcy earlier this year, which resulted in many debts being canceled. The settlement amount is considered 'priority' under both the

bankruptcy code and the settlement agreement, ensuring workers are compensated ahead of other creditors.

"This was our first-ever Superior Court misclassification case, and we saw it through to the end—surviving a company sale, a bankruptcy, and years of litigation," said Jarvis. "The message is clear: New Jersey will use every tool at our disposal to protect workers, and we'll fight until the job is done."

The New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development (NJDOL), in partnership with the AG, announced another settlement with Affordable Quality Cleaning LLC (AQC) and Affordable Quality Property Management Corp. (AQPM). According to Jarvis and Davenport, the owner of both janitorial companies allegedly devised a paycheck-splitting scheme to avoid paying workers their legally mandated time-and-a-half overtime during weeks when they worked more than 40 hours. The settlement also addresses the companies' failure to pay workers for the time they spent traveling between job sites, in addition to several other violations of New

Jersey wage and hour laws. From the AG's Office and the NJDOL:

AQC and AQPM have agreed to pay a total of \$457,500 to resolve the unpaid wages, including \$357,500 in unpaid overtime and unpaid work time spent traveling for 68 employees of the janitorial companies. Additionally, AQC and AQPM must pay \$100,000 in fines and penalties to the NJDOL.

"New Jersey law is crystal clear: workers must be paid for the work they perform," said Jarvis. "This settlement puts money back into the pockets of the 68 workers who have earned it — where it belonged from day one. We'll continue to protect the dignity of Garden State workers and their right to fair compensation by ensuring businesses that operate in New Jersey comply with our state's labor laws."



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5. Donald Norcross

United States Congressman, District 1



An electrician by trade, Norcross has consistently demonstrated strong leadership for his brothers and sisters in Labor. This year, the U.S. House of Representatives passed his Faster Labor Contracts Act (FLCA) in a bipartisan 230-193 vote. The bill, which would be the single biggest advancement in workers' rights in nearly a century, went to the floor after Norcross successfully forced a vote over the objections of House Republican leadership.

From Congressman Norcross:

Because there are no deadlines for an employer to agree to a contract with a new union, it takes an average of 458 days for that first contract to be finalized. Likewise, roughly a third of workers are forced to wait more than three years for a contract after voting to unionize. The FLCA would

speed up that process by giving both parties options to seek third party remediation after set periods of time – including the choice to have a three-person arbitration panel render a first contract.

“The biggest loophole in labor law is how the richest executives in human history can simply run out the clock on their workers’ first union contract – denying their employees their fundamental collective bargaining rights. That dirty tactic is selfish, it’s immoral, and today’s vote also puts it one step closer to being a relic of history,” Norcross said. “Unions represent workers of all political stripes, and today’s resounding bipartisan vote should clearly demonstrate the collective power of workers’ voices. Solidarity forever, and it’s time to get this bill over the finish line.”

During the Trump era, Norcross repeatedly makes the case that the economy under this President’s leadership does not serve working people and continues to tilt toward more egregious abuse by the billionaire class.

“Donald Trump has failed the American people,” the Congressman said in response to the State of the Union. “Families are already struggling with high costs, and Trump’s policies have only made life more expensive. Trump’s tariff tax hurts American workers and his Big Ugly Law resulted in the largest cuts to healthcare and food assistance in U.S. history.

“At the same time, Trump’s ICE has been terrorizing our communities, instilling fear into our children, and murdering Americans on our streets. We all want to see violent criminals locked up but what we are experiencing across the nation is that every day Americans are paying the price. We need transparency, accountability, and rule of law. Trump’s ICE has got to go.”

6. William T. Mullen

President, New Jersey Building and Construction Trades Council



While serving as Senate President, Steve Sweeney obviously enhanced the statewide power of the Building Trades. They became the premier political operation in the state.

Under Mullen's leadership, they remain a very well-organized group, very politically active, both civilly and financially. With or without Sweeney, the Trades don't look to get knocked

from their perch anytime soon. President of the powerful labor organization for 15 years, Mullen received the support last year from his brothers and sisters for another three-year term.

7. Dale Caldwell

Lieutenant Governor, the State of New Jersey



Earlier this year, Lieutenant Governor Caldwell attended the ceremony of proud Pathways to Apprenticeship graduates at Elmwood United Presbyterian Church. “Jobs are a priority for us in this administration,” said the Lieutenant Governor. “Jobs are the best social program. A job transforms a community. I want to congratulate each of you.

We celebrate all these celebrities, but they don’t do as much as what you’re going to do for your community, and so I want you to be very proud of what you’re doing.”

As the Sherrill Administration strives to make New Jersey more affordable, the LG says it all starts with worker training. “We need to

do a better job to connect people to training in labor,” Caldwell told InsiderNJ. “That program [Pathways to Apprenticeship] is a model for young people, to turn their lives around.

“One of the things we’re trying to do,” he added, “is connect labor and employers with higher education. There’s a disconnect, in many cases. Folks coming out of high school don’t know all the options. They don’t know about apprenticeship. Our jobs action center under business action makes sure of a streamlined way for people to say, for example, ‘I want to be a plumber,’ and get there.”

Caldwell said the administration is encouraging every union to open apprenticeship program similar to the one operated by LIUNA.

“We can make inroads and reverse [the outmigration of students],” the Lieutenant Governor said. “If they knew these jobs were here we’d keep people in New Jersey – and that’s our goal.”



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8. Eddie Donnelly

President, New Jersey Firefighters Mutual Benevolent Association (FMBA)



Prez of his union since 2013, a leading voice on public pension policy, Donnelly (along with Hellstrom, see above) backed Mikie Sherrill early for Governor.

“Social issues are your social issues,” the Union Township-based firefighter told InsiderNJ last year. “What we do - what you [FMBA members] elect me to

do – is to go out there and vet the candidates and make sure they’re right and squared away on the issues important to us.”

9. Anthony Verrelli

Chairman, Assembly Labor Committee



The 15th District Assemblyman worked as a carpenter on a Statehouse renovation project years before going back as an elected leader and becoming chair of the committee. On his plate this fall? Healthcare for public sector workers and data centers.

“Data centers construction, building and development, are great when done right,” Verrelli told InsiderNJ. “Be transparent with what you’re going to do

and be sure to communicate how it can be better for the communities.”

Other issues for the Labor Committee include examining what the state needs to do to better combat bad contractor and development actors. Large-scale developers have so much money that many simply rack up offenses and pay fines leveled by the DOL (their transgressions might include ignoring PLAs, not employing

organized labor, or reporting a nonexistent apprenticeship program, among others) and go to court, exerting a “more money than God mentality” on state AG Office resources. Obviously, workers bear the brunt. Bottom line? It’s a problem. Verrelli is prepared to dive in. In addition, he has a non-compete clause bill he’s shopping, Senator Andrew Zwicker’s AI-workforce bill (see below), and many bills pertinent to specific labor organizations.

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10. William Sproule

Executive Secretary Treasurer, Regional Council of Carpenters for the Eastern Atlantic States



Diehard South Jerseyan. Represents six states and 43,000 carpenters, including 15,000 in New Jersey. An apprentice carpenter in 1989, Sproule worked his way up through the ranks to hold various leadership roles within the organization, including Organizing Director, New Jersey Regional Manager, and President and Regional Manager of the Northeast Regional Council of Carpenters. Took over the restructured Carpenters' organization in 2018-2019. In charge of day-to-day operations for the Council's local unions, overseeing collective bargaining agreements.

11. Ana Maria Hill

New Jersey State Director and Vice President of 32BJ SEIU



If you ever wanted to know about Hill's level of dedication, and the dedication of Analilia Mejia to working class issues, consider Hill and her members pounding on doors in the brutal cold after a snowstorm during the special CD-11 2026 Democratic Primary.

"I already know who to vote for, if you're out in the snow for her," a working-class woman told Hill as the labor leader tried to make her pitch for Mejia.

Daughter of a baker father and mother who folded silverware for the airlines, Hill is one of the stars

of New Jersey's labor movement, affiliated with a results-driven operation that represents 190,000 people across the east coast in 12 states, with 15,000 members in New Jersey, where union density stands at 14.7% (or seventh in the nation, compared to ten percent nationally).

She understands to her core the struggles of workers who can't make ends meet, in an economy where her members making \$18-21 hourly need second and third jobs.

She knows the stakes.

"We are working on fixing the world by unionizing and organizing workers beyond the traditional way of doing things," Hill told InsiderNJ.

To that end, she is working with state lawmakers on enabling legislation to unionize rideshare workers in New Jersey, a key coming battlefield for SEIU.

"We want to introduce legislation in the fall, once they are back in session, to create a pathway for [100,000 NJ] rideshare drivers to be recognized," said Hill, who has an abundance of members who drive uber cabs on the side, or who have family members who drive.

An early backer of Sherrill (whom she applauds for the Governor's opposition to Roxbury and Delaney Hall) – and also, of course, Mejia – Hill, for all her idealism about the work of labor unions, possesses a streetwise, decidedly New Jersey political sensibility.

"When I talk to my members about elections and politics, I point out that our leaders are not politicians, they are elected officials," she said. "We elect them and we can elect them out. I go back to the woman at the door in the cold and the fear and struggles out there. This is what matters in the end - what's in your paycheck. This is all determined – all of it - by elected officials and, like the woman said, union members knocking on my door."

Routinely seen at Delaney Hall in Newark, as well, on the frontline of the cause for undocumented workers' rights.

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12. Steve Beatty

President, New Jersey Education Association (NJEA)



A year in as president of one of New Jersey's most powerful unions, overseeing nearly 200,000 active members, Beatty has traveled to 400 school buildings in his quest to make contact, not only with his members, but with the people they serve, the children and families of the Garden State.

The COVID crisis took a terrible toll on all parties involved and revealed not only the degree to which families depend on teachers, but also the hazards and challenges of the profession.

"We have a crisis in many ways," Beatty told InsiderNJ. "Teachers still love what they do, but it's everything around them, which continues to a recruitment and

retention problem. It's about healthcare, salary, and pensions. People find it discouraging and at times ask, 'Why come to a place with only this amount of money?' People leave the profession early. In many cases they are not teaching for 30 years. There is, too, a general perception of educator voices getting ignored." Unfunded mandates for the classrooms remains a theory issue, for example.

Other issues:

Student teaching stipends

Money for higher education (community colleges do such a great job, more investment necessary)

Transfer credits

That said, Beatty praised Governor Mikie Sherrill for allocating record school funding in her FY2027 budget. In addition, he appreciates her stated priority to reform the school funding formula to modernize the system. He said he will fight, as always, for a full teacher pension payment.

"Overall, we're very pleased," he said of Sherrill's first year in office, and noted productive conversations with Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Lily Laux. "When it comes to school funding reform, the word is 'modernization.' The current formula is 18 years old, and it worked well, but ultimately it became like Frankenstein, where you're bolting on this and adjusting for that for a finite amount of time. It needs to be torn down to the studs, which of course are thorough and efficient education equity for every student."

Beatty took charge of the NJEA in the aftermath of Sean Spiller, who controversially ran for governor last year. The new NJEA President notes that it would have undoubtedly benefited the organization to have one of its leaders become governor. He does not disparage his predecessor's ambition. But he also notes his ongoing efforts to connect with members to make sure they know that he prioritizes their work and their needs. "We have to move forward," Beatty told InsiderNJ.

13. Julie Diaz

Deputy Commissioner, NJ Department of Labor



Former state political director for SEIU 32BJ, former Obama grassroots campaign star, Diaz successfully fought to increase airport worker wages substantially above minimum wage. The Perth Amboy native possesses a real world understanding of workers and their needs and deep convictions rooted in the labor movement. Highly regarded within Labor and political circles, this department veteran engages all pertinent matters where the department requires veteran passion and expertise.

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Eastern Atlantic States

REGIONAL COUNCIL OF CARPENTERS

14. Anthony Abrantes

Assistant Executive Secretary Treasurers, the Carpenters



Works directly under Sproule in the administration of all Carpenter duties in New Jersey as part of the union's six-state, 43K-strong effort. Serves 15,000 members in the Garden State.

Abrantes has his eye on ten different bills in the Legislature that would equip the state to better regulate unscrupulous business practices that negatively impact union labor. These include

measures ensuring just workers compensation, and punishment for those entities breaking New Jersey's labor laws.

Involved in the development of three carpenter training centers, including a dive school, which instructs members in underwater construction.

Regarding the challenge of AI, Abrantes told InsiderNJ, "Our

position is no different than it has been in the history of time, which is that we've always adapted to the needs of changing technology, and adapted our training standards. Our industry is one of the least impacted by AI. We've embraced AI as a whole and see as positive the potential for growth that they bring. In the short term, we are not opposed to it, and we are not scared about what it brings. In the long term, we're concerned about job loss. Understand, we've had data centers for 20 years. I do think there is significant misinformation circulating about them. A lot of people who oppose data centers don't know the correlation between the tech we're using every day in the phones we have in our hands, for example, and data centers."

The union has diverse demand for its workers, including hospitals and hospital additions, educational facilities and libraries, and yes, data centers.

15. Analilia Mejia

Congresswoman, District 11



Winner of the 2026 special election for the 11th District Congressional seat and subsequently the special general and Democratic Primary, Mejia defeated her rivals by living her roots. Formerly the head of Working Families, the Elizabeth native got her organizing start at SEIU, connected to the men and women of labor, the people who pump gas, mop floors, bang nails, and cobble together multiple jobs to make ends meet. That's what she knows and that's what drives her. Uniquely positioned to fight Trump's immigration concentration camp, she commands a strong leadership position in opposition to Delaney Hall.



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to all of the 2026 InsiderNJ Labor Leaders



HPAAE is the largest union of registered nurses and healthcare professionals in New Jersey. Since its founding by Englewood Hospital nurses in 1974, HPAAE has expanded across the state and into Southeastern Pennsylvania, representing more than 15,000 nurses, social workers, therapists, technicians, medical researchers, and other health care professionals in hospitals, nursing homes, home care agencies, blood banks, and university research facilities. HPAAE is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO.

Learn more at HPAAE.org

16. Charles N. Hall, Jr.

President of RWDSU, UFCW 108



Strong, on-the-ground, respected Newark-based leader of Local 108, which represents a wide range of retail workers in clothing stores, jewelry stores, automotive service, parts and accessory stores, supermarkets, warehouses, manufacturing, and also in the public sector, with a membership of 5,000-strong.

“What we’re all about right now is building coalitions and talking about voter rights and standing up for immigration and resisting how immigrants are being treated right now,” Hall told InsiderNJ.

Working in conjunction with Larry Hamm and the People’s Organization for Progress (POP), Hall co-sponsored a convention of 500 different groups focused on labor and voting rights issues.

“Those whom I represent include immigrants who work in my neighborhood stores and nursing homes,” said Hall. “We’re very active right now across a broad range of groups to make people aware, for at the end of the day, we have to get out and vote. That’s our top priority.

“I have a lot of confidence in our new governor,” the labor leader added, when asked if he trusts in the state’s maintenance of safe elections. “She’ll get out in front of this thing [threats by President Donald J. Trump to delegitimize the midterm elections]. We have to be ready. We have to make sure we get enough people out to overcome what they’re trying to do. They’re going to bring it to us. The labor movement understands what we need to do.”

His members and the industries they serve feel economic pain, Hall said.

“We should focus on what the issues are and what the records are and if you’re out on the shop floors and in the neighborhood supermarkets or talking to bus drivers, I don’t talk about [Donald Trump,” he told InsiderNJ. “I talk about the issues we have to tap into. That’s what people care about, and I think people on their own are coming around the economy because they’re hurting. If you focus on that, then you don’t get into the personalities of leaders on a higher level.”

17. Steve Tully

Executive Director of AFSCME New Jersey Council 63



Head of an organization representing 20,000 members, half employed in state government and half in local government. Their biggest issue, says Tully, is the cost of healthcare, in addition to the cost of living, and wages keeping up with groceries, gas and bills.

“The so-called ‘big beautiful bill’ presents a lot of unknowns about how impacts to services and the people who rely on those services,” Tully told InsiderNJ. “County and state governments are trying to adapt for when it takes effect on Jan. 1, 2027.”

18. Troy Singleton

State Senator, District 7



As a champion for working families, Senator Troy Singleton has made labor rights, workforce development, and economic opportunity central to his legislative career. He has championed and passed laws to strengthen collective bargaining rights, protect prevailing wage standards, and expand apprenticeship and job training opportunities for workers across New Jersey. His efforts have empowered unions, safeguarded worker protections, and helped ensure that workers receive fair wages for their contributions to our state's economy and public infrastructure.

Senator Singleton's commitment to working families is also

reflected in his approach to housing policy. As Chairman of the Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee, he has made housing affordability a top priority, recognizing that one of the most effective ways to address the housing crisis is to increase the supply of homes. More housing construction not only creates more opportunities for families to find safe and affordable places to live, but also creates good-paying jobs for carpenters, electricians, plumbers, laborers, and other skilled tradespeople. For Senator Singleton, housing policy and labor policy are intrinsically connected - building more homes means building more opportunities for New Jersey workers.

Singleton is also working to promote portable benefits, recognizing that the modern workforce increasingly includes independent contractors, freelancers, and other workers in the gig economy whose employment may not come with traditional benefits. He believes workers should not have to

sacrifice access to benefits simply because they work outside a traditional employment model and is committed to exploring policies that allow benefits to follow workers from job to job.

Singleton's commitment to organized labor is personal as well as legislative. He is a proud, card-carrying member of Carpenters Local 255 and previously served as a union executive with the Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters. His experience in the labor movement has given him a firsthand understanding of the dignity that comes with a good union job and the importance of ensuring that New Jersey's workforce has the skills, protections, and opportunities needed to succeed.

Whether the issue is labor rights, housing affordability, or workforce development, Senator Singleton remains focused on creating an economy where working people can build a career, support their families, and have a fair opportunity to succeed.

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19. Eric Richard

Legislative Affairs Coordinator, NJ AFL-CIO



With nearly 25 years of experience, Richard serves as the mammoth organization's veteran point person on legislation impacting working people. Respected and sought after as one of the state's leading labor experts.

Richard sees AI cutting both ways on the work force and supports a compromise that will properly regulate the industry that will protect labor and the environment.

In that regard, he is working with state Senator Andrew Zwicker (D-16) on S-4075, which would install stronger AI regs in the Garden State.

20. Mike Tranberg

President, NJ Pipe Trades



Thirty-eight years in the pipe trades, Tranberg succeeded President Shaun Sullivan, who sadly died earlier this year.

Based in Englishtown, Tranberg (who also serves as business manager of UA Local 9) leads 10,000 members, including plumbers, pipefitters, welders, and HVAC techs.

"It's a great career and I recommend the pipe trades to men and women, to be part of a brotherhood and sisterhood who find the work through our signatory contractors," Tranberg told InsiderNJ. "Here we have skilled people who work for prevailing wage. It's a great way to make a living."

Jobs now include data centers, colleges (a lot of university work at Princeton, for example), Netflix in Monmouth County, and hospitals. "A lot of [medical] facilities are putting on additions," he said.

Two years ago, Tranberg replaced the retired Mike Maloney as business manager of UA Local 9.

21. A.J. Sabath

Founder and CEO, Advocacy & Management Group (AMG)



Former New Jersey Labor Commissioner and chief-of-state to the late Governor Richard J. Codey, Sabath leads the ranks of pro-labor lobbyists in the State of New Jersey. At present, he occupies a critical forward position on behalf of Building Trades in the ongoing debate about data centers. “What we’re trying to do is to find balance, where appropriate, for places to locate facilities,” Sabath told InsiderNJ. “They’re the new demon, of course. The more we get involved in the advanced tech world, it’s becoming harder and harder for the industry as towns and counties back resolutions forbidding them in their towns. I do think people miss the potential for work opportunities, both in construction and operation and maintenance, prime for building trades.”

22. William “Billy” Gallagher

CWA District 1, Assistant to the District Vice President



Billy Gallagher is a seasoned labor leader who has spent more than three decades organizing workers, taking on tough fights, and delivering results for CWA members. His union activism began as a picket captain during the 1989 NYNEX strike, and he rose through the ranks from Steward to Vice President of CWA Local 1109 before joining the CWA District 1 staff. Gallagher has led major organizing and bargaining fights across the public and private sectors, including the successful fight for a first contract at Cablevision. Now Assistant to District 1 Vice President Dennis Trainor, he helps lead the work of the District and has played a critical role in some of the biggest issues facing New Jersey public-sector workers, particularly the fight to protect affordable, quality healthcare. Drawing on decades of experience across every corner of District 1, Gallagher brings a tough, practical, and member-focused approach to building union power and improving the lives of working people.

23. James “Jim” Ford

President, New Jersey Fraternal Order of Police



Successor to Bob Fox.

Detective Sergeant, Florence Township PD.
Founding member of Florence FOP Lodge #210.
Former NJFOP Recording Secretary. Experience within the FOP on Education, Legislative, Diversity, Wellness, and Scholarship Committees.

24. Gordon Johnson

Senator, District 37, Chair of the Senate Labor Committee



The Chairman's labor priorities in the fall include addressing the high the cost of public sector healthcare (Senator Lagana bill S-4516).

"We want to fix this damn thing, and this is a good start," said Johnson.

He also wants to nail down the independent contractor bill. "Define what it [an independent contractor] is," he said. "Some workers don't want to be employees. The DOL has looked into it and we must have a conversation about classification."

Finally, along with his colleague, state Senator Joe Cryan (D-20), Johnson convened a joint AI joint hearing and wants to tackle Senator Zwicker's bill, S-4075.



CONGRATULATIONS

to Everyone Named to the
2026 Insider 100: Power List



**John F. Capo,
Director**



**Leon E. Jones Jr.,
Treasury Secretary**

25. Orlando Riley

Chairman of the Amalgamated Transit Union NJ State Joint Council



On-the-ground successor to Bayonne's own Ray Greaves, former frontline transit worker at Local 819-Newark. Rose through the ranks to become New Jersey State Chairman, where he champions worker safety, service reliability, and fair treatment for all transit employees.

Based in Kenilworth, heading a union of 6,000 active members (operators, mechanics, cleaners, maintenance workers, clerics), Riley leads the fight in Jersey City to regulate the microtransit system.

26. Andrew Zwicker

Senator, District 16



It all comes down to Zwicker and S-4075, the priority of the Senate Labor Committee.

In brief:

“This bill is designed to ensure that there are reasonable guard rails on the use of systems using artificial intelligence (AI) and related technologies in places of employment and for public services. The bill regulates AI used in electronic monitoring tools (EMT) to collect and process a wide range of data and information about workers and job applicants and AI used by automated employment decision-making systems (AEDS) in making employment-related decisions such as hiring and firing. The bill also regulates automated benefit and service decision-making systems (ABSDS) used in making decisions related to providing public benefits and services.”

27. Michele Liebttag

CWA Local 1036, Political and Education Director

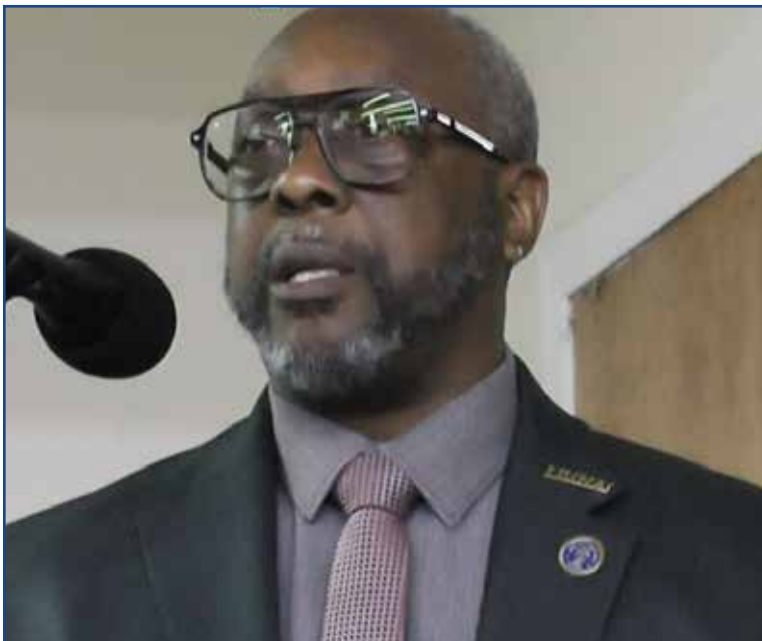


Michele Liebttag is a dedicated labor leader, public servant, and community advocate whose work is rooted in a deep commitment to working families, strong public services, and collective action. As Political & Education Director of CWA Local 1036 and President of the Mercer County Central Labor Council, she helps members build political power, advocate for fairness, and advance issue-based campaigns across New Jersey. She has spent decades

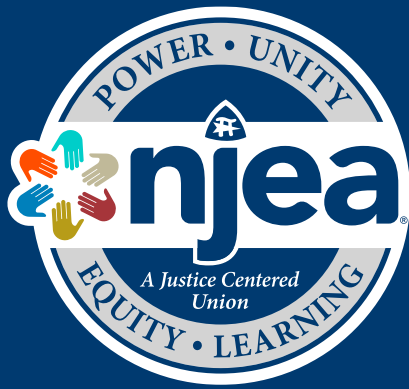
successfully championing landmark legislation like Family Leave Insurance, Earned Sick Leave, and Equal Pay. Liebttag also serves as Frenchtown Borough Council President and Vice Chair of the Hunterdon County Democratic Committee, bringing a collaborative and action-oriented approach to labor advocacy, public service, and community leadership.

28. Wayne Richardson

Manager of Strategic Partnerships for the Laborers Eastern Region



The Essex County Commissioner won a close contest for reelection in the 2026 Democratic Primary. President of the board for the Laborers' Pathways to Apprenticeship program, training the next generation of union workers, Richardson and Pathways to Apprenticeship in March awarded certificates of course completion to 24 graduates from East Orange, Newark, Irvington, and Orange. This month in East Orange he led another orientation for prospective young trade workers. Key relationships at the state level include Lieutenant Governor Dale Caldwell. Serves as a vital conduit for labor to the business and development community.



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Pictured above (l-r):

Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare, President Steve Beatty & Vice President Petal Robertson

29. Greg Lalevee

Business Manager, International Union of Operating Engineers Local 825



A crane operator by trade, Lalevee became business manager of the 7K-strong men and women in 2010. Trusted and respected.

30. Matt Caliente

President, Professional Firefighters of New Jersey



Head of the 3,400-active member organization, Caliente in 2025 prioritized the New Jersey First Responders Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Protection Act, which Sherrill signed into law earlier this year. The Act provides employment protections for paid first responders diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder under certain conditions. “I’m very proud that it is already being used,” the labor leader told InsiderNJ.

Going forward, Caliente’s responsibilities include securing just overtime, staffing fire districts, and addressing the impacts on firefighters of fewer EMS volunteers.

31. Virgil Maldonado

President, ILA Local 1588



With an office in Bayonne, Maldonado – in addition to his local duties – serves as International Longshoreman’s Association vice president of a region that covers everything from the Great Lakes to Maine, to Florida and Texas. Over 85,000 members and growing. A big dog beyond New Jersey, he still serves 600 longshoremen right on the waterfront in his hometown. A key ally of Hudson County Sheriff Jimmy Davis and Assemblyman Will Sampson.

32. Will Sampson

Assemblyman, LD-31, Crane operator and political liaison for the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) Local 1588



A longshoreman by trade with ILA Local 1588 and a key ally of Virgil Maldonado, Sampson covers the waterfront on all issues pertinent to labor.

33. Thomas Sullivan

President IBEW Local 164, Bergen County Commissioner



A member of the Bergen County Board of County Commissioners since January of 2015, Sullivan of Montvale started his professional career as an apprentice electrician, working his way up to become a journeyman electrician, before getting elected Vice President of Local 164 in 2010, and President in 2013.

34. Joe Cryan

Senator, LD-20



Longtime labor advocate Cryan (the former Sheriff of Union County) says a skeptical and fearful public needs more public information from the data center industry. Only with facts – and data, of all things – can New Jersey thoughtfully proceed.

That said, the New Jersey Economic Development Authority already granted a \$250 million tax break to CoreWeave, a computing company based in Livingston, toward a 392,600-square-foot data center in Kenilworth, worth approximately \$1.8 billion.

“Core is taking \$250 million of state money and refuses to stand in front of the public,” Cryan told InsiderNJ.

According to Inside Climate News, “from its application, CoreWeave promises to create 143 jobs paying above 120 percent of the county median salary. The tax credits will be \$50 million per year over the first five years of a 10-year commitment to stay and keep the jobs in the state.”

But people doubt the overall positive impact of data centers on jobs, and on quality of life generally.

Cryan earlier this year with Senator Gordon Johnson helmed a conference on AI and acknowledges the overall undefined public agenda as lawmakers try to keep up with people’s worries about the future. For the moment, “Top of Form” Bottom of Form I have legislation that ends state subsidies [for data centers].”

“I don’t actually believe they should be banned, but they need to be far more forthcoming and demonstrate much more transparency to satisfy people’s concerns,” said the senator, not only around jobs but also the environment, including water usage and noise.



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35. Rich Maroko

President, Hotel and Gaming Trades Council, AFL-CIO



After getting behind the gubernatorial candidacy last year of Mikie Sherrill, Maroko in 2026 focused more on New York, where he secured an eight-year contract for his members (30,000 of them, across 250 hotels). The union wants to use that success (wage increases of 50% over the course of the contract) in preparation for a renegotiated New Jersey contract. The current contract expires in 2028.

36. Wayne Blanchard

President, State Troopers Fraternal Association



Respected representative of all 1,900 state troopers, responsible for collective bargaining and handling grievances. Longtime veteran of law enforcement. Re-elected earlier this year as first vice chairman of the National Troopers Coalition. Very active.

37. Annette Quijano

LD-20 Assemblywoman, Speaker Pro Tempore



The veteran, Elizabeth-based Assemblywoman remains the AFL-CIO's go-to lower house lawmaker for labor issues. The daughter of tomato pickers from Puerto Rico, attorney, and speaker pro tempore, championed drivers' licenses for undocumented workers, equal pay, and state measures to protect warehouse workers, crack down on wage theft, and forbid the use of masks by New Jersey law enforcement officers.

38. Herb Conaway

Congressman, District 3



Medical doctor Conaway occupies a critical role at the federal level in the regulation of artificial intelligence. This summer, he introduced the Protecting Patients from Automated Denials Act, which would establish safeguards on the use of artificial intelligence in Medicare Advantage prior authorization decisions.

Under the bill, according to Conaway, any AI-assisted denial must be reviewed and approved by a qualified physician under the supervision of the plan's medical director. It also requires physicians to attest that they exercised independent medical judgement and that the denial was not generated or dictated by AI. Additionally, the bill grants the Department of Health and Human Services the authority

to audit and inspect AI use in prior authorization decisions, including reviewing denial data, internal policies, algorithms, employee practices, and overturn rates.

"Artificial intelligence is dramatically changing the technology and healthcare industries, but we need to ensure that patients aren't being left behind," said Conaway. "This legislation establishes necessary physician oversight and will increase transparency with the federal audit requirements to make sure patient claims aren't being wrongfully denied."

39. Megan Chambers

President, SEIU NJ State Council, Co-Manager of the Laundry, Distribution and Food Service Joint Board of Workers United



Highly respected leader of the industrial laundries and school cafeteria workers for the City of Newark. The SEIU State Council's membership includes health care, warehouse, industrial laundry, and school cafeteria workers, as well as motor vehicle inspectors, resident physicians, and municipal employees in Newark. The council includes 1199 SEIU Healthcare Workers East, the Laundry, Distribution and Food Service Joint Board of Workers United, the Committee of Interns and Residents, and 32BJ Motor Vehicle Inspectors. Represents and advocates for more than 20,000 members across the region.

40. Laurel Brennan

Secretary Treasurer, NJ AFL-CIO



Secretary-Treasurer of the New Jersey State AFL-CIO since 1997, Brennan is the first woman to serve in this office in New Jersey and is one of only seven to do so across the nation.

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41. John Burzichelli

LD-3 State Senator



South Jersey diehard Burzichelli works with the Building Trades to help make NJ labor competitive so members can work. He also closely monitors state labor enforcement to ensure New Jersey does everything in its power to hold contractors accountable and maintain an in-state labor work force.

42. Steven Gardner

Director, NJ LECET



Heads the business development and legislative arm for Laborers leader Mike Hellstrom. Former executive director of the Assembly Democrats has close ties to both Craig Coughlin and Lou Greenwald, with solid political relationships up and down the state, Gardner will continue to operate at the forefront of the labor movement in Trenton. This fall, listen for him in the data center conversation as New Jersey firms up guardrails while preserving work opportunities for LIUNA, and seeking ways to build more worker housing.

In addition, “We are really focused on worker exploitation in the construction industry as it relates to Jersey City,” Gardner told InsiderNJ. “In my career, I can’t remember a time like this, when billionaire developers can afford to do the right thing and don’t. The level of exploitation is shocking and we are laser focused, working with two strong allies, Hudson County Executive Craig Guy and Mayor James Solomon.”

43. Latham Tiver

Senator, District 8



Senator Tiver's labor priorities center on a simple idea: New Jersey needs to be a place where working families can afford to live, businesses have the confidence to invest, and the skilled trades have a strong and predictable pipeline of work.

A major focus for the Senator is continued investment in infrastructure and energy generation. His support for expanding advanced nuclear energy in New Jersey is one recent example. The Senator co-sponsored legislation removing outdated barriers to new nuclear development and supported the Power NJ Act, which pairs new generation and grid reliability with strong labor standards and the potential for thousands of skilled construction jobs.

He also believes New Jersey needs greater predictability from government. Strong labor, safety and environmental standards can coexist with a permitting system that provides clear requirements and reasonable timelines. When major projects spend years in uncertainty, investment stalls, construction jobs disappear, and it becomes harder for the trades to recruit and apprentice the workforce that New Jersey will need in the years ahead.

For Senator Tiver, affordability, infrastructure and workforce development are interconnected. New Jersey should enforce its labor laws, invest in the infrastructure necessary for economic growth, and create enough certainty that organized labor and responsible employers can train, hire and put people to work.

44. Andy Cassagnol

Executive Vice President of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East



Under Cassagnol's leadership, 1199 backed Analilia Mejia early in CD-11 to nab a win. He was also part of the "Meeting the Moment" labor coalition, which led cross-union Know Your Rights trainings for immigrant workers, and supported the Labor Eyes on ICE coalition to raise awareness of human rights abuses at Delaney Hall.

Other priorities:

- Securing industry-leading contracts for nursing homes workers statewide.
- Fighting in Trenton for better financial transparency in the for-profit nursing home industry and closing corporate loopholes that undermine the long-term care workforce.

45. Anna-Marta Visky

CWA District 1 New Jersey Political and Field Director



Visky is a longtime progressive and labor organizer who has built grassroots political power in New Jersey around issues including universal healthcare, workers' rights, and ending the county line. A former national organizer with Our Revolution, founded by Bernie Sanders, she has extensive movement-building experience, having mobilized volunteers and community partners around progressive candidates and causes. At CWA, she has led the union's political and field operation, developing a strong, member-driven political program with record-breaking participation. Visky serves on the New Jersey AFL-CIO Executive Board and is a county committee member and Co-Chair of the Oceanport Democrats. She works to strengthen the labor movement by turning union members into leaders, organizers, and a powerful force for change.

46. Bernard Callegari

Assistant Eastern Region Manager for the Laborers



The longtime member of Local 79 rose above squalid circumstances to become chief-of-staff for the eastern region. Secaucus-based. An inspirational speaker and motivator who powerfully and uniquely connects with Labor audiences. Passionate about preserving and enhancing worker mental health.



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47. Debbie Parks

Vice President, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)



A member since 1982, former field coordinator Parks became an International Vice President in January 2018. Formerly vice president of AFSCME Council 73, Parks represents over 20,000 workers.

48. La'Tenya King

Vice President, 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East



In charge of organizing with the relatively new 1199 regime, brought in new on-the-ground energy and a lot of new companies. Brings deep experience in worker advocacy, coalition building, and social justice.

49. Patricia Campos-Medina

Activist and Educator



A Research-Teaching-Extension (RTE) Faculty and labor educator, Campos-Medina focuses on the intersection of race, immigration status, and workers' rights. The Jersey diehard serves as Executive Director of the Worker Institute at the School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University, where she leads research, policy innovation, and training to advance worker justice, collective bargaining rights, and the interests of workers in today's economy and society.

50. Dan Cosner

Business Manager and Financial Secretary of Electrical Workers Local Union 351



Representing a Local Union with over 2,600 members, Cosner has been a member of Local 351 since he began his apprenticeship in 1987. He started serving the local union on the Executive Board in 1997. Appointed Business Agent in 2001. Trustee to the Pension, Surety and Health and Welfare Funds of Local 351, as well as Chairman of the IBEW Local 351 Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee.

51. Debbie White

President, Health Professional Allied Employee (HPAE)



A registered nurse at Virtua Memorial Hospital for 27 years and a long-term Med-Surg nurse, White took over from HPAE founder Ann Twomey.