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QUOTE OF THE DAY



"That person gets to rule over a county in ruins."


- A Union County source on whoever wins Union County Democratic Committee chairmanship tonight after a bruising battle between Senator Scutari and Mayor Mahr

TOP STORY ON INSIDER NJ




INSIDER INTERACTIVE





[Siding With Scutari, Judge Rules For Open Voting Process For Union County Convention](#)

Judge Katherine Dupuis ruled in favor of an open voting process for tonight's chairman's convention, a victory for Scutari



[Insider NJ Poll: Who Will Win the Chairmanship of the Union County Democratic Committee?](#)

As the Union County Democratic Committee heads into tonight's convention, who will prevail: Nick Scutari or Colleen Mahr?



NEWS FROM INSIDER NJ



Tonight, the Union County Democratic Committee will hold their chair's convention after a bruising month of political and legal battles between Senator Scutari and Acting Chair Mayor Mahr to [succeed Assemblyman Jerry Green](#) as top leader of the county party. Yesterday, a judge [ruled](#) that the convention must use an open process to tabulate the votes, and candidate Anthony Salters [dropped out and endorsed](#) Mahr late last night (read more in the Diner Booth below).

In what was a [politically difficult decision](#), Assemblyman Anthony Bucco [dropped his exploratory bid](#) for the CD11 seat, [endorsing](#) Jay Webber at the same time, saying 'Jay can and will run the kind of campaign necessary to keep this seat in Republican hands, and ultimately, protect taxpayers from a liberal, big-government approach under Nancy Pelosi.' Webber [welcomed](#) Bucco's endorsement.

Governor Murphy [announced three new Cabinet picks](#): Zakiya Smith Ellis as Commissioner of the Department of Higher Education, Deirdre Webster Cobb as CEO of the Civic Service Commission, and [Sue Fulton](#) as Motor Vehicle Commissioner. Garden State Equality [released a statement](#) praising the choice

of Fulton, who is the first high level LGBT member of the Governor's Cabinet.

Governor Murphy [announced a coordinated effort](#) between the state, the Legislature, and law enforcement agencies to improve school safety in the wake of the Parkland shooting.

HALT PennEast, a group of homeowners, filed a [request for a rehearing](#) of FERC's approval of the PennEast pipeline because the approval would allow PennEast to exercise eminent domain over private and preserved land.

ONE American [released a statement](#) urging Senator Booker and Rep. Frelinghuysen, both members of foreign affairs committees, to protect foreign aid programs.

ICYMI: [Insider NJ's Who's Up And Who's Down: Week Of The Reynolds-Jackson Win](#); Steinhardt [rolled out his state committee staff](#); Kivvit [announced a partnership](#) with the NJ Cannabusiness Association; Prieto [was affirmed](#) to the Sports and Expo Authority for a \$280k salary; Tonio Suarez is the [HCDO's choice](#) to succeed him; in CD7, Salmon [suspended his campaign](#) and [endorsed](#) Malinowski, following Mandelblatt's surprise [departure and endorsement](#) the week before; Morris Chairman Robinson [personally endorsed](#) Malinowski; Kate Whitman Annis [won't run](#) in CD11

THE DINER BOOTH



Chairman John Currie announced veteran operative Axel Owen to [serve as political director](#) of the State Dems; Owen successfully managed the winning LD11 Democrats' campaign last year.

The Union County Democrats [will have an open voting process](#) for their convention tonight, Judge Katherine Dupuis [ruled](#) yesterday, banning the use of voting machines and allowing a hand-raised vote. Having [heard arguments on all sides](#) during the morning, Judge Dupuis pulled the attorneys into her chambers in an [attempt to mediate](#) an outcome, given the tight timing runway to tonight's vote. She eventually ruled in favor of Scutari's legal team's argument. Scutari attorney Kologi said he [expects an appeal](#) by Mahr's attorney, Bill Northgrave, this morning. Allies of Scutari, who had advocated for the [open process](#), had [filed the complaint](#) in Superior Court against Mahr, who wanted a [closed process](#) with voting machines. Scutari's legal team yesterday also requested Union Clerk Rajoppi [review](#) five Union Township committee seat

vacancies that [they say weren't vacant](#), [presenting affidavits](#) signed by the committee members, who insist they never resigned from the seats.

While the [court ruling](#) is a victory for Scutari, Mahr also scored a victory with the [endorsement](#) of Hillside Democratic Chair Anthony Salters, who [dropped out](#) of the chair's race late last night and [threw his support](#) to Mahr, saying that he has '[absolutely nothing negative](#) to say at all about Senator Scutari personally' but that as a Senator, as Judiciary Committee chair, and as Linden Democratic municipal chairman, Scutari would wield too much unchecked power if he ascends to the county chairmanship saying '[it could be a politically dangerous situation](#).'

Mahr [heads into the convention tonight](#) with the voting bloc controlled by Senator Cryan (about 100) in Union Township, Fanwood (but for Freeholder Al Mirabella, who's with Scutari), Salters' votes out of Hillside (19-20 votes), and key suburban support to offset the advantages Scutari has in the cities; Scutari [heads into the convention tonight](#) starting with 125 odd votes in Elizabeth, the bulk of Linden, Rahway and however many votes in Plainfield that Adrian Mapp can deliver.

iAmerica Action [launched an ad campaign](#) against GOP Reps. Lance and MacArthur as part of a coordinate ad buy in 27 House districts over the DREAMer issue.

ICYMI: Former GOP gubernatorial candidate Hirsh Singh [will run](#) for the GOP nomination in CD2, his [preferred](#) landing spot by GOP party leaders; former Monmouth chair Scudieri [endorsed](#) Josh Welle in CD4, who [clashed](#) in a debate that highlighted the [societal psychological underpinnings](#) at the contest's core; Gopal [threw his support](#) to Scutari, Mahr has the [endorsement](#) of Watson Coleman; Jones gives [his take](#) on CD11 and CD7; the Morris GOP [internal battle](#) continues to [simmer](#) over an ELEC [complaint](#), as the chairman's [race](#) heats up

Vote in the [Insider NJ Poll: Who Will Win the Chairmanship of the Union County Democratic Committee?](#)



Here's [what's on tap](#) under the Gold Dome tomorrow, and here's [what happened](#) last Thursday in Trenton.

Senate President Sweeney announced the [formation of a panel](#) to study tax and fiscal policy.



Speaker Coughlin [pledged](#) to 'answer the call to action' in preventing gun violence and school shootings in remarks given at an event with Governor Murphy, where he pledged to [improve school safety](#) and coordination.

Senator Gopal and Assembly members Houghtaling and Downey [released a statement](#) in support of Sue Fulton for MVC Commissioner.

Governor Murphy will sign his first bill today to restore state funding for family planning services that was eliminated during the tenure of former Governor Christie.

ICYMI: Green COS Maria Del Cid [will transition](#) to NJDHHS; Reynolds-Jackson [was sworn-in](#) to the Assembly; Kean [was named](#) to the RLCC's 2018 Executive Committee

EDWARD EDWARDS



As former Speaker Prieto [secures a landing spot](#) at the Sports and Exposition Authority coming with a \$55k salary increase from his predecessor, Governor Murphy learns to [navigate the partisan aspects](#) of the governorship of New Jersey.

Read Insider NJ's [deep dive into the 2018 congressional contests](#) to see how the races are stacking up so far.

Take a look at [Insider NJ's African-American Political Power List](#) in honor of Black History Month.

Visit the [Insider 100 Publications](#) page to see Insider NJ's various publications over the last year.



CITY CONFIDENTIAL





In Roselle, Mayor Christine Dansereau [endorsed](#) Colleen Mahr in tonight's UCDC chair convention; Dansereau's local one-time ally turned political foe, Assemblyman Jamel Holley, backs Scutari.

In Long Branch, Rep. Pallone's brother, John Pallone, will challenge Mayor Schneider in the May election, according to the Asbury Park Press; Insider NJ had [reported](#) on the speculation of a Pallone challenge in Long Branch in November.

In Blackwood, Rep. Norcross [announced](#) over \$1M in federal grants for South Jersey fire departments.

In Hamilton, Mayor Kelly Yaede [announced the nomination](#) of local pastor Dr. James Woods to the Hamilton Economic Development Commission.

In Hoboken, Mayor Ravi Bhalla [was named of counsel](#) to the law firm of Lavery, Selvaggi, Abromitis, and Cohen; Bhalla previously served as of counsel to Florio Perucci Steinhardt and Fader before departing when he became Mayor of Hoboken. The new firm is headed up by Michael Lavery, who [served as interim GOP State Chair](#) during last year's gubernatorial election.

In Atlantic County, Assembly members Mazzeo and Armato [announced](#) \$5M in Department of Transportation funding for various projects in LD2 municipalities.

In Sussex County, the LD24 legislators [announced](#) an additional \$5.3M in infrastructure grants for transportation.

In Montclair, 'Fire and Fury' author and Paterson native Michael Wolff will hold a [book signing](#) at the Wellmont Theater in May as part of his national book tour.

In Lincroft, the group Indivisible 4th [will hold](#) a meet the candidate forum with Josh Welle.

ICYMI: In Trenton, Harrison [launched his mayoral campaign](#); in Cranford, former Mayor Asenbach [endorsed](#) Scutari for chair, while several Cranford elected officials [endorsed](#) Mahr; in Linden, Gerbounka [fired off a letter](#) to the Linden Police Chief charging Mayor Armstead with [improperly taking advantage](#) of a police vehicle, Armstead [apologed](#) to city staff and residents - [and himself](#) - for having to address the issue

Vote in the [Insider NJ Poll: Who Will Win the May Nonpartisan Contest for Mayor of Paterson?](#)

COLUMNISTS



Insider NJ columnist and veteran journalist Bob Hennelly writes '[Global Refugee Crisis Grows As Failure To Address It Prompts Anti-Immigrant Sentiments In Reaction](#)'

Insider NJ columnist and Port Authority Chairman and former Senator Kevin O'Toole writes '[Plan and Plot And Understand That Nothing Goes As Planned, But Be Near The Sphere Of Opportunity](#)'

Insider NJ columnist Alan Joel Steinberg writes '[The NRA and New Jersey: NOT Perfect Together](#)' and '[Lance Effectively Distances Himself from Trump Misogyny](#)'

Insider NJ columnist Jay Lassiter writes '[Drug Policy In NJ. We're Doing It All Wrong](#)'

Insider NJ columnist and veteran journalist Fred Snowflack writes '[Lance's Political Tightrope](#)'

AROUND THE WEB



[Montclair clergy, others plead 'not guilty' in Lance office sit-in](#)

Ricardo Kaulessar, NorthJersey.com

- Six people arrested after refusing to leave the Westfield office of Republican Rep. Leonard Lance pled 'not guilty' to charges in Westfield Municipal Court on Tuesday.

[John Pallone to challenge for Long Branch mayor](#)

Dan Radel, app.com

- It's 1994 all over again. That was the year that John Pallone and Adam Schneider squared off in one of the most heated mayoral contests in the city's history.

[Officials meet to hear about marijuana legalization](#)

David Levinsky, Burlington County Times

- More than 250 officials who attended the seminar, which was billed by the association as a way for local leaders to learn more about the issue and dispel myths and outdated information about the drug that is now considered legal for adult recreational use in eight states plus the District of Columbia.

[N.J. marijuana legalization: Some urge New Jersey to slow the rush toward legal weed](#)

James Nash, NorthJersey.com

- Assemblywoman Annette Chaparro is the kind of politician Gov. Phil Murphy and other supporters of legal marijuana ought to be able to count on. A self-described liberal Democrat from Hoboken, Chaparro grew up around marijuana users and has been lobbied by hundreds of legalization proponents – including her own 18-year-old son.

Murphy: My cabinet makes history because it's mostly women and most diverse in the U.S.

Brent Johnson, NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

- Gov. Phil Murphy said Tuesday he's set to become the first governor in New Jersey history with a Cabinet in which the majority of members are female.

Atlantic City business summit encourages growth and development in the city

Lauren Carroll, Press of Atlantic City

- Business leaders and community members met in Council chambers Tuesday morning for a business summit, sponsored by the Mayor's Office. "We are committed to helping businesses small and large grow," said Charles Barker, constituent advocate representing the office of Sen. Cory Booker.

L.A. Parker: Trenton residents should get TTF funds despite filing failure

L.A. Parker, The Trentonian

- "Hold up, Gov. Phil Murphy. The state of New Jersey has some of my hard earned money invested in the Transportation Trust Fund. Just because Mayor Eric Jackson and his less than intrepid staff failed to apply for funding should not mean that Trenton residents have no claim to monies."

Rep. Tom MacArthur: Better background checks needed, not more gun control

Erik Larsen, app.com

- More gun control is not the answer to last week's mass shooting that left 17 students and faculty dead at a Florida high school, said U.S. Rep. Tom MacArthur, R-N.J. on Tuesday.

National School Walkout: Central Jersey weighs in

Pamela MacKenzie, MyCentralJersey

- Students from several Central Jersey high schools plan to take part in a nationwide protest next month to mark the one-month anniversary of the shooting death of 17 students and adults at a Parkland, Florida, high school. But school administrators — as well as parents and community members — continue to debate the merits, goals, and safety of the proposed action.

Several Hoboken council members take aim at Bhalla over news of counsel position

John Heinis, Hudson County View

- Several members of the Hoboken City Council are taking aim at Mayor Ravi Bhalla for his newly announced as of counsel position at Lavery, Selvaggi, Abromitis & Cohen, P.C.

New Jersey leads blue-state defiance of Trump tax law SALT deduction

Ryan Hutchins, Politico

- Democrats in New Jersey are moving at a lightning speed to institute one of the boldest workarounds of the new Republican tax law, potentially setting up the first tax showdown between high-cost states from coast to coast and the Trump administration.

Murphy: 'We Gotta Die Trying' on Gun Control

Edward-Isaac Dove, Politico

- It's not the same something as Florida Governor Rick Scott—who, one day after a high school shooting in Parkland, Florida, left 17 dead, said he wants to have "a conversation" in Tallahassee, where many state gun regulations have been struck down in recent years. It's not the something supported by Florida Senator Marco Rubio, who said on the Senate floor last week that no law is going to stop a person who wants a gun from getting a gun.

Toxic Secrets: N.J. community faces high rates of cancer, rare illnesses

James M. O'Neill and Scott Fallon, NorthJersey.com

- By the time Rick Orefice reached the surgeon's table in August 2014, his spleen had grown to 15 times its normal size. Two months earlier, the 23-year-old college student from Pompton Lakes began feeling unusually fatigued. Then came night sweats. And soon, a pain in his left abdomen grew so bad he quit his job waiting tables at TGI Fridays in Wayne.

Phil Murphy to keep Christie choice Callahan as head of State Police

S.P. Sullivan and Brent Johnson, NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

- Gov. Phil Murphy plans to nominate Col. Patrick Callahan, the acting superintendent of the New Jersey State Police, as full-time head of the force, NJ Advance Media has learned.

NJ marijuana legalization: Are Asbury Park legal weed stores a 'win' or 'insane'?

Austin Bogues, app.com

- Michael Blades wants to open the first marijuana dispensary in the city. He views the opportunity as a win-win for government, the wider community and his own business interests.

Online petition takes aim against planned I-80 fence

Bruce A. Scruton, New Jersey Herald

- An internet petition drive has started for people to express their concern about a state Department of Transportation plan to build tall fences and other structures along a half-mile stretch of Interstate 80 through the Delaware Water Gap. Pam Rusweiler, who lives in Knowlton, said the petition will be available on change.org as early as today.

N.J.'s unemployment rate just spiked, departing from rest of the country

Erin Banco, NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

- Over the last several months, New Jersey's unemployment rate has continued to increase putting it now almost one full percentage point higher than the U.S. unemployment rate – a split not seen since February 2015.

Lawmakers Try Yet Another Version of Contentious Nuclear Subsidy Bill

Tom Johnson, NJ Spotlight

- The Legislature will try to advance a controversial nuclear subsidy bill again this week — at least the fourth version of the measure drafted this year.

What's the best capital city to live in? Not Trenton

Jessica Presinzano, NorthJersey.com

- If you're looking to move into any of the country's 50 capital cities, the one that should be last on your list is Trenton, New Jersey. At least, that's what WalletHub says. In its analysis of the country's capital cities, Trenton ranked last, earning the title of worst U.S. capital to live in.

Paterson landlord opens his doors to Guardian Angels anti-crime group

Joe Malinconico, Paterson Press

- Curtis Sliwa, the founder of the New York-based Guardian Angels crime prevention group, came to Paterson on Monday morning to meet with a developer about starting neighborhood patrols in the city's most crime-ridden areas.

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ABOUT US

Insider NJ is a nonpartisan website dedicated to political news in the state of New Jersey. Veteran award-winning reporter and editor Max Pizarro is contractually in charge of all news content and professionally focused daily on making InsiderNJ the Garden State's number one trusted source for political news. An editorial board regularly offers opinion on statewide political subjects. InsiderNJ is committed to giving serious political players a fair hearing and an interactive and dynamic forum for ideas, discussion and political intelligence. We will be out here on the streets of our cities, under the Gold Dome, and in the suburban town halls, fair grounds, marketplaces, county conventions and diner booths of political inquiry and intrigue. We will find our way into the conversation.

We have the great good fortune of living in a state saturated with politics, in an atmosphere that makes for both exciting public campaigns and elections, and seemingly stagnant cycles dominated by intense backroom negotiations and deal-making. In the annals of presidential politics, we may have only given this country one native son who became president in the person of Grover Cleveland, but we are also the state that supplied the ring that FDR kissed when he craved the White House. We are interested in all of it, and will sort it out for you respectfully, accurately and impartially, usually in real-time – and at all times driven by the simple proposition that good reporting makes better public servants and better-informed citizens.

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