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# THE BROADWAY DEMOCRATS

♦ District Leaders: Curtis Arluck, Paula Diamond Román ♦ President: Joe Nunley ♦

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# **Gun Control:** *Pragmatic* *Approaches to* *Reducing Gun* *Violence*

## ***Featuring speakers:***

**\*Richard Aborn**

President, Citizens Crime Commission of New York  
Former President, Brady Campaign

**\*Jens Ludwig**

Professor of Social Service Administration, Law, and Public Policy  
University of Chicago  
Visiting Scholar, Russell Sage Foundation

## **Thursday, February 17<sup>th</sup>**

**7:30 pm sign in/refreshments \* 8:00 club business \* 8:30 forum**

**Congregation Ramath Orah**

**550 West 110th Street (off Broadway)**

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Volume 36, Issue 2

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## President's Corner

Joe Nunley

### MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The Democratic Party is the best place to be an activist because it's the only vehicle that exists that can muster enough power to produce the change that we all want to see in America. But this activism must be on the local level. Only the determination of many people in a grassroots effort across the nation can reverse the right wing shift of the party nationally into the party of Big Business (meaning those who promote globalization, fight unionism, keep wages low, outsource jobs, promote unfair tax policies, pollute the environment, wage perpetual wars, support dictators, etc.) After all, we have the Republicans to do this.

The remarkable courage and commitment of the demonstrators in Egypt is inspiring. And it made me ask myself, "If they can do this in their circumstances how can we give up in ours?" Is this the country we want? Do we want to be supporting brutal dictatorships around the world? Do we want the US to facilitate directly or indirectly murder, torture, cruel imprisonment, the suppression of journalism and free speech, civil rights, and the rights of people throughout the world to determine their own destiny? We just made a 60 billion dollar military deal with Saudi Arabia, another dictatorship. Is this a runaway train? No, it can't be. We are responsible because we are allowing it to happen. We must all be activists.

An average looking man from the backwoods of Illinois once said that our government was "of the people, by the people, and for the people." And if we believe that, and I do, then there is no "they". "They" are not doing it. "We" are doing it. We are the government. Good citizenship is a job. Maybe it's a part time job but it's a job.

Activism should be the understood price of citizenship. Many people think that their citizenship is free. They think that if they vote and pay their taxes and obey the laws that they're doing their part. They aren't. I once saw as a youth hitch hiking around the country something written on the side of a wall in Tucson, Arizona. It said "Love is work made visible." That has stayed with me. And love of country is also "work made visible."

The Broadway Democrats is not a chess club or a literary club. It is a group of people determined to make

a better future for our nation. And we are stepping up our activism. One can say "I have no time" but part of the responsibility of living in America is to "produce the time". It is taking responsibility for our country.

I urge you to come to our meeting on February 17<sup>th</sup> and to use the Broadway Democrats as a launching place from which to make a difference.

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## District Leader's Report

Curtis Arluck

I'm already in the early stages of Tax Season, so I'll just pass along the resolution I drafted and the club improved upon, before passing unanimously:

*Broadway Democrats deplores the shootings of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and those who attended her constituent meeting. We extend our condolences to the families of the six people who died, and our best wishes for the speedy recovery of Gabby and those injured with her—we're thrilled that they've come so far. We join with millions of Americans and people around the world in hoping that this tragic event will lead to greater compassion and tolerance in the public discourse, and to increased development and implementation of comprehensive mental health services. We urge elected officials, law enforcement officials and all Americans to come together to ban those weapons and ammunition that serve no hunting purpose, no self defense purpose, and are designed primarily to kill as many people as possible.*

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## Assembly Member's Report

Daniel O'Donnell

Local news has been dominated recently by coverage of the tug-of-war for public school space in District 3 as Success Academy attempts to expand into the Upper West Side. Department of Education (DOE) held a public hearing on January 25<sup>th</sup> about its proposal to co-locate Success Academy Charter School at Brandeis, and I submitted testimony in opposition on the following grounds: violation of state law due to inadequate public notice, the inappropriate expense of retrofitting the facilities for younger students, and the potential to disrupt the growth and success of the schools already at Brandeis.

Sadly, this issue has divided local parents over the invaluable - and scarce - resource of space: in District 3, classroom space is at a premium and many schools lack the capacity to accommodate local demand. In that climate, DOE should scrupulously avoid situations where families vie against each other for this precious and valuable resource. Instead, DOE's failure to carefully plan has resulted in a situation where elementary school parents, desperate for another option, are competing with high school parents decrying the lack of District 3 high school seats. This is counter-productive and could have been avoided by thoughtful consideration of the district's current and future needs.

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## **State Committeeman Report**

**Daniel Marks Cohen**

Perhaps the only good thing former Defense Secretary Rumsfeld did was provide humanity with a decent catchphrase. In application to the State Committee, the known unknown is that while Jay Jacobs is currently the Chair of the State Party, it is unclear whether he will remain in that position, or be replaced. His work as chairman—from what I hear—has been mixed, neither truly loved or deeply hated, he remains from what I see a competent but not particularly charismatic chairman, more workhorse than show horse, and with a particularly charismatic Governor, that may be what Cuomo wants (the decision to keep or replace the chairman is exclusively the Governor's to make). I predict that Jacobs stays. The next State Committee meeting is not until May, but we may have clarity about the chairman's position sooner than that. It is not a political earthquake regardless of what happens, but in our little fishbowl, all ripples are felt.

Unknown unknown is what Cuomo will do now that he has assumed the mantle of responsibility as Governor. He campaigned against a hapless opponent(s) so much so that he did not need to articulate many positions or interact with the press or the public, except in controlled environments. Early signs since taking office are encouraging—robust support for gay marriage, pushing for ethics reform including forcing elected officials to disclose outside sources of income and clients (a direct shot over the bow of the ship of Assembly Speaker Shelly Silver, whose income as an attorney at the state's largest malpractice firms is well known generally, but also a well kept secret on specifics) and fiscal austerity. Although I was too young at the time to appreciate the early years, Mario Cuomo also inspired when he initially took office, and later disappointed. I hope that history does not repeat itself.

The Reform Caucus of the State Committee met, and has also created a small working group on issues we should press for in the new administration, among the things discussed this week were ethics reform and nonpartisan redistricting, with the goal to draft resolutions to submit before the spring meeting. I will elaborate more on them as they unfold.

Switching topics, while I have witnessed and shared the displeasure with the recent initiative of the Harlem Success Academy ("HSA"), which has shamelessly, and many say, misleadingly marketed itself to west side parents about the new school they are proposing to co-locate in the old Brandeis High School building (and it was with satisfaction that CB7 unanimously rejected the co-location), I am a little concerned about the tenor against ALL charter schools. Many are little better, and often worse, than the schools they replaced, but a few have managed to offer a superior alternative for parents desperate for better education options for their children. So while I agreed with a recent Three Parks resolution against HSA co-location, I was against an overall moratorium on charter schools, and that is why I voted no.

In closing, I wanted to express my condolences to Alan Flacks on the recent death of his mother. It is hard to lose a close family member and my sympathies to Alan and his family over the loss.

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## **Steering Committee Member**

**Luis Román**

In the wake of the tragic Tucson shootings, guns have been on my mind a lot. In my job as a Legal Aid attorney, I have had a front row seat to the proliferation of guns available on the street, and the kind of devastation they have wrought among New York families. Young men by the thousands, particularly young men of color, have become guests of New York's correctional systems because of the easy access to illegal firearms. Sadly, none of this information is really news. Americans have been watching this problem fester and grow before our eyes for more than forty years.

A few days after the Tucson shootings, MSNBC's Rachel Maddow did a penetrating report on the incident, focusing particularly on the comments about how unbelievable and unpredictable the incident was. With clinical, unbiased precision, Maddow destroyed the idea that this event was either unbelievable or unpredictable, simply by reviewing America's recent history of tragic gun violence. Beginning with the attempted assassination of President Reagan in 1981, Maddow presented a dozen nationally reported shooting incidents. Though the details of the incidents varied,

there was a consistent theme woven through them all. No one imagined that such an event could have happened in their community.

One thing has changed over the past thirty years. It used to be that, following one of these tragic events, you would hear an anguished cry for new, better gun control measures. Following Tucson, we have barely heard a ripple of outrage. Rep. Carolyn McCarthy from Long Island, whose political career began after her husband's death during the Long Island Railroad shootings, has sought to re-impose the ban on the extra-long ammo magazines of the type used by the Tucson shooter, a step even Rep. McCarthy admitted was modest, at best. Even that brief flicker of outrage was quickly dimmed, by House Speaker John Boehner. One thing of which we can be sure, there will be no measures restricting the easy flow of guns around the country coming out of the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress.

It is the ho-hum reaction to these events that has surprised me. The NRA has such a firm grip on the national discussion over guns that the events of the past three weeks seem to have barely elicited a shrug of our national shoulders. A man who was known to be emotionally disturbed within his community was able to purchase a semi-automatic firearm and a copious amount of ammunition, legally, without any background check, and the response from much of the country was that there should have been more armed people at the scene of the shooting. This sentiment was expressed despite the statement of one man who was at the scene, armed with his own weapon. He came to the scene moments after the shooting, drawing his own weapon, prepared to fire on the man he saw holding a gun. Before he could fire, other bystanders told him the man holding the gun had just taken it from the perpetrator.

Just as it seemed no one was prepared to do anything to stem the tide of gun violence in the country, one man has shown extraordinary leadership. Mayor Bloomberg, with the support of mayors and local elected officials around the country has been waging a campaign to stop the traffic in illegal guns. Particularly, he has targeted gun shows, where dealers have been blatantly ignoring laws mandating background checks before selling guns, guns which often end up on the streets of New York, or other cities. Mayor Bloomberg recently unveiled the results of an undercover operation where private detectives hired by the City bought guns at a show, despite telling the dealers they would not be able to pass a background check.

Reactions to these operations have been mixed. Some gun shows operators have taken steps to close the holes some dealers have used to skirt waiting requirements. Others have stood firm, taunting Bloomberg publicly for sticking his nose into what they consider their business. The point of it all is not the gun dealers' reactions. The

point is whether and how we are going to react. Mayor Bloomberg has been no less than a profile in courage in this war on gun violence. No matter what other issues we have with him, and those issues are many, on the issue of guns and gun violence, he deserves nothing less than our full-throated cheers, and our active support.

We have the opportunity at this month's forum to talk about gun safety, thanks to the efforts of District Leader Paula Diamond Román. This will be a chance for us to think about actions we can take to support Mayor Bloomberg and others around the country to stop the illegal flow of guns into our cities. Let's use this opportunity to make a difference in the future of New York.



## **Letter to the Editor**

Brian D'Agostino

In a time of extreme fiscal austerity, especially for the states, the U.S. today spends at least a trillion dollars a year on so called "national security." It is not just the Department of Defense budget but those of the C.I.A., the Afghanistan war (which has its own appropriations), the costs of past military activity (e.g., Veterans Administration, interest on the military portion of the debt), military expenditures in other departments (e.g., NASA, State, and Energy—which maintains the nuclear weapons complex), and various black budgets. A trillion a year is a conservative estimate.

And yet, House Republicans in January declared national security the only category of discretionary spending exempt from federal budget cuts. Nor is the Obama Administration pushing back. The reason? A bipartisan ideology that holds national security as a sacred cow—an ideology I intend to demolish here—and defense contractor and other corporate interests that are served by this ideology.

To be sure, Obama deserves credit for getting the New START through a lame duck Senate over continued Republican opposition. Arizona Republican Senator Jon Kyl still wanted to delay ratification in December, even after shaking the administration down for hundreds of millions more in nuclear weapons spending as a condition for supporting the treaty. But let's put this in perspective. START will reduce the U.S. nuclear arsenal to "only" 1,500 weapons.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is a dirty little secret here that neither Republicans nor Democrats are willing to talk about—there is no conceivable military justification for more than a few dozen nuclear weapons. That is what security experts call a "minimum deterrent," and it

is all that is needed to annihilate the industrial centers of several countries. I personally don't think a technology that would incinerate millions of human beings and turn entire regions into radioactive wastelands is a morally acceptable basis for any country's security. But even if you disagree, my point is that only one thirtieth of a 1,500 weapon arsenal is needed to threaten such devastation.

And the nuclear arsenal is only the beginning. Take missile defenses, which are allegedly the only thing standing between us and a future nuclear attack by Iran or North Korea. Hello? If we can deter these "rogue states" with the threat of total annihilation, why do we need missile defenses? Even the most evil and irresponsible dictator would not be willing to destroy their own power, the only thing they care about (in contrast to responsible democratic leaders like Senator Kyl). No country, no power. For the same reason, a nuclear armed Iran would pose no threat to nuclear armed Israel, at least under prevailing military doctrines accepted by American and Israeli leaders. U.S. and Israeli policy towards Iran has NOTHING to do with the security of either population—nothing, nada, niente, nichts. It is all about the power of government elites—a nuclear state can dominate a non-nuclear state—and about the profits of Raytheon, Boeing, and other missile defense contractors.

But what about terrorists? Well, can missile defenses intercept a suitcase bomb? Can tanks, jet fighter planes, cruise missiles, submarines, aircraft carriers, over a million men and women in uniform at hundreds of military bases throughout the world? And if none of this can help us intercept a suitcase bomb, then neither do we need another million working as civilian support staff, including the single biggest bureaucracy on earth administering the whole system.

This brings us to the hawks' ideological last stand. We really need all this stuff to be able to disrupt and dislodge terrorist organizations in places like Afghanistan. Really? Even if the U.S. secured Afghanistan with an heroic sacrifice of blood and treasure, would that put al-Qaeda out of business? Of course not. So which country will we invade next? Yemen? Paraguay? Kenya? Would that do the trick?

The truth is, military power is not a viable means of security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If the U.S. is serious about preventing terrorism, we can and should eradicate extreme poverty in the world by diverting a mere 10% of our military budget to international economic development (real, locally-controlled development, which would build a global groundswell of goodwill for America). Most of the rest could be channeled to the states to meet the real economic needs of U.S. cities and local communities, including smaller public school class sizes, renewable energy, organic farming, and adequate health care—all of which could create well paid, sustainable, productive jobs.

How about putting weapons engineers to work as math teachers and how about paying the people currently maintaining the nuclear arsenal to dismantle it instead and clean up radioactive sites? What is preventing this? Answer: a bipartisan national security ideology and the corporate interests it serves. To be part of the solution, Broadway Dems and other Democratic clubs need to push back hard, demanding austerity for the military-industrial complex, not for the states and the people.

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**Make a difference!**

## Membership

In order to vote in club elections (endorsements, elections of officers, judicial convention, amendments), you must be an eligible, voting member of the Broadway Democrats. You must have attended at least one of the previous nine monthly public meetings and you must pay your dues. Dues partially defray the costs of presenting forums and putting out this newsletter. Dues are \$20; senior dues are \$5.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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Special Interests: \_\_\_\_\_

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FIRST  
CLASS

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Paula Diamond Román  
President: Joe Nunley  
Newsletter Editor: Gretchen Borges

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

**A Forum on Gun Control, with Richard Aborn and Jens Ludwig**

**Thursday, February 17th 8:00 p.m.**