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WITH THOSE CLOSEST TO THEM...

New season begins October 5th!

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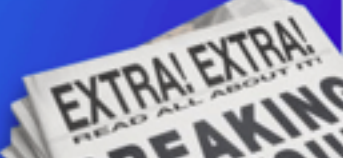
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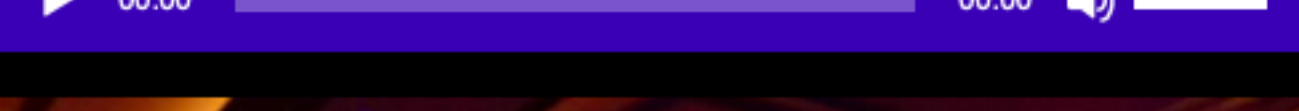


## THE DINER BOOTH

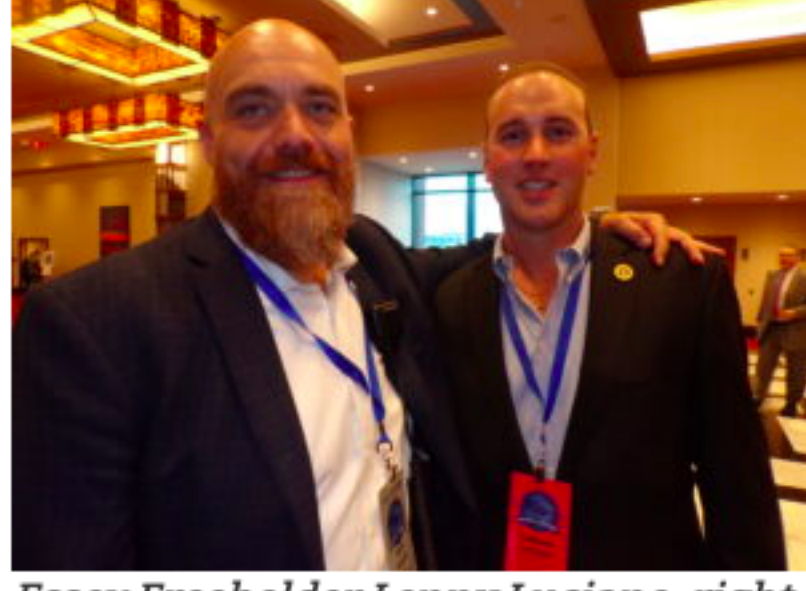
### Party-Like Atmosphere in a Small Group Ahead of Main Event Pelosi

By Max Pizarro | September 26, 2019, 8:39 pm | in [The Diner Booth](#)

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Murphy



Essex Freeholder Lenny Luciano, right, and Democratic Party star operative Dave Parano.

Democratic State Committee's annual convention but very few influencers. A lot of boisterous reveler noisemakers and precious few George Norcross III ear-nibblers.

Even by morning the theater piece would significantly shift, the room expand and a number of insiders

emerge from a dinner last night where the party pooh-bahs stuck their heads in the same trough.

But in the evening, those present kept noting that Pelosi – at ground zero of the decision to launch an impeachment inquiry in President Donald J. Trump – will be here at Harrah's tomorrow.

That's their argument for the naysayers.

That said, will Pelosi be a sufficient superstar to prevent Essex County Democratic Committee Chairman Leroy Jones from summoning enough votes to displace **Murphy's choice** for state party chair, **sitting throne** John Currie?

It was a question hanging over a group that kept saying how great everything was before once again slam-dunking the name Trump into the ensuing roar.

There were enough politicians in the room even in this crowd of newcomers to conclude that things weren't great.

You know who was here, even if you weren't here.

Matt Platkin, counsel to the governor, on a phone alone on the casino floor.

And wait a minute, yes, that was Sean Spiller of the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA).

Some Passaic faces.

Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter (D-35) put in an appearance, as did Passaic County Freeholder T.J. Best.

Casino Reinvestment Development Authority Executive Director (and former Belmar Mayor) Matt Doherty.

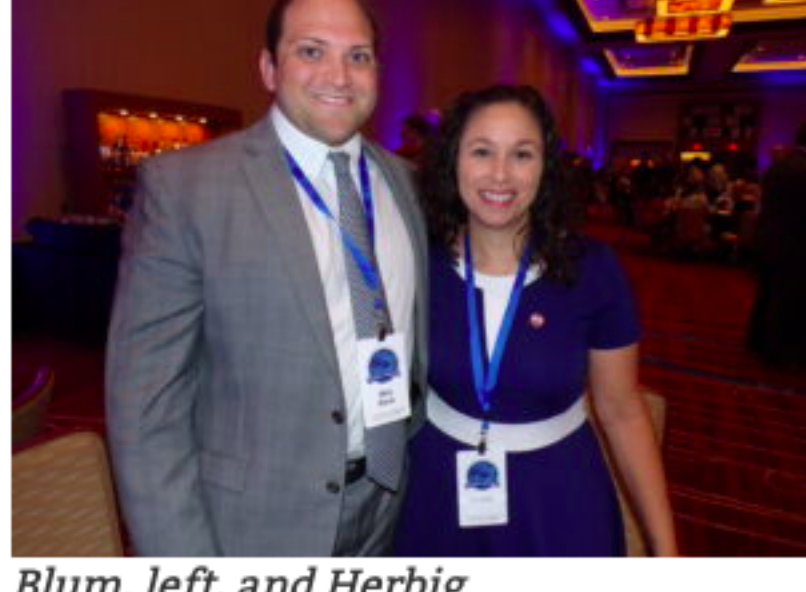
Warren County Democratic Party Chairman Tom Palmieri.

Clinton Town Mayor – and Green Bay Packers Quarterback Aaron Rodgers fan – Janice Kovach.

Montclair Councilor At-Large Bob Russo.

CD4 Democratic hopeful Stephanie Schmid, buoyed by Currie's call from the stage that the party wants the congressional seat occupied by U.S. Rep. Chris Smith.

Author Chris Donnelly.



Blum, left, and Herbig

Elizabeth Board of Ed. candidate (and rising star) Kason Little.

And other assorted players and quasi players and pals of players on one side of a statewide party divide.



State Senator Vin Gopal (D-11) was a name in the room, along with Essex County Democratic Party insider (and [InsiderNJ](#) columnist) Tom Barrett.

Newly returned from India on trip with the governor, Gopal hit the event on his way to the crap tables.

He's on everyone's short list for governor of the state at some point, in part because he knows how to straddle the divide most Democrats chalk up to a party simply so overloaded with party registration that it's bound to turn on itself, which it has, of course.

But tomorrow could be a completely different story with Pelosi at the microphone.

"He'll have to come," an insider said, in reference to U.S. Rep. Donald Norcross (D-1), when someone else mentioned that South Jersey would sit out the entire convention on account of the attorney general investigating tax credits that benefitted the business interests of the Democratic congressman's brother, power broker Norcross III.

Actually, **now it was the feds investigating**.

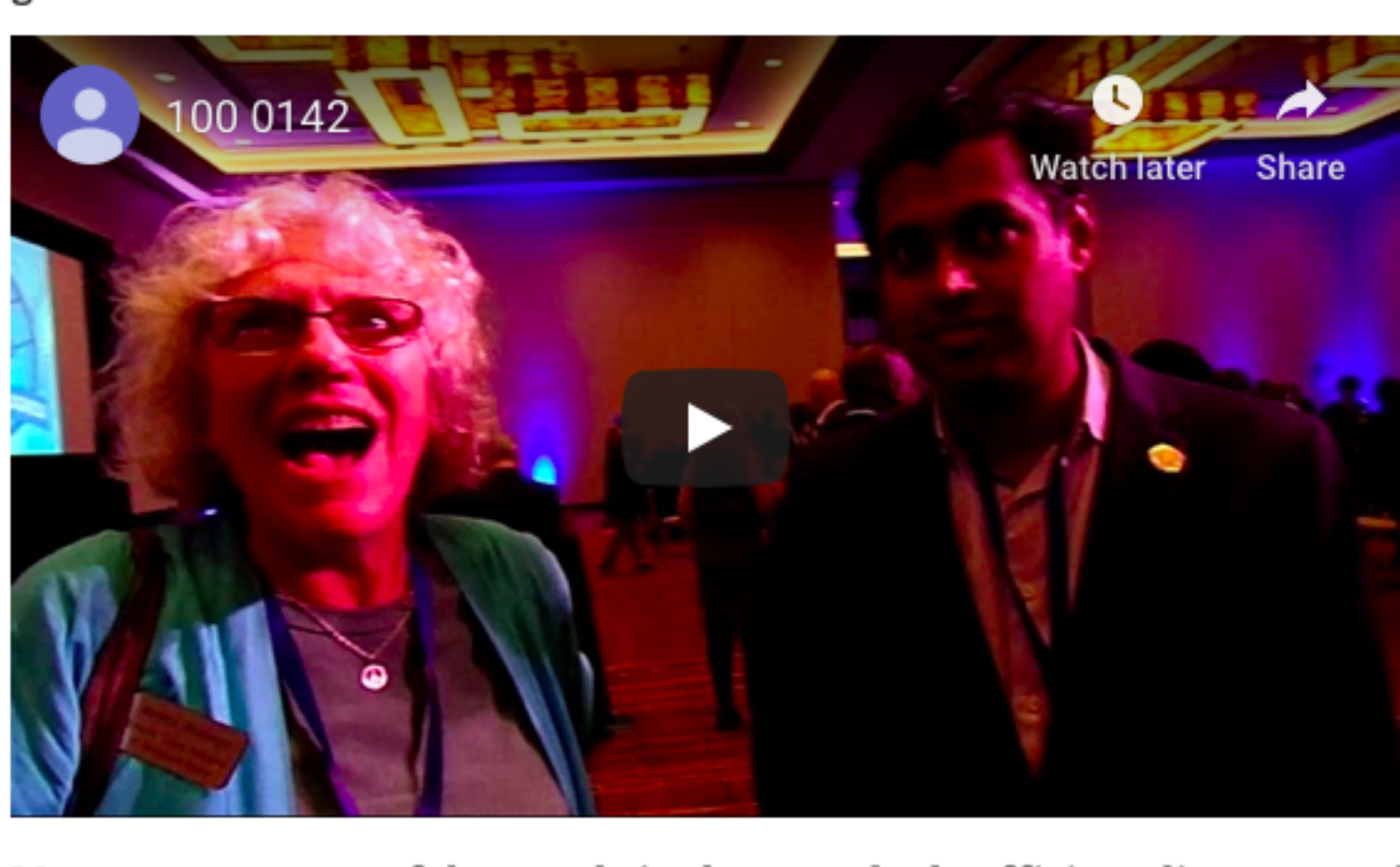
Anyway, Pelosi would be the draw.

Otherwise "Never," the source said gloomily.

But that was the point Currie and **Somerset County Democratic Chair (and State Party Vice Chair) Peg Schaffer** kept making.

Despite the fracture, they had enough influence to pull the speaker of the House taking on (drum roll) Trump.

If the effect of establishment absence on day one had the devious effect of balloon puncturing in the Avalon Ballroom, the mood of euphoria swung back in favor of those in Atlantic City as news trickled through the crowd about the feds now on that EDA tax incentive case, the heart of the governor's disaffection from Norcross.



Moreover, so many of the people in the room had sufficient distance on the insider divide (at this would-be insider event) that all they could be was happy at the notion of Democrats in control of their home state in the Trump era, even as those party members at the highest levels destroyed each other with abandon.

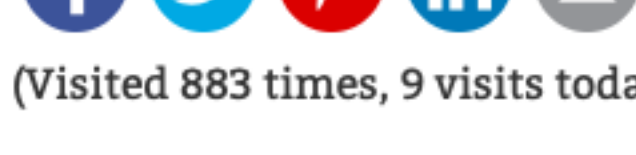
Plus, there was Pelosi coming in, after all, and she had her priorities straight; **she had Trump – not Jersey Democrats – in her considerable sites**.

And, yes, that investigation, having seeped from the attorney general to the FBI, of the administration of **EDA tax credits**, lingered in the atmosphere.

For if it led somewhere damning for that half of the party at Murphy's throat right now in the ongoing fight between the progressive governor and the entrenched Norcross machine, those legislation-enabling senators in its gears, under the auspices of Norcross pal senate President Steve Sweeney (D-3), maybe these were not just bused-in libs, after all.

Maybe they would be the future influencers in a party half devastated by scandal and indictment.

Then again, it was New Jersey, and to the Murphy-hating half of the equation, those not in jail or near jail would always merely be, even onstage with Pelosi, unhip and out of the loop.



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**Chris James** **Chris Smith** **Cori Herbig** **Dave Parano**

**Democratic State Committee Convention** **Donald Norcross** **Donald Trump**

**East Orange Democrats** **Essex County Democrats** **George Helmy** **Janice Kovach**

**John Currie** **Kason Little** **Lenny Luciano** **Leroy Jones** **Margaret Weinberger**

Proceed