



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas K. Duane

## Supporting Our Unions

THOMAS K. DUANE July 26, 2011

There has been a recent flurry of activity by unions that are fighting to achieve fair and just contracts for their members, and I have been proud to stand with them. Unfortunately, many employers continue to ignore the needs of their workers.

On July 12, I joined members of Local 802, American Federation of Musicians and the American Guild of Music Artists (AGMA) in a rally protesting the New York City Opera's decision to leave its home at Lincoln Center for a limited season at scattered venues, and its contract proposals for its musicians and singers which would eliminate such provisions as employment guarantees, vacation pay and instrument insurance, and would significantly reduce health care coverage. I have long been a strong supporter of Local 802 and AGMA because one of the most important ways to support the arts is to support the artists. Union members have already made millions of dollars in concessions. While I sympathize with City Opera's dire financial straits, I truly believe that management, working with its unions, can find a way to both protect its employees and preserve the strong, vibrant company which Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia famously called "The People's Opera."

I have also voiced my support for the approximately 16,000 New York State Verizon Communications employees whose contract expires on August 6, 2011 and who are at risk of losing job security, pension, health and other benefits critical to these middle class working

people. On July 25, I sent to Verizon Chairman and CEO Ivan Seidenberg and President and COO Lowell McAdams urging the highly profitable company to begin bargaining in good faith with the Communications Workers of America and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers to achieve a reasonable contract that protects middle class jobs and ensures continued high quality service to the public.

I should also note that as Village Voice employees' contract expired on June 30, 2011, I stood ready to join them in a picket line following a planned walkout. Fortunately the walkout was not necessary as negotiations between management and UAW Local 2110 led to a fair new contract, including the preservation of health benefits, which members unanimously approved. This is evidence that honest, open negotiation benefits all parties.

It has always been my belief that a unionized workforce and a collective bargaining process are beneficial for both employers and employees. I will continue to work with my union brothers and sisters for safe conditions, fair compensation and benefits, job security and a stronger labor movement.