

# Long Island Chapter

Labor and Employment Relations Association

*Newsletter*

## SHAPING THE WORKPLACE OF THE *FUTURE*



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### **PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE: SPEECH BY MACKELL STIRS DEBATE**

Our Spring Conference at the deSeversky Center was a great success. We had over 100 attendees and the Conference Planning Committee (Amanda Barker, Richard Roth, Tom Lilly, Jr., Beverly Harrison, Mary Meyers and Paula Clarity) did a terrific job of setting up interesting panels and engaging a provocative keynote speaker. We are doing our job as a vibrant chapter of a professional organization if we make our members think about the topics that we present.

After Dr. Thomas Mackell delivered his speech, many of those present said that we should print it our newsletter so that the entire membership could read it. We have done so and we invite your comments. As space permits, we will publish your response (pro or con) in a future newsletter.

The keynote address touched on some current issues confronting our nation. Perhaps the most serious is the high unemployment rate that has persisted for the past few years. Some of those who are concerned about the lack of jobs for the millions of people who want to work have criticized the president and our dysfunctional federal legislators for not providing an aggressive plan to get members of the labor force back to work.

If households do not have jobs, they will not have sufficient income and they will not spend, except for necessary goods. When business owners lack confidence about the short-term prospects for recovery and earning a profit, they will not be hiring. It is a vicious cycle that needs to be broken to that we can restore prosperity to

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### **Upcoming Chapter Meetings Please Add These To Your Calendar**

Wed., Sept. 14, 2011,  
Black Forest Brew Haus

Wed., Dec. 7, 2011,  
Nassau County Bar Assoc.-Mineola

Wed., Mar 7, 2012, Black Forest  
Brew Haus-Farmingdale

Fri., May 4, 2012, Annual  
Spring Conference

### **THE DOWNSIZING OF AMERICA: OVER MY DEAD BODY**

*by Thomas J. Mackell, Jr., Ed.D.*

#### **Introduction**

Capitalism is our nation's greatest strength and our greatest weakness! Historically, the capitalist system did, in fact, raise all boats in a rising tide. But something happened that changed the landscape dramatically and drove so many of us into the abyss with a concurrent erosion of the protective social safety net that had made America the greatest country in the world.

Today, in their ideological quest for power, the right wing wants to reduce America to a shadow of its former self and take us headlong into Third World status where the wealth of an entire nation is in the hands of the ruling elite who want to give the federal government the ability to regulate pollution, food safety and workplace hazards.

Nothing is sacred—public schools, Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security, the Environmental Protection Agency and OSHA are targeted for elimination or drastic cutbacks.

Lobbyists are working aggressively and tirelessly to protect business interests, health care providers, and others to fight to hold onto, or kill, proposals that affect the corporate bottom line. And the people who historically

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have stood up for the American workers' interests and needs have surprisingly folded like a cheap card table!

Is the U.S. a banana republic whose politicians can't or won't come to grips with long-term problems? Are our corporate leaders and the titans on Wall Street citizens of the same republic? Unfortunately, the bulk of our leaders across the board think that the "confidence fairy" will make everything alright! Who are they kidding?

This is not a phenomenon that has just unfolded in the last 100 days. Rather, this is an evolutionary process where the political leadership in America has been in a holding pattern for over three decades and the American people, who are not part of the political, corporate or power elite, have been pushed aside.

Historically, we believed that there was dignity in work at every level of the workforce but we have shifted to the mindset that the only dignity was in making piles of money to the detriment of others, namely we have grown to honor *greed*.

On April 28 we remembered Workers' Memorial Day and honored those workers who lost their lives in the service of an employer. We mourn the dead and keep them in our hearts. But we live our lives and their memory cannot be erased.

In our culture, failure is anathema. We're afraid of it. We avoid it. We loathe it. We penalize it. But failure is inevitable and often out of our control. But we can choose to understand it, to learn from it, and to recover from it and, hopefully, move this country back on track from failure to make it great again.

Look at our elected officials, who battle over inconsequential ideological issues, while they all dance to the tunes of lobbyists and have abandoned the common, ordinary American citizen. Help me with the numbers! There are over 300 million of us and only 535 of them. Why do they control the agenda? Are you upset about that? Why have we let this happen?

The answer is twofold: first, voters suffer from a deep political schizophrenia, loving and hating their representatives for a multitude of reasons; and, second, as long as the balance of power is in the hands of those with the economic influence, nothing will get done to help main street American people.

Good public policy has been shunted to the back burner and the only policy that exists today is to solidify the wealth of the small band of HAVES and weaken the middle class, crunching them down to the HAVE LITTLE or HAVE NOTS.

U.S. productivity grew at a healthy clip from 1973 to 2009. Median wages didn't come close to matching those gains. Yet, CEO pay skyrocketed and continues to do so to this day!



Dr. Thomas Mackell and Paula Clarity at the 2011 Spring Conference

Carl Icahn wrote recently that "The fact that I can make so much money as an activist investor shows that something's wrong with governance in most of Corporate America."

We need a strong catalyst for real change in the political world.

Why is it that there are well over 16 million people out of work and there is no substantive jobs bill in the works? Nagging joblessness will continue to drag down our economy and the lack of zeal for hiring is ludicrous when CEOs in finance, energy and beyond are pulling down multimillion-dollar paychecks.

Why is there no mid-career re-engineering policy for millions of people who lost jobs to which they will NEVER return?

Why no energy policy, yet we have become dependent on oil from unstable regions as well as rogue states and oil has become the elixir of life?

Why no political will to tackle our raging budget deficits? Why is there no methodology to upgrade our deteriorating air traffic control system?

Why no infrastructure rebuilding policy to upgrade our dysfunctional highways, bridges, tunnels, railways, water treatment facilities, levees, locks, dams and sewage systems?

Why no serious oversight, supervision and regulation of the financial services industry whose actions tore the world's markets apart wreaking havoc on people globally?

Why no intelligent gun policy?

Why no definitive immigration policy?

Why no real health care cost containment initiatives?

Why no major commitment to rectify our sub-standard educational system that has resulted in our children's math and science scores that are relegated to being the lowest of any industrialized nation?

And, why is there no practical retirement income security policy?

I could go on and on.....

As these long-term problems have gone unaddressed, Americans have lost faith in the credibility of their political system, which is the main resource that the entire regime is predicated on.

We are involved in the most important struggle over the role of government since the New Deal! Yet, what happens in Washington is only symbolic. Nothing serious gets done especially as it affects the well-being of working American families.

This loss of faith has contributed to a complex and dark national mood. The leaders in Washington are clueless and fell asleep at the wheel and cannot connect the dots.

Just as action taken has consequences, inaction has its own set of consequences and because of this long stretch of inaction.

If the United States was a student, it has flunked every course in the curriculum!

The fiscal crisis in Wisconsin, as in other states, was largely caused by the increasing arrogance and power of America's oligarchy. After all, it was the super-wealthy players, not the general public, who pushed for financial de-regulation and thereby set the stage for the economic crisis, a crisis whose aftermath is the main reason for the current budget crunch. And now the political right is trying to exploit that very crisis, using it to remove one of the few remaining checks on oligarchic influence. This must not happen.

As a business person, the question today is not, if I stop to help the workers, what will happen to me? The question is, if I do not stop to help the workers, what will happen to them? The path into the middle class for millions of Americans—black, white, Latino, Native American and Asia American—is not a dream that we should let die.

The real wealth of a nation is its people. The purpose of human development is to create an enabling environment for them to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives. This simple truth is too often forgotten in the pursuit of material and financial wealth. We should not tear down our people but, rather, build them up!

Governor Martin O'Malley of Maryland said recently that, "This is one of the uglier examples of a temporary majority, and I think it's going to backfire badly." We should insure that it backfires!

The movement to take away the pension and health care benefits of public workers following the decimation of the benefits in the private sector is absurd. According to Wilshire Associates, state pension systems had an estimated funding ratio of 69% for fiscal year 2010, ending June 30, up from 65% for fiscal year 2009, but well below the 95% estimated average funding ratio for 2007. Who do you think caused the erosion of these assets?

Defined contribution or 401 (k) plans, as stand-alone retirement plans, are the worst idea on the planet. Placing the burden of long-term asset allocation onto the shoulders of the individual is criminal when over 50% of Americans do not know the difference between a stock and a bond and more professional investment managers are moving away from long-only investments (stocks and bonds) and focusing on more sophisticated and esoteric alternative investment strategies.

To add insult to injury from the twilight zone in Crawford, Texas, in a recent interview in the AARP magazine, George W. Bush said that the biggest regret of his presidency was that he did not privatize Social Security. Did he sleep through the stock market and mortgage meltdown that destroyed the futures of millions of Americans?

The American retirement income security system is fast breaking down. If this trend of eliminating defined benefit plans continues, poverty rates among the elderly will soar, and the middle class retirees will find that their retirement income will not pay for the lifestyle they achieved while working. I have horrible visions of elderly people living under bridges, along the highways, byways, and railways somewhat akin to what existed during the Great Depression.

Americans are looking for authenticity. The country is anxious, pessimistic, ashamed, helpless and defensive. People are struggling to make sense of our roulette wheel world.

For too long there has been a massive assault on working Americans. Jobs have been shipped overseas. Workers have been denied their rightful share of productivity gains. Wages have been depressed and benefits in many, many instances have disappeared. The share of Americans who say they trust government to do the right thing most of the time is scuttling along at historic lows and hostility is rising.

We are governed in Washington by self-absorbed, reckless children. The country is not mobilized by this sense of crisis but appears to be immobilized by it. It is hard to rally majorities behind immigration, tax, energy or any other formidable policy. We appear to be drifting aimlessly with no strong leadership taking us to the barricades.

It is time to turn that around. Strength lies in organization. It requires long-range planning and implementation and consistency of action, and in the political power of united action, led by a coalition of thoughtful, energetic leaders who can rally the enthusiasm of a listless populace.

We must move beyond the hopelessness and reignite the inspirational nature that has so long characterized Americans and the American Dream.

James Dean said: "Dream as if you'll live forever, live as if you'll die today."

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We must fight with all we've got to staunch this mean-spirited, sweeping movement to dismantle the social compact of the 20<sup>st</sup> Century. The basic principles of Americanism are: The right to criticize; The right to hold unpopular beliefs; The right to protest; and, The right of independent thought.

I don't believe in sitting around while others plot my destruction. We must implore those few elected officials who get it to reach deep down and drag up some newfound confidence to show the American people a clear view of this bare and pessimistic landscape. If they don't respond then it is clear that we have a choice. We can live in fear of the unknown that awaits us around the corner or we can fight back!

Senator Bobby Kennedy said once that, "The future does not belong to those who are content with today.....rather, it will belong to those who can blend passion, reason and courage in a personal commitment to the ideals and great enterprises of American society." What happened to leaders with the mindset, character, intellectual fortitude and the resolution to articulate these kinds of thoughts and aspirations? Have they faded forever into history?

The late Senator Hubert Humphrey addressed the Senate shortly before he died. In his speech he said to his colleagues that, "You can judge a society by how it treats those in the sunshine of their lives (the children), those in the twilight of their lives (the elderly) and those in the shadows (the misfortunate)."

Remember this advice from Horace Mann and live it: "Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity."

We live in an epic political moment. We must strive for universal human rights to guarantee aspirations for dignity and for a political system that will listen to, re-

**ANNOUNCEMENTS, NOTICES**

If you have an announcement or job posting that you would like to have published, send it for consideration to our editor at:

< jerryarb@optonline.net >

Former LI LERA president Thomas J. Lilly, Jr., Esq. is the new Coordinator of the Industrial and Labor Relations program at SUNY College at Old Westbury. Tom replaces former LI LERA board member Joseph Harris, PhD., who has retired from academia, but continues to work as an arbitrator and mediator.

spond to and respect the will of the people.

Finally, the Greeks did not write obituaries. When a man died, they simply asked, did he have passion? Let's not lose our passion, but, rather, let's embrace it and seize it to regain our country!

Our nation would be well served by borrowing from the people who once imagined Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and the War on Poverty. Let's emulate and honor their aspirations and their accomplishments!

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**SPEECH BY MACKELL STIRS DEBATE**

our country.

I look forward to seeing you at our September 14th meeting at the Brew-Haus in Farmingdale. Our speaker will be Gary Thayer, attorney, with Archer, Byington, Glennon & Levine LLP. His topic is "Hot Button Issues in Health Reform." Our next meeting will be on December 7, 2011 (who remembers what happened on December 7, 1941) at the Nassau Bar Association in Mineola. This will be our annual holiday party.

**The Long Island LERA Newsletter** is a quarterly publication of the Long Island Chapter of the Labor and Employment Relations Association.

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