

New Union Initiatives on Job Creation and Affordable Housing: A Conversation with the AFL-CIO's Roger Clayman

by Rachel Kreier

Faced with a hostile administration in Washington D.C. and the continued assault on legal protections for union organizing and collective bargaining, workers across the country have developed creative new strategies to influence patterns of economic development. The goal is to shape the political and legal environment so that new development meets the needs of communities for good jobs, decent benefits, affordable housing, and effective transportation infrastructure. These strategies require organized labor, as a first step, to build unity among its constituent members around a longer-term vision of the sort of community they hope to leave for the next generation of workers. Then workers must build broad coalitions with religious, environmental civic and community groups to realize this vision.

In some ways, Long Island is an ideal testing ground for such new strategies. With one of the most densely organized metropolitan work forces in the country, the over 300,000-strong union movement has a tradition of alliances with local and regional politicians. At the same time, the cost of living is very high, especially for housing, health care, and transportation. And the growing diversity of the Long Island work force, including the presence of a substantial number of undocumented workers, presents challenges for the traditional models of union organizing and collective bargaining.

Roger Clayman is currently the executive director of the Long Island Federation of Labor (AFL-CIO), the umbrella coalition of most local unions that has recently become involved with a number of economic development initiatives. These include projects under discussion to develop two of the largest remaining parcels of open space in the densely populated Island – the Lighthouse Group's proposal for the Nassau County Hub in the Town of Hempstead, and developer Jerry Wolkoff's proposal to purchase and develop the 452 acres surrounding the former Pilgrim State Psychiatric Center in the Town of Brentwood in Suffolk County.

Before accepting his current position at the L.I. Fed in July 2005, Roger Clayman worked for the National AFL-CIO for 30 years as field representative. Among his principal duties was to help form the federation's New Alliance Program, an effort to rebuild labor movements on the state and community level. Before coming to the National AFL-CIO he served as an intern in the National AFL-CIO's Department of Civil Rights; as a field organizer for Frontlash, a youth project for political participation; and as the Assistant to the President of the Connecticut State AFL-CIO. He is a member of the Laborers Union Local 423 in Columbus, Ohio, where he got his start working in construction. He was interviewed in June 2006 by Rachel Kreier.

Q: What is the New Alliance Program?

Roger Clayman: It was a project set up by the national AFL-CIO to try to unite the programs on the state and local levels, to go through a process of planning on the state level and to, at the same time, build central labor councils or area labor federations by uniting small central labor councils with enough of a strategic mass here (or what they call a "specific mass") to have a membership to support staff and to carry out programs.

Q: So it was not so much about organizing, but more about building the institutional strength of the union?

RC: It was very much related to organizing, because the unions who are organizing needed strong labor movements with strong community ties in order to have an effective ally when they go to organize. The idea was that very small, tiny central labor councils can't accomplish this. So, in New York State, the first state to

carry out the New Alliance process, we built five area labor federations and then we strengthened the programs in the central labor councils that remained: Westchester County, New York City and Long Island.

Q: What do you see as the crucial issues facing unions on the national level, and also Long Island unions specifically, over the next decade or so?

RC: I think our biggest challenge is to create unity in the labor movement so that we can pursue all the goals that we've had for many years. We need to have a common sense of purpose. I can only speak for Long Island, but I think it's very similar to most other big labor movements. We need to all agree that what we're all about is creating good jobs and guaranteeing some kind of future for the next generation of working people on Long Island, that they would have decent jobs, decent pay, decent benefits. And the best way to secure those is through union membership.

There's a much better chance of that happening in some of our union-dense communities and particularly on the coasts, and in Chicago and other big union cities than in some of the more rural areas. But we can do that by trying to enact public policies that will support the idea that our communities are well-served by good jobs, good pay and good benefits.

Q: When you talk about "unity," do you mean unity within the labor movement, or do you also mean unity in terms of building a broader political consensus or community consensus?

RC: Unity in the labor movement first. We're all trying to reach this goal and we're going together to get there. That we're going to have this common mission and we're going to speak as much as possible with a single voice about the goal and that we'll support each other in reaching it. So that, for example, we'll try to build a support system between construction trades and building services, which are on the back end of many of the programs that we're looking at, and retail as well, so that we avoid some of the disputes we've had. I guess it would be over whether or not "build union" should be the end of the labor movement's responsibility to the project. And by defining our responsibility as good jobs for the community, I think we then take a broader view and the building trades here are very supportive of that concept.

Q: So it's a broader view, not just in terms of a wider group of a people and a wider group of jobs, but also a broader view in terms of time. It's taking a longer term view. It's not this project, but it's what the project's going to be looking like out a decade in the future. Is that fair?

RC: Yeah, I think that's fair, because look at the largest projects that have been proposed for Long Island. The one that seems to be getting the most immediate attention is the Hub. The Hub will probably not break ground until 2008 or 2009. But the planning process and the leases are all being considered by the Nassau County legislature this week.

Q: You must be a busy man right now.

RC: Well, we have to understand them and we have to put forward a point of view and we have to try to express some views to those employers and those developers so that we gain their support for the same concept.

Q: Talking specifically about the Hub, who are your allies; who are the potential opposition; and how successful have the unions been at building the coalition you need to make this a project that works for working people in the long run?

RC: I think that there's a pretty good network of support for this project. Number one -- that it should happen, first of all. The county executive, Tom Suozzi, expressed support for the project long ago. It was slightly derailed because there had to be competitive offers made on the kind of project it would be. Charles Wang, owner of the Islanders, and Scott Rechler of Reckson have presented a comprehensive project which includes rebuilding the Nassau Coliseum.¹ It links, in concept, neighboring communities and institutions, such as Hofstra and the EAB Plaza across the street and other colleges in the area, as well as rail stations, and creates shopping and affordable housing. And so we have a commercial, recreational and business center that we hope meets community needs. It is a proposal that will need to be thoroughly examined by the County and the Town of Hempstead.

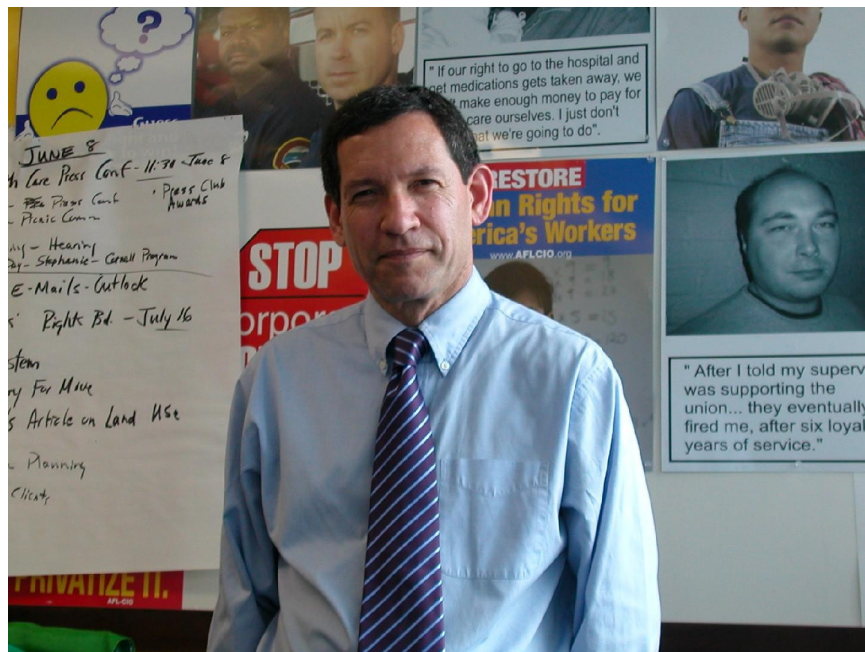
Now that there is one proposal that's been presented, the developers will have to negotiate a lease with the county and then they need to go through the planning and zoning process in the town of Hempstead, which has single-use zoning.

Q: That will be a real challenge.

RC: Well, it's a long process with a good start. I think there's probably support for it, but we haven't really tested out community concerns at this point. There's nothing to say that Uniondale and the surrounding communities will not have issues, such as the traffic and congestion and adequate transportation around it. The housing being proposed is on the area that's being leased from the county. This is an intriguing part of the proposal.

Q: So the county owns the Coliseum site, but the idea is to coordinate it with privately owned complexes like EAB Plaza?

RC: Yes. The reason this project is so important is it could shape the kind of development within the town of Hempstead for years to come. I think, when you build a project, so much interest is generated in economic activity in the area. So our objective is to make certain that the project is built union and I believe there's a very good chance that will happen. It seems like those agreements will be there. And also that the people who maintain those buildings and clean them will be in unions. Both of those objectives are likely to be met with the developers. And then we want to create good union jobs in the retail outlets that are built.



Roger Clayman

Q: But how can unions make that happen? Wouldn't that have to be something that was ongoing over a period of decades? How do you intervene with the project to make that happen?

RC: Well, there are several ways to do it. In this case, we believe that the construction trades will reach an agreement with the developers. And SEIU local 32BJ has broken new ground in reaching an agreement with Reckson covering commercial properties on the proposed site and other existing office facilities on Long Island. That demonstrates how important this project is to everyone. The Nassau County Legislature has clearly lined up behind good unionized jobs with benefits. So there was lots of pressure that might have been applied.

Q: Because the developers then would be subcontracting with additional individuals developing the property? Is that how it would work?

RC: In some other communities around the country where they've confronted large development programs, they've developed community benefits agreements where they bring all of their players in the community together (the community activists, religious leaders, political leaders) and they try to get an agreement that certain conditions will be met, respecting the needs of the community as well as the work force.

Now, one of the work force concerns of the community would be that people who live in that community get jobs. And the construction jobs, of course, are enticing, because they have good pay and good benefits. And the trades, in the past, have made agreements to try to bring community people into the apprenticeship programs. But the long-lasting jobs, the ones that will remain there, are the jobs that are in building services, in healthcare, in retail. And those are the jobs that make up the bulk of the opportunities for the community, and those are the jobs that most often have been left behind as the minimum-wage jobs with no benefits.

Q: So you are talking about an agreement that reaches down a couple of levels to the people who lease space from the developers in order to have those retail jobs also be good jobs?

RC: Yes, I think that's possible. I think that can happen, if we're able to reach an understanding with the major developers that we do this together and we look for responsible tenants, not those who have a record of evading unions. It's not just about having more unions; it's about having a standard of living that's going to support a work force. If people are going to work in these buildings and they're going to make minimum wage, where are they going to live?

Q: And where are they going to shop? So one of the things I hear you talking about is building a community coalition with religious groups, the community groups, with political interests as well. I keep hearing you talk sort of in a conditional, "We're hopeful that we will accomplish this." So, obviously, this isn't yet a done deal?

RC: It's not a done deal. It's very early in the process. We are following the examples of some other communities where there have been development projects. Probably, they've confronted it in a more hostile climate than we are in. However, we know that, up to now it has been difficult to maintain the unionized jobs in building services. We are seeing that a project like this can be a springboard for unions within the industry, generating responsible contractors and paying people decent wages and benefits.

We just talked yesterday to an employee from Mayco Building Services, the office cleaning contractor at *Newsday* that has been refusing to sign the agreement that they reached at the table with SEIU Local 32BJ. The workers make \$10.82 an hour. There are health benefits there, but the employer, Mayco has a contractor that has been refusing to make the contributions to the health and welfare fund of SEIU. So it's great to have a union contract when you don't have to live up to it, you know?

Now they're being asked to live up to the contract and they reached an agreement. And part of the agreement is that, in order to maintain the health benefits, the cleaners there will take a wage freeze for two years. So that's staying at \$10.82 for two years. If you had full-time work, you would be making roughly \$20,000 a year. We all know what the implications of \$20,000 a year would be on Long Island for somebody who wants to try to live here. But at least it's a start and, with their medical benefits, it produces a lifestyle that's way ahead of those who have none. The question is: Can we get this contractor to sign the contract?

Q: That they actually agreed to at the bargaining table?

RC: Right. And the question for Long Island generally: Are we going to have contractors who don't want to sign agreements, who don't want to pay medical benefits or are we going to have those who will follow the example we hope is set [by—] in the larger projects where we have a little more leverage and will provide a decent standard of living for their employees?

Q: Let me go back again to the issue of the coalition-building and who the allies are. Why do you think it's a less hostile environment than some other, similar movements in other places have faced.

RC: A lot of the inspiration for developing community partnerships came from some early, successful efforts. Los Angeles is a good example. LAANE, Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, was founded in 1993 and recognized as a national authority on issues affecting the working poor. The organization's vision calls for social justice and practical social change. LAANE's most basic principles demand fair wages and benefits, as well as decent working conditions. In 2001, LAANE launched its new Community Benefits program to ensure that developers provide quality jobs and community benefits in exchange for public subsidies

Q: So you're saying that issue at least is pretty much a done deal here on Long Island?

RC: We think that we're in good shape there. There is less hostility from the developers than what the labor movement has faced in other cities, at least at this point. And it's being faced now by San Diego with their downtown development. They want to do it totally nonunion. This comes up in community after community. We attended the founding meeting of a group called the Partnership for Working Families. Fourteen communities around the country and their staffs have built coalitions and research operations in order to weigh in on the chances for jobs through economic development in their communities and all have big challenges. Atlanta has the light rail that's being built around the city and the economic development that goes with it. Florida has a large downtown development. San Diego has been at this for a while and a group called EBASE in Oakland has been very sophisticated in looking at this for quite some time and unions are fairly strong there. But, with each project, there are new opportunities and new challenges to make certain it's not done on the cheap.

Q: What's the role of research in this?

RC: Research is really vital, because you need to be able to come to the table with facts. We need to know something about the owners, know something about the developers, know something about the kind of zoning rules and regulations that they're going to have to live up to. You have to know something about the community so you know something about your partners, potential partners.

Q: You have talked a little bit about tensions within the labor movement that have to be managed. But when you start to build broader coalitions in the community, there is a whole other set of potential tensions that have to be managed. I think, for example, about environmentalists' concerns or community groups' concerns with traffic. What sorts of issues like that do you see coming up around the Hub, or is it really too early to even say?

RC: It's too early now to tell and I think that this project is a little different, in the sense that it's contained in this open space of land in Nassau County, one of the last available spaces. There is pretty general agreement that something should be done with it, and that's a step in the right direction. And there is agreement that something should be done that provides housing--and transportation and ties the communities together. I think the community will largely agree with that. Now, what grows up around it may require more discussion.

The kind of things where we have to tie some diverse communities together I think will arise as we begin to talk about the Pilgrim Heartland Project in Brentwood. Potentially, this may be the largest project in the Northeast. It is still on the drawing board. At this time there are no agreements with any unions. I think the developer, Jerry Wolkoff, understands that it would be very hard to build a project at the scope he's considering without union labor. There's just no other way to do it, but the building trades have taken the position -- and, rightfully so -- that all of the work has to be done union. Jack Kennedy has spent a lot of time reaching out to the community in Brentwood.

Q: What is Jack Kennedy's role?

RC: Jack Kennedy is the president of the Nassau-Suffolk Building and Construction Trades Council. He has made that outreach to the community. He has opened up some of the pre-apprenticeship training to take in, through the various trades, people in the community who would qualify to get into pre-apprenticeship and to see whether they can move on to do construction work. The issue that will have to be negotiated (and this is a private developer) is: will that developer then provide jobs for people who live in the community and bring them into the apprenticeship programs?

Q: So the crucial difference between the Hub and the Pilgrim development project is who owns the land. Nassau County owns at least the central big chunk of land and that gives the politicians a lot more control over what happens.

RC: Yes.

Q: And that is potentially an entry point for community and labor movements to influence?

RC: And the goal of our work is: we want housing; we want jobs; we want healthcare; we want good roads. When we say "economic development," what we really mean by that is a growing economy that meets the needs of the communities. It's going to provide jobs and opportunities for young people to stay on Long Island, so it's a very broad concern.

Bringing those communities together around it is going to be probably more of a challenge in Brentwood, even though we have a good sense of the different groups. But the project has been so ill-defined, at this point, that nobody has really gotten very excited about it yet, I don't think.

Q: Do you have a sense of the timeline for the Pilgrim psych center site moving forward?

RC: I don't, because we're waiting for some initial agreements with Jerry Wolkoff that would allow us to be his partner in getting past some of the regulatory hurdles he faces. And the community can be partners or we can go our own ways and make our own cases to the regulatory bodies and the legislature.

Q: Which might slow things down considerably?

RC: It might perhaps, yeah. I think the best approach is for us to reach agreement on what we're trying to do. We have met with Mr. Wolkoff and he's got an ambitious and very interesting view of what he'd like to build there. And he has genuine community concerns and has backed it up by investments in the community. You know, he's helped his local community, and he's thinking about what his development could do to provide avenues for not only housing but recreation and other interesting attractions to young folks.

Q: He talks about the New Urbanism idea.

RC: Yes. And there's a community that I looked at when I was in Orlando called Celebration. I suspect there are not a lot of high-paying jobs connected to it. But, if you look at the community, there's a combination of single-family homes as well as condos as well as apartments, recreational opportunities and a downtown area. When you look at a project like that, it looks great on the surface. We have an important job to do in Long Island that is different, maybe, from what other communities were facing. We have a housing crisis.

Q: I know the affordable housing campaigns have been an important activity that the labor council's been involved in. What are your goals, what are the strategies, and who do you see as allies in that movement?

RC: We've made the case, publicly, that we believe that housing and transportation should be at the top of the agenda of the state legislature. And we suggested two ways that that could be accomplished. One was a proposal, the Balboni-DiNapoli Work force Housing Legislation, which was really aimed at requiring local communities to build a certain percentage of new developments with work force housing.

Q: How is that defined, work force housing?

RC: It's based on a formula related to the median income so that you would get work force housing in the area of under \$300,000. But it also creates percentages, so really you're looking at roughly 10% of homes in a development. What that legislation would do would be to override local zoning and, for that reason, it's met with some opposition of community leaders. So we're not certain that the State Senate will adopt it. It's passed the Assembly several times in Albany. The Senate has not passed it. It's one of the ways of accomplishing the goals.

The Senate has suggested that there are other ways and they're going to make a proposal before the session ends. So we're anxious to see what that will be, because they understand the problem, I believe. It's just that we feel that we'd like more communities to do what Islip has done and really make this commitment. It requires kind of a vision.

We've had a strong ally in the Long Island Association, the chamber of commerce for Long Island. Business agrees with us that housing is vital for business growth, because you can't attract new jobs in Long Island if you can't attract people to live here. And the point that they've made, over and over again, is that there are companies like Weight Watchers out in Woodbury that has 500 employees that moved back to New York City because they simply couldn't get anybody to come out here.

Now the state AFL-CIO had studied the cost of homes and the median sales price of a home was \$470,000 in Nassau County and \$396,800 in Suffolk County. That's in March just this year. The study calculates that home buyers would need an annual income of \$140,000 in Nassau and \$120,000 in Suffolk to purchase the median-priced home. But, you know, according to the Census Bureau, only 22% of all households in Nassau and 23% in Suffolk would meet those levels.

Q: Basically, more than three-quarters of the population would be priced out of the housing market, if they were buying today.

RC: Right. And, again, there's just really a shortage of rental units. So that it's very difficult to find the adequate kinds of housing opportunities. So what you find are young folks living at home. My wife and I don't know what'll happen with our kids, because we started in Connecticut, came here and our kids went off to do what they're doing. But I can't imagine if they came back and were working in the New York area, that they would find it logical to live in Long Island. And I'm sure my kids don't want to live with us.

Q: No, surely not.

RC: Surely not. And what Pearl Kamen [*Long Island Association economist*] cites here is a trend toward young people living in New York City now. There are more available units.

Q: We've talked about the affordable housing initiative, we talked about involvement in land use and development planning. What has the Fed been doing about healthcare?

RC: We backed legislation in Suffolk County, called the Fair Share for Healthcare, that was adopted by the Suffolk County legislature and signed by County Executive Levy. The purpose of this legislation was to level the playing field and to say to those big-box employers who don't provide healthcare and who teach their employees how to access Medicaid [*the state-federal health insurance program for low-income people*] that they have to pay their fair share and they would be required to provide healthcare.

Now Wal-Mart, one of the largest big-box employers, filed a lawsuit in the State of Maryland that passed similar legislation and in Suffolk County. And so, temporarily, that law has been revised to establish that the employers would be required to make a payment of \$1.52 per hour toward the healthcare needs, which could be a contribution to a low-income healthcare center. But, with that requirement having been made, the assumption is that, most likely, they would put that money toward the healthcare of their employers.

Q: Sort of a local pay-or-play sort of a proposal, but only for large employers, not for small- and medium-sized employers.

RC: That was the legislation that was produced in Suffolk County. Now, in Albany, there is a fair share bill, which would require employers of 100 or more to provide healthcare. There's also a larger bill that's modeled after the original intent of the Massachusetts-style legislation, before it went off the track, which is really a healthcare-for-all bill, that's being supported by the labor movement generally, and by the New York State AFL-CIO.

Q: This is interesting, because, of course, there are elements in the progressive political movement that see the Massachusetts law as a step in the wrong direction, because they're afraid it would lead to sort of under-insurance and let's say we solve the problem when people get insurance that is really very inadequate for inadequate coverage.

RC: Yes. One of the problems is trying to make the proposal meet the restrictions of the preemption of insurance laws. Under ERISA, where states and local communities can't mandate insurance, they can mandate healthcare provisions; there's a fine line of distinction. You probably know this better than I do. So that's why the laws may fall short, because we agree that the real answer is a national healthcare program. It would solve the crisis that we have, not only at the state level in the cost of public services and Medicaid, it would also probably alleviate the federal contribution to Medicare by balancing out the pool, but also result in prices in manufacturing and put us on a par with our European partners and other countries that are putting everybody in a single pool and managing their healthcare in an economically and administratively feasible way and saving lots and lots of money.

Q: Lots: 30% is, I think, the best estimate of likely savings.

RC: So, you know, healthcare is a longtime goal of the American labor movement and we're responding in a local way, because the political climate is so bad in Washington that it probably has little chance of seeing the light of day right now. But the problems are there. And as you see more nonunion employers begin to stream into this area, like Wal-Mart, Target, and CVS, they're undermining what have been for many years, stable union jobs with good benefits in our grocery stores.

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Q: What is happening with union membership on Long Island? It has traditionally been a place with fairly high union penetration. What's the trend?

RC: I rely on Hofstra's labor center for that data. I think the trend is pretty stable, because, unlike a lot of the rest of the country, we lost our manufacturing base a long time ago, so the erosion of union jobs has been very tightly related to manufacturing. There's a fair level of growth and there's some major projects which will stimulate the construction sector.

Q: And that has resulted in continued high union penetration?

RC: Yes. Healthcare has a chance to grow on Long Island. Our building services, of course, we want to maintain, and retail. I don't see any major drop-off in retail. We're not yet seeing erosion, a large erosion of jobs, but, every time we have a Super Wal-Mart or something that's nonunion, there's only so much that can be sold in one area.

Q: Which gives another argument for things like the Fair Share legislation, because it levels the playing field between the unionized employers and these newcomers on the scene?

RC: Right. And we have a very strong public sector membership.

Q: In the Fair Share for Health Care campaign in Suffolk, have you found the religious community has been responsive on that particular issue?

RC: They have been. And, as we deepen the relationship, we hope to get into the community more and tie together both leaders and congregants and community-based organizations into a coalition that can work on specific issues that come up.

Q: Getting back to the issues of tensions among labor groups: one of the things that's very clear is it's becoming a much more diverse work force with the passage of time. If you saw the Brookings report on the older suburbs, this was really highlighted. And you also see it on Long Island. This raises issues both of different cultures and different languages, but also documented versus undocumented workers. What do you think is the role of the labor movement in this context?

RC: The labor movement has to be a voice for working people on immigration issues, because there's nobody else who's going to raise the issues that we'll raise. The questions we'll raise concern the way employers are exploiting an immigrant work force in order to cut costs and the degree to which they're being supported by the government. The immigration laws now are supposed to enforce the employers' responsibility to hire only documented workers. Well, I think employers are looking the other way and the government is looking the other way. And we have proposals out there to create even larger guest worker programs, which are a way to bring workers into this country with really no rights while employers have the right to expel them for whatever reason they may choose to get rid of them. This could include, and very likely would include, demanding their rights on the job or asking for better pay or asking for benefits. So we believe that any kind of immigration legislation has to take into account that guest worker programs have to be very temporary. That they don't work in general.

Q: The concern is not to allow guest worker programs to be used to create a permanent second class of workers?

RC: Yes. And that there's a group of immigrant workers in this country -- it's a fact they're here-- many of whom are very good citizens and that they ought to be able now to live up to certain requirements to gain citizenship, just as immigrants have done in this country since its inception. We'll leave the question of enforcement of the borders to people who are knowledgeable about it. The fact of the matter is there's not much enforcement on the borders and we would raise the question: "Why is this the case, and who is benefiting from it?" I would suggest that the employers like the situation very much. They want to maintain a low-paid work force with very little access to legal protections that is easily exploited. The fact is that the Supreme Court, which is the product of the Republican administration, has ruled that an immigrant worker without documentation can't file charges of unfair labor practices for discrimination in the workplace if they're fired. So that what you have is a two-tiered work force, where you have rights (not very good ones) for American workers, for citizens, but we have a different set of rules for non-citizens. This means, if the employer, in an organizing campaign, decides to use the undocumented immigrant worker as a pawn and to teach everyone a lesson by firing him, he won't have access to the usual legal remedies of back pay and reinstatement.

Q: Right, although those remedies have been undermined very substantially in recent years.

RC: But it has made a difference. The fact that the work force is laced with immigrants, in most cases, that there's a group that could be used to stymie any kind of organizational effort.

Q: Any other major initiatives at present?

RC: We can talk a lot about transportation, but I'm not certain where we're going with that yet. We, along with the Long Island Association, supported the third track -- an additional track on the Long Island Railroad line between Queens Village and Hicksville -- and that has met some community opposition.

Q: How do you see that as a labor issue?

RC: It ties in, because of the housing situation, in many respects. There are people commuting onto Long Island, whereas the belief had been, historically, that people commuted to New York. And they're commuting here for jobs and commuting because they don't have a chance to live here. The rail system, as it is, can't handle the two-way traffic as well as it should and that's why the proposal has been floated for the third track. There are

some questions that have to be answered later on. It's also grade-crossing upgrades that the communities are supporting, but these are awaiting an environmental impact study.

Also, the Long Island Fed recently helped create a local chapter of Jobs with Justice. This is a national organization that we felt would help us in our outreach to the community. Jobs with Justice can help us to respond to all of the challenges we face in collective bargaining and economic development and neighborhood concerns, so that we can have an effective outreach to the religious community, community leaders and political leaders. And, as part of that outreach, Jobs with Justice created a workers' rights board, which will hear its first case relating to Mayco over at *Newsday*. Community leaders will listen to the facts and take action based on what they hear.²

Q: So this is like a quasi-judicial process?

RC: Yeah. The motivation for a workers' rights board is the ineffectiveness of our National Labor Relations Act and the National Labor Relations Board. But the real value, I believe, in our Jobs with Justice operation is that we've gained greater access to and better contacts, deeper, more meaningful contacts with the religious community, in particular, throughout Long Island. There's a lot more to be done, but that's one of our specific objectives and that'll enable us to have a lot more success when we unite the community.

Q: And you've been finding that the response from the religious community has been positive?

RC: Yes. I think a lot of them share the goals we have and the members of their congregations are working people, including many members of our unions, and they see it as a responsibility to provide for their membership in effective ways and to work together and have an outreach. And I think it's kind of an exciting opportunity for all sides.

Q: Finally, on a somewhat different topic, could you comment briefly on the split of some of the major unions like the SEIU and Teamsters from the AFL-CIO. How has that affected the Long Island scene and, in particular, impacted the ability of the federation to pursue some of these coalition-building activities that we talked about?

RC: Well, for now, we're very lucky; it hasn't affected us. We've been able to maintain unity and we have not lost membership because of the national split. The differences between the AFL-CIO and the Change to Win coalition are not being played out on the local level and there's a consensus that we need to keep together a strong labor movement for all the reasons that we've discussed, and some that we haven't discussed, such as our ability to help local unions who have specific fights that they're in. They know that as we get better here at the Long Island Federation, we're prepared to represent them and fight for them in any number of different ways, politically, in the community and through our relationships with employers generally.

Q: Do you have worries for the future on that issue?

RC: The unions in the Change to Win coalition are participating in our central labor council through solidarity charters, which came about as a result of an agreement between the AFL-CIO and the Change to Win coalition to allow affiliation at the state and local level. And that agreement runs through the end of this year. Will they renew that agreement? I'm not certain. I think that what we saw this year was that voices were raised pretty loudly at the local level by local unions who want to be involved in their local labor movement, regardless of what federation they're in. The need is obvious to them and the fights at the national level can be somewhat irrelevant to the local concerns. Not that the locals are unaware of the national disputes, because they hear about them from their own international union. But the discussions go on somewhere in a different orbit than what happens on the local level. So hopefully, as they begin to talk about extending solidarity charters and creating unity, those voices will be raised again that it is really vitally important that we don't undermine the grass roots of our labor movement.

NOTES

¹ Charles Wang, former chairman of Computer Associates and owner of the Islanders hockey team, is partnering with Reckson Associates Realty Corporation, Long Island's largest commercial landlord and the owner of EAB Plaza, on the Lighthouse Group proposal to develop the Nassau County Hub.

² Before the hearing took place, Mayco signed a contract with SEIU Local 32 BJ.