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# THE BROADWAY DEMOCRATS

◆ District Leaders: Curtis Arluck, Paula Diamond Román ◆ President: Luis Román ◆

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# The Time Is Now: BUILDING A PROGRESSIVE PLATFORM FOR THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

## Join the Conversation

Come to the club meeting and participate in generating ideas for a party platform reflecting progressive ideals. Tell us what you think the country needs and what the party should prioritize.

**Thursday, September 17, 2015**

**Meeting starts at 8:00 PM**

**Bank Street College of Education**

**610 West 112<sup>th</sup> Street**

**(between Broadway and Riverside)**

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Volume 40, Issue 7

September 2015

## District Leader's Report

Curtis Arluck

### Presidential Politics

Welcome back from a long hot summer. I'm writing this on Labor Day, and I wanted to start with a strong declaration of support for America's labor movement, which is under vitriolic attack from every single Republican Presidential candidate. Each Republican candidate has a particular issue where they lead the reactionary charge; Trump on immigration is the most odious example. For labor relations and denunciation of working people, Scott Walker is the head villain. I didn't think we would ever see a stupider Presidential candidate than Sarah Palin, but Walker is a hundred times duller and a thousand times meaner. Happily for working people, he is sinking like a stone.

Speaking of Presidential politics, petitioning for the NY Presidential primary begins in early January, which means that Broadway Democrats would have to endorse by December if we wanted to have a candidate before petitioning begins. The other alternative is to wait until just before the April primary, on the grounds that petitioning is not important for President the way it is for local offices. What do you think: should we endorse sooner or later?

### Netanyahu's Bridge to Nowhere

Last summer, when Israeli citizens were under attack from the utterly-without-redeeming value terrorist government of Gaza, I was thrilled to see President Obama, Congressman Jerry Nadler, and to an only slightly lesser extent Senator Bernie Sanders speak out in Israel's support. We might have wished that Israel had a more progressive government, or that this or that military action was handled differently, but this was war: Hamas was trying to kill Israeli civilians and destroy the Jewish state. In wartime, you get behind your government, you get behind your ally, even if you don't like its leader.

The Iran agreement is a completely different story. There is no war with Iran. (If Iran attacked Israel, Israel and the U.S. would flatten it.) This agreement was negotiated and endorsed by every major world power, and is supported by military and intelligence agencies throughout the world, including those in Israel. If the US followed Netanyahu and his right wing allies' advice and rejected the deal, peace talks would collapse, international sanctions against Iran would end, and the prospect of Iran assembling nuclear weapons would

increase. Most troubling is how Netanyahu's meddlesome right wing alliances have undermined Israel's support around the world. *Not one world leader likes or supports him.* England, France, Germany—two of which have conservative governments—are disgusted. From the moment President Obama—a staunch supporter of Israel—took office, Netanyahu and his right wing Israeli allies have undermined and belittled him; and worked in lockstep with U.S. right wingers to engage in near-treason against the Commander in Chief of Israel's one true ally.

Thanks to the stalwart support of President Obama, all of the world's major leaders, the two people we most hope will be President, Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, and yes, Jewish Congressional leaders like Al Franken and Jerry Nadler, the Iran agreement will go through. Chances of avoiding nuclear war will increase, Israel will survive, there is a chance that even Iran will be a more moderate player on the world stage. It wasn't easy, or pretty, but the forces of reason and intelligence have triumphed over the forces of fear and reaction symbolized by U.S. Republican leaders and sadly embraced by Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu.



## District Leader's Report

Paula Diamond Román

It was recently brought to my attention that New York City and New York State have invested money from their pension funds in two private, for-profit prison companies, Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) and The GEO Group (GEO). Investing pension fund money does two things. It provides capital to an entity to continue doing what it's doing. It **also** says that what the entity is doing is acceptable to the citizens of New York City and New York State.

The five NYC Public Pension Funds are each administered by its own board of trustees, with its own investment policy, but Comptroller Scott Stringer is the custodian and investment advisor to all five boards. The New York State Common Retirement Fund is the third largest pension fund in the United States and, as of March 31, 2015, had a value of \$184.5 billion. State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli is the sole trustee of the New York State Common Retirement Fund and is directly accountable for the performance, oversight and management of the Fund. As of March 31, 2014, the net position of the Fund was \$181.28 billion, including

investments of \$10,256,924 in CCA and \$6,615,003.205 in GEO.

For-profit prison companies have contracts with federal, state and local governments, running facilities for the Federal Bureau of Prisons, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the United States Marshals Service, as well as various state, county, and city jurisdictions. CCA is the largest private corrections company in the United States with more than 67 facilities with a designed capacity of 92,500 beds and revenue in 2012 of more than \$1.7 billion. GEO's U.S. Corrections and Detention division has 56 correctional and detention facilities with approximately 61,000 beds, which makes them the sixth largest correctional system in the United States.

Private prisons have been around since the American Revolution. In 1854, the opening of San Quentin in California marked the beginning of public prisons. The 1980s' privatization movement and "War on Drugs" gave life to a newly profitable industry, for-profit prisons. While these prisons have been quite profitable for their corporations, there is a lot of evidence that privatization of prisons has not saved money for their clients. In addition, the staff is non-union, training is often minimal, and at least one company has been found to be bribing judges to send them inmates.

Surprisingly enough, there is an even more important reason not to support for-profit prisons with our investment money. These companies make money when they build more prisons and imprison more inmates. One way to increase inmates is to make criminal laws more punitive. As GEO's website states, "Engagement at the federal, state and local levels of government is crucial to promoting the benefits of public-private partnerships. GEO participates in the political process in jurisdictions where it has or may pursue the development of public-private partnerships." In 2014, GEO spent approximately \$2.5 million on "consultant government relations professionals" for direct lobbying, approximately \$300,000 at the Federal level and approximately \$2.2 million at the state and local levels. In 2012, CCA spent approximately \$2.6 million for direct lobbying, approximately \$970,000 at the Federal level and approximately \$1.6 million at the state and local levels.

To help further those ends, CCA and GEO are members of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) which "advances" privatization of government services. ALEC's Criminal Justice Task Force has developed model "tough on crime" bills including "Truth in Sentencing" (mandatory minimums) and "Three Strikes" laws, which strip judges of discretion in sentencing. ALEC also assists its members in arranging meetings with legislators, often in order to help them write the bills that will be passed. They have also helped financially in campaigns to pass California's Proposition 6 (2008) and Kansas' Jessica's Law (2006), both of which would have increased penalties. In 2012, CCA offered to buy public state prisons **but**, if the inmate population went below

90% occupancy at any time in the following 20 years, the state had to reimburse CCA for the empty beds, providing another incentive for keeping beds full.

According to an April 28th article in the Washington Post, for-profit prisons have donated more than \$10 million to candidates since 1989 and have spent nearly \$25 million on lobbying efforts. However, "[t]he biggest beneficiaries of private prisons' political donations have been Republican politicians in Florida, Tennessee, and border states with high populations of undocumented immigrants." When the for-profit prison companies fail to keep their prisons filled with inmates, they simply turn them into ICE detention centers, housing immigrant families.

CCA and GEO together represent less than one percent of the funds invested by NYS pension fund, miniscule portions of the NYS and NYC pension funds; divesting from private prison companies won't have a major impact on the success or failure of the funds. However, I don't think we should be investing capital in for-profit prison companies to continue acting against our best interests. I don't believe that what CCA and GEO consider doing business is acceptable to the citizens of New York City and New York State. We need to ask Comptrollers DiNapoli and Stringer whether they believe it is.



## President's Corner

Luis Román

Let me take this opportunity to welcome you all back from the summer of Trump. It seems it was impossible to turn on the television or log on to a news web site this summer without seeing another story or opinion piece on the real estate magnate, reality show host and failed casino owner, who has finally made good on his promises (or were they threats?) to run for President of the United States.

For three months, Donald Trump has sucked up virtually all the oxygen in this presidential campaign, which is, admittedly, barely out of its infancy. Capitalizing on his name recognition and his seeming incapacity to experience shame, Trump has vaulted to the head of the impossibly crowded field of candidates vying for the G.O.P. nomination for President. In the most recent round of polling, Trump doubles the support of his closest competitor in both national polls and polls from the states of Iowa and New Hampshire, where the first actual voting will take place, in January.

Thousands of pages of newsprint, thousands of hours on cable news programs and perhaps billions of bits of data have been devoted to analyzing the Trump phenomenon. Political pundits have put forth numerous explanations for Trump's rapid rise to the top of the Republican field, and the dominance he has displayed in recent opinion polls. The relative obscurity of the other

Republicans in the race, the antipathy of voters (particularly active G.O.P. primary voters) toward politicians (particularly those from Washington, D.C.) and Trump's plain-spokenness in confronting issues are all theories that have been posited to explain the Trump phenomenon, and all those theories have merit.

Trump has defied seemingly obvious political logic in achieving his current dominant position in the polls. His odious comments regarding immigration (and Mexican immigrants in particular) are well known by now. His rapid rise has also come despite a history of misogynistic comments toward and about women (highlighted by Megyn Kelly in the Fox News debate) and some decidedly non-orthodox positions for a Republican in today's political environment, such as his prior statements in favor of a single-payer health care system.

I can't think of a parallel case in politics to compare with Trump. As has been pointed out, Trump has said a half-dozen things since he launched his campaign which would have destroyed the hopes of a more traditional candidate, but Trump's popularity appear to grow without regard to the public's awareness of Trump's odious and embarrassing statements. I can only think of one phenomenon that parallels the popularity of Donald Trump, and it come from the world of popular culture—Archie Bunker.

"All in the Family" skyrocketed to the top of the Nielsen television ratings in the 1970s due in large part to the popularity of the legendary character of Archie Bunker, the irascible Queens cab driver portrayed by the actor Carroll O'Connor. Archie was a bigot, an unrepentant chauvinist and intolerant of practically everyone around him, and he remains one of the most popular characters in television history. While Archie was clearly the butt of most of the show's sharp humor, many people watching "All in the Family" sympathized with the intolerant, politically incorrect rantings of TV comedy's first "anti-hero." Many people felt that Archie was speaking for them, expressing their confusion with the many changes American society was experiencing during and after the Vietnam War, and their longing for a simpler time (which, in reality, might never have actually existed).

I sense in many of those supporting Donald Trump a similar confusion with the changes we are experiencing and a longing for simpler times. I see a lot of parallels between Trump's many intolerant pronouncements with the frustrated outbursts of Archie Bunker. Archie Bunker, of course, was a creation of the legendary writer Norman Lear, who recently passed away, and Archie was brought to life through the brilliant performance of Carroll O'Connor. Trump, on the other hand, is sui generis, a creation of his own warped world view and colossal ego. Like Don Quixote, Trump has strapped on a golden helmet and is tilting at windmills he has constructed into dragons that are tearing at the fabric of our existence.

This campaign has barely begun. There is no way to know how long the Trump phenomenon will continue and whether Trump's current popularity will translate to actual primary votes. No matter how ridiculous the concept may seem to us now, a little less than a year away from the party nominating conventions, we as Democrats must be prepared to point out that the would-be President Trump, like the emperor of fairy tale lore, is wearing no clothes.



## Steering Committee

Richard A. Siegel

### Homeless and Mentally Ill In New York

This summer, the N Y Post and other media outlets have spoken of the dramatic rise in homeless people in our neighborhood. New Yorkers appear to be blaming Mayor de Blasio and Police Commissioner Bratton for lax policies and turning a blind eye to quality of life crimes.

The Mayor and the Commissioner are not responsible for the increased number of homeless individuals on the streets. Homelessness is a complex issue with roots in the progressive policies of the 1980s. There are no simple solutions. Here are some of the key points:

- NY State and the rest of the country greatly expanded patients' rights—particularly the right to refuse treatment. This decision, along with the movement to de-institutionalize people with mental illness, led to a large increase of individuals with little or no support into society. We as a society did not adequately increase community-based services to support these people. As a result, the number of homeless people on the street rose, leading to a large increase in people put in jails.
- This movement created a system where local judges have the ultimate authority to decide who receives treatment in a psychiatric facility and who is released. For the most part, they use the "**imminent danger to self or others standard**". For all who criticize the health care system, just look at the number of times psychiatrists involved in the care of an individual recommend continued treatment and a judge sides with a patient and releases the individual back into the community. Most of the time, the person released does not accept discharge medications or follow up care. The health care system cannot help people who do not want help and whom the legal systems mandates are to be in society.

- Most of the individuals who are homeless are dealing with 3 types of medical problems— chronic medical illness, chronic mental illness, and substance abuse. There are simply nowhere near enough community residences to support these individuals. If you talk to someone from the State Office of Mental Health, you will be told that NY State spends more than any other state on services. While that statement is true, the amount spent is not enough to meet the needs. The state and the federal government need to do more.
- We are just adapting our treatment modalities to work across these 3 problems. The Department of Health regulates medical care, the Office of Mental Health regulates mental health care, and OASIS regulates substance abuse. We need more ways to provide 'one stop shopping' for people in need. We need reimbursement systems that adequately pay providers for care delivered.
- Thanks to Assemblymember O'Donnell, the prison system is now required to hook parolees into mental health services prior to release. This long needed change will pay dividends down the road. For a long time, this lack of planning exacerbated the problem.
- It was a very cold winter. Most homeless individuals sought shelter inside. Now that we have a warm, dry summer, people are outside more. In addition, New York City is a final destination for many individuals with troubles. We see many folks who have come from other states—lured to NYC by many different factors—who end up on the streets and in hospital emergency rooms.

Many good people are working hard to address this problem. We clearly need more supportive housing with built in support. We may need to put some limits on individual rights to address the most troubled in our community who refuse all assistance. We need to expand the delivery of services so that people can more readily access all the services they need.

We all know that a stable home environment is the basis for success in our communities. We need to do more to make sure people have access to a stable environment. We need to do more to support families in caring for a member with complex problems. Let us know if you have any ideas.



**IN MEMORY OF MARTIN SOSTRE  
1923-2015**

**SIEMPRE EL FUEGO**

The fire began unnoticed  
A whisper in the wooden beams  
Slowly growing, gathering strength  
Then suddenly it exploded,  
Fiercely swirling in a surreal dance.

The firefighters, helmets in place,  
Slick black coats  
Took out their hoses and sprayed.  
Day and night the house resisted,  
And would not collapse.  
Finally in the heat of August  
It gave way, reduced to ashes.

But a small flame persisted  
Steady and strong  
A living reminder of the house  
That once stood tall,  
And it will never expire.

As long as we keep the flame alive,  
It will burn in all of us.

*Dedicated to my husband, Martin Sostre,  
Lizabeth Sostre / August 22, 2015*

### **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 \$25; senior dues are \$10.

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

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

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

The Broadway Democrats  
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FIRST  
CLASS

Assemblymember: Daniel O'Donnell  
District Leaders: Curtis Arluck,  
Paula Diamond Román  
President: Luis Román  
Newsletter Editor: Gretchen Borges

## **Building a Progressive Platform for the Democratic Party**

Thursday, September 17th 8:00 p.m.

Bank Street College of Education

610 West 112<sup>th</sup> Street (between Broadway and Riverside)