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EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE
OF THE
SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

A meeting of the Education & Labor Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Maxine S. Postal Legislative Auditorium of the Evan K. Griffing Building, 300 Center Drive, Riverhead, New York, on February 26, 2020, at 12:30 p.m.

Members Present:

Legislator Kevin J. McCaffrey - Chairman
Legislator Samuel Gonzalez - Vice Chair
Legislator Susan A. Berland
Legislator Kara Hahn
Legislator Leslie Kennedy

Also In Attendance:

Sarah Simpson - Counsel/Suffolk County Legislature
Amy Ellis - Chief Deputy Clerk/Suffolk County Legislature
Elizabeth Stroehlein - Budget Review Office
Lora Gellerstein - Chief of Staff/Presiding Officer's Office
Guy Cala - Aide to Chairman McCaffrey
Ali Nazir - Aide to Legislator Kennedy
Derek Stein - Aide to Presiding Officer Calarco
Doug Sutherland - Deputy County Comptroller
Ben Zwirn - Director of Legislative Affairs/SCCC
Jack Nix - County Executive's Office
Rosalie Drago - Appointment as Commissioner of Suffolk County Department of Labor
All other interested parties

Taken and Transcribed By:

Lucia Braaten - Court Stenographer

(**The meeting was called to order at 12:31 p.m.**)

CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the Education & Labor Committee. Everybody, please rise for the Pledge of Allegiance, led by Legislator Gonzalez.

(**Salutation**)

Thank you. Madam Clerk, do we have any correspondence?

MS. ELLIS:

No, sir.

CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:

Do we have anybody who wishes to speak?

MS. ELLIS:

No, sir.

CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:

Is there anybody who didn't sign a card that wishes to speak? Okay.

Next order of business is appointments, and we are (*I.R. 1144*) ***Confirming the appointment of Rosalie Drago as the Commissioner of Suffolk County Department of Labor, Licensing and Consumer Affairs (Co. Exec.)*** And I believe Ms. Drago is here. If you'd like to come forward, maybe we can have her sit at the head table there.

Thank you.

Welcome. It's nice to have you here today, and thank you for your willingness to serve. And maybe we can start out by -- maybe you can tell us a little bit about yourself and why you would want to serve in this capacity with the County.

MS. DRAGO:

Absolutely. Can you hear me okay? First of all, thank you for the opportunity to present today and the opportunity to be considered for the position.

I'm hoping that my resume that you received earlier conveys my commitment to making sure that there's economic prosperity for the people, the businesses and the communities of Long Island. Also, that that is an approach using equitable and inclusive growth. And I think it also, hopefully, conveys to you how much time I've spent making sure they're a classroom-to-career connection working with businesses and unions and communities.

What the resumé doesn't tell you is why I care about this work and why I want to serve as Commissioner of Labor, Licensing and Consumer Affairs. I grew up in a very modest home with very loving parents that worked very hard. My father was in manufacturing, my mother was a teacher's aide. But we didn't have a lot, and even though they worked hard and long and well, they could never make ends meet. And as a child, they often wondered why they didn't get

1 the manual in life that everybody else got, because people had new
2 cars and new homes, and the kids had a lot of overflowing lunch
3 boxes that I didn't have.

4
5 I've been working since I'm 14, and when I was in my late teens, I
6 was waiting tables, and one of my regular customers said, "Where do
7 you see your career going?" And I -- I had no idea what he -- what
8 he was talking about. I didn't know what a career was, I only had
9 jobs. And I certainly didn't know where I was going, because I
10 only could really see in front of me a couple of options for
11 someone where I came from. And that person proceeded to, for weeks
12 after my shift sit with me, help me develop a vision for what my
13 life could be, far beyond what I would have imagined, helped me
14 write a resumé, helped me look for potential places where my skills
15 and interests might match with a job opportunity, helped me look
16 through -- it was a newspaper back then, and you like circled jobs
17 in the classified -- look at what I might apply for, and then
18 removed barriers for me, like lending me \$100 for my first suit for
19 that first interview, which I paid back when I got that job. And
20 if someone hadn't taken the time to sit with me and build that
21 career ladder, and show me where to go, so I could remove those
22 barriers for myself, I wouldn't be sitting here today, and I
23 wouldn't have had the opportunity and nearly 30 years of a career
24 to pay that forward and help other people.

25
26 So, aside from my resumé, I care about this work, and I care about
27 helping our community. And I think working with the Suffolk County
28 Government in all the divisions, and working with you, I think that
29 we can do that and build prosperity for everyone. So I don't know
30 if you have any specific questions or --

31
32 **CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:**

33 Well, you know, I'll just start. I just wondered, you had
34 mentioned equitable and inclusive growth. What do you -- what do
35 you mean by that?

36
37 **MS. DRAGO:**

38 Well -- sorry. Yes, answer?

39
40 **CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:**

41 Yeah, yes.

42
43 **MS. DRAGO:**

44 We have an amazing Department at the Department of Labor, and
45 including Licensing and Consumer Affairs, where we interact with
46 over 17,000 businesses, so making sure that all those job
47 opportunities get into every community in Suffolk County, every
48 community. And that's what I mean by equitable and inclusive
49 growth, making sure that when we build something, whether it's one
50 building or a downtown, that we are making sure that everybody in
51 the community is raised up by that economic prosperity.

52
53 **CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:**

54 And I see you have an extensive resumé, and I could ask you about a
55 lot of things, but tell me about Madame Tussaud. No, I'm only
56 kidding.

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(*Laughter*)

MS. DRAGO:

No, everybody -- you know what's interesting? I'm actually going to tell you about the wax museum --

CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:

Okay.

MS. DRAGO:

-- because everybody asks about that on my resumé. So, first of all, I was Head of Marketing for Madame Tussaud's New York, and I was doing that right after 9/11. And so what's interesting, it's a global company and I got a really fast lesson on how to work with places around the world. But the most significant thing, besides meeting celebrities and sort of the fun part of that job, was that my boss called me in, even though I hit -- you know, we hit our revenue numbers, we had a great amount of visitors and visibility. But she called me in after working there a while and said, "*I want to tell you, I don't think you're cut out for for-profit. You should be in non-profit or government, because every time we try to raise the price or talk about revenue, you ask what about the people, and how can a family afford to come here at those prices.*" And she's like, "*Sorry to tell you, we're here to make money, and you, ma'am, should be in nonprofit or government.*" So I am thankful that she said that. And aside from meeting fancy celebrities, it actually helped me rethink what I was doing.

12:37PM

CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:

I thought you were going to say that it trained you to realize that people aren't always as they appear.

12:37PM

(*Laughter*)

MS. DRAGO:

There's that, too.

CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:

Yes.

12:37PM

LEG. GONZALEZ:

Hold on a second.

CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:

Okay.

LEG. KENNEDY:

That was good.

12:38PM

CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:

All right. Go ahead. Legislator Hahn, you have some questions?

D.P.O. HAHN:

Or practice keeping a straight face.

(*Laughter*)

1
2
3 So, all kidding aside, I really enjoyed our conversation when you
4 came in to meet with me in Port Jefferson.

5
6 I do believe that in many ways the Department has been sort of
7 reactive in the past on the labor front. And, you know, a lot of
8 what we think about what it does touches on a very important
9 segment of our population, but, you know, does the average person
10 think that there's something there to help them? Probably not.
11 And so, you know, I -- and, also, the idea that not only helping
12 individuals, but coming up with workforce plans, and helping
13 companies see how they can stay here, and we have the people power
14 to help them stay here and make those connections, and connections
15 between industry, education and the labor sector and bringing them
16 together. I don't know if you want to speak at all to ideas you
17 have on those fronts, that would -- I'd appreciate that.
18

19 **MS. DRAGO:**

12:38PM 20 Absolutely. So, you know, the good news -- the staff prepared
21 these great fact sheets for me. So the good news is, in being
22 reactive, we serve about 16,000 people, just in reacting to what's
23 coming at us, right, and we do -- the Department promotes. I do
24 think that the general public thinks that it's a place that you go
25 only if you're in trouble, and not if you're looking towards that
26 career to get that map, like someone did for me. So that's
27 something that we're as a team talking about, how to promote what
28 we do in different places. And it's part of, Legislator Hahn,
29 going into creating those connections between industry and
12:40PM 30 education. So making sure we're going in and informing them about
31 the trends that we're seeing, the in-demand occupations, the top
32 five employers.
33

34 There were 127,000 job openings on Long Island last year.
35 Ninety -- no, 72,000 of those, I think, were in -- or 92. I'll
36 tell you in one second. Seventy-nine thousand were in Suffolk
37 County. So making sure that all of the educators know where those
38 in-demand jobs are, what the in-demand skills are and the pathways
39 in.

12:40PM 40
41 The other thing, to answer your question, is partnering with
42 Economic Development, so the newly appointed Commissioner of
43 Economic Development. And I -- already, we're working together,
44 prior, prior than this, and we are planning on a joint strategy to
45 make sure that every time there's a business that we're talking to,
46 at that very first meeting we're talking about the jobs one year,
47 or five year, or 10 years out, so we can connect them with the
48 ecosystem.
49

12:40PM 50 **D.P.O. HAHN:**

51 Do you see important growth industries here on Long Island in the
52 way that the Department can be a part of the solution to the
53 workforce, their workforce needs?
54

55 **MS. DRAGO:**

56 So there are -- you know, we have a handle on what the top five,

1 ten industries are. The key here is the knowledge of which ones
2 are not growing themselves, but have good jobs, and good jobs
3 defined by a career pathway, low barrier to access. So
4 manufacturing is one that I like to point out. It is in the top
5 five -- top six industries for us. You can enter into a job in
6 manufacturing. I like to use Estee Lauder as an example, because
7 we facilitated an apprenticeship there, State-registered
8 apprenticeship. You know, you can come in as a mechanic at \$20 an
9 hour out of high school, and you get benefits on day two, and in
10 six months, they pay for your college, and that's what happens.
11 It's not a college or no-college conversation, it's a work-first or
12 college-first conversation.

13
14 So there are a bunch of industries that facilitate both pathways
15 into jobs. So we want to support all of our industry, but we want
16 to focus on the ones that provide growth economically for our
17 communities and growth for the people personally so they can
18 advance.

19
12:41PM 20 **D.P.O. HAHN:**
21 Thank you.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:**
24 Thank you. Anybody else have any questions? Legislator Berland.

25
26 **LEG. BERLAND:**
27 Hi. I don't have a question. I just wanted to thank you very much
28 for coming to see me and talk to me. I think that your enthusiasm
29 is going to be just incredible for the Department, and I think
12:42PM 30 you're going to, you know, take us to the next level. And I
31 welcome your enthusiasm and look forward to see what you're going
32 to do.

33
34 **MS. DRAGO:**
35 Thank you.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:**
38 Legislator Gonzalez.

39
12:42PM 40 **LEG. GONZALEZ:**
41 Absolutely, I ditto everything that you have just said, Legislator,
42 because it was a great meeting that we had, and I really can't wait
43 to get started on some of the projects that you and I were talking
44 about, and just taking this to a complete different level. I think
45 you're the perfect individual for the job, and I can't wait to work
46 with you. Thank you.

47
48 **MS. DRAGO:**
49 Thank you.

12:43PM 50
51 **CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:**
52 Legislator Kennedy.

53
54 **LEG. KENNEDY:**
55 Welcome to the building.

1 **MS. DRAGO:**

2 Thank you.

3

4

(**Laughter**)

5

6 **CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:**

7 That's it? Very good. And --

8

9 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

12:43PM 10 You want me to say more, I'll say more.

11

12 **MS. DRAGO:**

13 Whatever makes you happy.

14

15 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

16 We can meet. We can meet.

17

18 **CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:**

12:43PM 19 Yeah. Anybody else have anything else? Okay. Motion and second.

20

21 **MS. SIMPSON:**

22 You need a motion.

23

24 **CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:**

25 A motion?

26

27 **LEG. GONZALEZ:**

28 Motion.

29

12:43PM 30 **CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:**

31 Legislator, by -- motion by Legislator Gonzalez, second by

32 Legislator Berland. All in favor? Opposed? So carried.

33 (*Vote: Approved 5-0-0-0*).

34

35 You should be coming on Tuesday. And are we here or in Hauppauge?

36

37 **MS. SIMPSON:**

38 We're here.

39

12:43PM 40 **CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:**

41 We're here on -- so you get to come out to lovely Riverhead at

42 least one more time, okay?

43

44 **MS. DRAGO:**

45 Fabulous.

46

47 **CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:**

48 Thank you. Thank you for your commitment to serving.

49

12:43PM 50 **MS. DRAGO:**

51 Thank you.

52

53 **CHAIRMAN MC CAFFREY:**

54 No further business, we stand adjourned.

55

56 (**The meeting was adjourned at 12:43 p.m.**)

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