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The General Assembly's New Members

2015 began with three key vacancies in the New Jersey General Assembly being filled. Celeste Riley (LD3) moved on to become the Cumberland County Clerk, Joseph Cryan (LD20) was voted in as Union County Sheriff and Bonnie Watson Coleman (LD15) was elected as the Congresswoman representing New Jersey's 12th Congressional District (CD12).

On Thursday, January 15th the Gloucester County Democratic Committee selected Gloucester Freeholder Adam Taliaferro to fill Riley's seat in the 3rd Legislative District. Taliaferro, serving in his second term as Gloucester County Freeholder, is a former Penn State football player who persevered through a spinal cord injury to not only walk again but earn a law degree and become an advocate for those battling cancer and HIV/AIDS.

Roselle Mayor Jamel Holley was unanimously appointed by the County Committee in LD20 on January 21 to fill the seat vacated by Joe Cryan. Holley, currently in his first term as Mayor of Roselle, had served on the Town Council for two terms prior to becoming Mayor. In addition, Holley is the Director of the Department of Public Works for the City of Irvington.

The County Committee in LD15 met on Saturday, January 24th and appointed Mercer County Democratic Chair Liz Muoio to fill the seat vacated when Bonnie Watson Coleman joined the 114th Congress. Muoio currently chairs the Mercer County Democratic Party and served on the Mercer County Board of Chosen Freeholders for 8 years, becoming President of the Board in 2004. Prior to her service with the County, Muoio was a Councilwoman in Pennington Borough.

Congressman Pascrell to Chair Bi-Partisan Fire Caucus

Congressman Bill Pascrell, Jr. was selected to Chair the bipartisan Congressional Fire Service Caucus, the committee responsible for addressing the needs and challenges facing the nation's firefighters and emergency service personnel. For over 19 years, Pascrell has been the leading advocate for firefighters on Capitol Hill. His tireless leadership saved the Aid to Firefighters (AFG) and SAFER grants from budget cuts ensuring that Fire Departments across the country have the resources, technology and protective equipment necessary to service their communities. With Republicans controlling Congress, this appointment is testament to the respect for Pascrell from members on both sides of the aisle.

NJ's Congressional Freshmen Receive Key Committee Assignments

The freshmen members of New Jersey's delegation in the House of Representatives have received key committee assignments in the 114th Congress. Representative Donald Norcross (CD1-D) was assigned to the House Armed Services Committee, taking on a critical role protecting New Jersey military installations from another possible round of base closings. Representative Tom MacArthur (CD3- R) was assigned to the Natural Resources Committee and House Armed Services Committee. These committees have jurisdiction over the Jersey shore

and Joint Base – McGuire/Dix/Lakehurst. Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman (CD12-D) was assigned to the Homeland Security Committee.

Earned Sick Leave

In his State of the Union address, President Obama spoke about a new initiative to boost “middle-class economics.” Obama asked Congress to send him legislation making community college free, cutting taxes for the middle class, and providing the opportunity for every worker to earn seven days of sick time. During the speech the President spoke specifically about earned sick leave, saying:

"Here's another example. Today, we're the only advanced country on Earth that doesn't guarantee paid sick leave or paid maternity leave to our workers. Forty-three million workers have no paid sick leave. Forty-three million. Think about that. And that forces too many parents to make the gut-wrenching choice between a paycheck and a sick kid at home. So I'll be taking new action to help states adopt paid leave laws of their own. And since paid sick leave won where it was on the ballot last November, let's put it to a vote right here in Washington. Send me a bill that gives every worker in America the opportunity to earn seven days of paid sick leave. It's the right thing to do."

Obama's commitment to providing national resources to assist States to adopt paid sick leave laws ties directly to the New Jersey, where earned sick leave legislation (A2354) sponsored by Assemblywoman Pam Lampitt is pending for a vote by the full Assembly. Companion Senate legislation – S785 – introduced by Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg has not yet been considered by the Senate Labor Committee. With the President's commitment to assist States in passing earned sick leave legislation it is very possible that New Jersey will emerge as one of the initial targets for national assistance.