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COMMENTARY

A 'Contract with SJ' to lift up neglected workers

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South Jersey has never been a priority among presidential candidates or the media. Other than the beloved shore communities, Camden and Gloucester counties are often dismissed as the poor cousins of the tri-state area.

That's unfortunate for a region that is a case study of all that happens when both parties collude to sell out Middle Americans in favor of Wall Street.

When I grew up in Cherry Hill in the 1960s, family-wage jobs were plentiful for line workers and middle managers alike. Camden was an industrial bellwether, brimming with 43,000 manufacturing jobs sustained by Campbell Soup, RCA and New York Shipbuilding.

Today, New Jersey is plagued by the highest percentage of long-term unemployed and underemployed adults, stagnant wages, record levels of public-welfare dependency and sky-high property taxes that encourage young families and retirees to flee the state.

This collapse was not inevitable. It is the consequence of policies that reward globalist corporations at the expense of the American people. From the Wall Street bailouts, to trade deals that ship U.S. jobs overseas, to a deluge of foreign workers, this elitist agenda has hollowed out domestic manu-



A crane hoists a part for a nuclear reactor in 1959 at the New York Shipbuilding yard in Camden. The city was once brimming with manufacturing jobs. (Photo: Associated Press)

facturing, defense-related industries, transportation infrastructure and the energy sector, hitting South Jersey particularly hard.

Both Democratic and Republican parties are to blame. Too many politicians buy into the culture of greed and corruption that rewards the privileged classes that look down on South Jersey.

The solution: A "Contract with South Jersey" that would make the region great again by reviving modern manufacturing and related industries, the

only sectors capable of generating family-wage jobs for neglected workers in Camden and Gloucester counties.

Start with defense-related jobs. Just as President Franklin D. Roosevelt built the Arsenal of Democracy, we need to replenish our defense industries in response to massive new global threats. America should build a 21st-century missile-defense system to protect America and our allies from a nuclear Iran. We can launch this effort right here in the South Jersey-Philadelphia area.

Other promising initiatives include refurbishing and expanding our aging Navy fleet. Pentagon experts estimate that we need to build about 90 new vessels and reboot existing ships, offering an opportunity to revive the golden era of shipbuilding in Camden.

There's more. The Contract with South Jersey would overhaul the region's transportation system, including fast-tracking the deferred maintenance of our highways and bridges.

But what's really needed is big new projects. Let's build a twin span of the Walt Whitman Bridge to separate truck from passenger-car traffic, build a tunnel under the Delaware River for PATCO trains and widen I-295 to eight lanes between I-76 to a Route 90 that connects to

the New Jersey Turnpike. And let's complete Route 55 to the Garden State Parkway and expand the Atlantic City Expressway to three lanes in both directions.

Here's the kicker: We should require that all supplies, tools and materials used in these projects be made at home, not in China or Mexico.

We should also mandate hiring U.S. citizens, not illegals or foreigners. Indeed, "buy and hire American" means a strong and safe America.

Moreover, we could supercharge the energy sector by unlocking oil and gas reserves under federal lands and by streamlining licensing procedures to reset existing refineries and build new ones along the Delaware.

Such reforms would create new jobs, lower energy prices, infuse the government with new revenue and wean America off of foreign oil.

These common-sense proposals harken back to when South Jersey workers were stakeholders of a national economy. A Contract with South Jersey will elevate the American worker and family once again—and make South Jersey great again by putting the American people and nation first.

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