



## Apology not accepted: DeCroce's unemployment comments show he's clueless

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By **Star-Ledger Editorial Board**

This spring, Alex DeCroce, Assembly minority leader, received his payback for being a Gov. Chris Christie loyalist and Republican water carrier:

His wife, Betty Lou, the municipal clerk in Roxbury, was handed a job as a deputy commissioner for the Department of Community Affairs. She received a raise from \$90,806 to \$130,168 with the new position in Trenton.

That's a politically connected 43 percent raise on an already hefty public paycheck, not to mention a booster rocket to her pension during an economic downturn and government downsizing.

Why is that important now?

Because that salary and pension, like the paychecks the DeCroces have been cashing for decades, will be funded by New Jerseyans, many of whom are out of work and struggling to pay their bills, with the state's unemployment rate at 9.2 percent.

Amazingly, Alex DeCroce believes some of the people helping to pay his and his wife's mortgage are lazy, shiftless couch potatoes who should have their unemployment checks cut off if they haven't been able to find a job.

"I'm one of the few people here ... who feel that benefits are too good for these people," DeCroce said Tuesday. "Why go to work? If you can go for 26 weeks, collecting \$550 a week, and you get an extension for another 26, that's close to \$27,000 a year or \$30,000 a year, and a lot of people figure, 'Why go to work?' "

"These people" can't find jobs because there aren't any to be found. And most don't have the connections to land a state job, available only to insiders, like Betty Lou DeCroce did.



Star-Ledger File Photo

Assembly Minority Leader Alex DeCroce believes unemployed New Jerseyans are "gaming the system" and should have their benefits cut off.

Alex DeCroce backpedaled yesterday with a limp apology, saying his comments were made to “a gathering of business leaders” (in other words, he didn't want regular folk to hear them). What he meant was there are people “gaming the system.”

Oh, really? How many? Based on what information? If it's happening and DeCroce has proof, he should release that data.

By the way, most of the state's unemployed workers are receiving less than \$550 a week. That's near the top of the benefit scale. And in New Jersey, that doesn't go very far. The top weekly benefit is \$600. The average this year is \$393.

Oh, and over 52 weeks, that \$550 benefit amounts to \$28,600 — much less than his wife's raise.

The jobless would rather work, because they know the longer you're unemployed, the harder it is to find any job. There is no future in handouts, but right now they desperately need one.

Because they're not Betty Lou DeCroce.

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