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PRESS RELEASE

NJ State AFL-CIO President Charles Wowkanech Responds to Assembly Minority Leader DeCroce's Comments on Unemployment

“Most of us in New Jersey have friends, family or know someone who is unemployed as a result of the recession. We have seen firsthand how difficult this situation can be for a person and the amount of willpower it takes not to become discouraged.

“Assembly Minority Leader Alex DeCroce’s comments – that unemployment benefits are too generous and are causing workers to become complacent – are an unprovoked insult to people who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own. DeCroce’s statements are like ‘kicking someone while they are down’ and prove just how out of touch he is with New Jersey families.

“The reality is that the unemployed do not have the choice to become complacent. Average benefits this year were approximately \$393 per week and the top weekly benefit was about \$600. Middle class families know that \$393 per week does not cover the bills; it will not cover skyrocketing health care costs, next month’s mortgage payment, a child’s education, transit fare hikes, rising fuel costs and their groceries. Foreclosure rates in 2011 are predicted to reach their highest levels since the beginning of the recession.

“No one would trade a stable job for unemployment benefits, and likewise, no one would choose their unemployment benefits over a stable job.

“New Jersey does not have a 9.2% unemployment rate because of unemployment compensation levels. Instead, one reason workers are unemployed is because public policies have created a jobless recovery. Taxpayer money has been dedicated to bailing out Big Banks, jump starting Wall Street, and paying out executive bonuses. Rather than creating jobs, employment opportunities are being shipped overseas, long-term infrastructure investments such as the ARC tunnel are being canceled, and jobs like those of the Turnpike toll collectors are being eliminated through privatization.

“Persistent unemployment is also a result of a unique pool of job applicants. College graduates are competing with people twice their age, as well as people that were nearing retirement and were forced back into the job market. Age discrimination is affecting many job applicants, and the higher health care costs associated with baby-boomers are a disincentive to hiring.

“Alex DeCroce’s statement that the unemployment problem stems from unemployment benefit levels is not only off-base, but shows that he is failing to see the bigger picture. His statements ignore the real drivers of unemployment and threaten one of the only lifelines for unemployed workers during one of the toughest times in our state’s history.”

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