



Transcript of remarks made by Margaret Donovan at the Liberty Bonds Hearing on 12/3/09

Good evening. Officials have had eight years to get rebuilding the World Trade Center right and it's hard to imagine how they could have gotten it more wrong. They would like us to believe that their current difficulties are the result of a dismal economy, but their troubles are in fact the consequence of bad policies and wrong choices.

If we are ever going to have a World Trade Center worthy of the name, it won't come by ignoring the voice of the people and forcing them to pay for, or underwrite, something they have flatly rejected – particularly when there is an alternative that can reconcile all the competing claims and concerns in a far more rewarding and satisfying manner. More information on that can be found in our written submission. I regret the rapidity with which I must deliver these comments, but packets with transcripts of our remarks and background information are available at the registration desk.

Most people think that the *only* way to rebuild the World Trade Center *is to rebuild the World Trade Center*. The American people are the property's indispensable stakeholders – and we are unwilling silent partners. If officials have a compelling reason to override the public's wishes, they owe us an explanation – because the abandonment of the Twin Towers defies reason, it defies respect, and it is certainly not inevitable.

No state agency has any business enabling a project whose sole justification rests on contracts and procurements – not when there is a more feasible, cost-effective, and popular alternative that could be in construction within a matter of months. And no Federal program has any business using taxpayer funds to authorize a measure that confounds the will of the people.

Last year, Richard Hughes and I sat with Kenneth Gardner, the designer of the "Twin Towers II" plan, in the office of Executive Director Ward and introduced him to an alternative that could have easily saved billions of dollars and years of time. Even after all the aggressive and foolhardy activity of the last year, it still represents a far more suitable and profitable venture for *all* concerned.

Mr. Ward promised us that he would look into the feasibility of changing course and pointedly remarked more than once that we deserved a quick answer. We are still waiting. But we understand his dilemma. If they could have discredited the "Twin Towers II" claims they surely would have. What can he say?

So what are we left with fourteen months later? We are tons of steel and tons of concrete closer to a World Trade Center with an asterisk after its name... an irrelevant, unsustainable sinkhole for public money and public hopes of a *real* recovery. It is scandalous and he should be dismissed because of it.

The truth is that no one is celebrating the current progress at the site. It is not even a consolation prize. It is an affront to the American system and the American spirit. If only officials had honored the common sense of the American people from the beginning, the Towers would already be open to the public and sparkling in the night – ready to taunt the 9/11 thugs when they look through their prison peepholes.

That is no fantasy; it is painfully true. As Mayor Koch pointed out, we had the plans. Instead, throughout the world, murderous extremists point to Ground Zero as their trophy – and if the end result is *anything* but new Twin Towers, that claim to fame will become permanent.

In May of 2001, Mr. Silverstein said, “This is a dream come true. We will be in control of a prized asset. There is nothing like it in the world.” So why would he exchange it for some attractive but commonplace buildings? Because it is not really his. He even withdrew his paltry down payment from the insurance proceeds. It certainly was a prized asset – the public’s prized asset and his intended cash cow.

Following the transfer in July, 2001, Mr. Silverstein boasted, “I am proud to assume the stewardship of the World Trade Center, one of New York’s greatest jewels.” *Stewardship* – they were our jewels, not his. Not George Pataki’s. Not Michael Bloomberg’s. So why should it be so hard to understand that people want what was stolen from them and won’t accept counterfeit paste? We know what the World Trade Center looks like and this [held up the image below] is not it.

The contract that Mr. Silverstein signed stipulated that if the buildings were destroyed, the “Premises” were to be rebuilt by Silverstein Properties “with the plans and specifications for the same as they existed prior to such damage or destruction.” If only Mr. Silverstein had stood up to an arrogant and deceitful Governor and built what he has admitted that people from around the world begged him to build, he would have had the support and gratitude of the masses. Instead, he wants to give us this [image below].

In a press release dated July 24, 2001, Port Authority Vice Chairman Charles A. Gargano noted that “The World Trade Center and its Twin Towers are among the handful of instantly recognizable structures on the entire planet, like the Pyramids at Giza or the Great Wall of China.” Would anyone in this room seriously suggest that this [image below] would ever be described in those terms?

In February of 2002, CNN reported a conversation Osama bin Laden had in October 2001, wherein he gloated: “The values of this Western civilization under the leadership of America have been destroyed. Those awesome symbolic towers that speak of liberty, human rights, and humanity have been destroyed. They have gone up in smoke.” Does anyone really think that this [image below] would ever be called *awesome*?

Following the privatization, Port Authority Executive Director Neil Levin pledged just weeks before he lost his life, “We will continue to protect this outstanding public asset so that it can continue to flourish.” *So how did something that was acknowledged as a prime public asset prior to 9/11 suddenly belong to everyone but the public after 9/11?* What instrument conveyed our legitimate rights to those with absolutely no superior claim? None.

Furthermore, once billions of taxpayer dollars came to the rescue, the World Trade Center and, by definition, the Twin Towers, only became more of a public asset, not less of one. But now, instead of belonging simply to the citizens of New York and New Jersey, every American has a rightful voice in the future of Ground Zero. Officials love to complicate the picture, but the truth is that not one of the nineteen agencies or other stakeholders can trump the public's legitimate role.

Gov. Paterson recently observed that New York "took the bullet" for the country. He is exactly right about that, and it makes absolutely no sense for the rebirth of Ground Zero to be limited to what two states can afford – anymore than it makes sense for New York to bear the burden of properly caring for the ailing heroes of 9/11. It is time to do the right thing and do the thing right – across the board.

In the near future, a book with more than a thousand selected comments from the Twin Towers Alliance petition will be sent to the White House and Congress. It will accompany a powerfully viable alternative to the current dysfunctional project and outline a robust transition. So, if anyone believes this bond issue can be rubber-stamped, thereby enabling and further complicating a losing proposition, I am here to ask them to think again.

If what Mr. Ward, Mr. Bloomberg, and Mr. Silverstein have in mind for the future World Trade Center were exciting and uplifting, we might have a harder time making our case, even though their methods would still make their project wrong for this site. But far from inspiring, what they are offering is demoralizing, generic, and extravagant all at the same time.

We are therefore asking Ms. Walton and Mr. Mullen of the New York Liberty Development Corporation: Please do not make it any easier for them to thumb their noses at the rest of us by issuing these bonds. Moreover, we will see to it that the transcript of our remarks here tonight is delivered to our Congresspeople and Senators prior to any vote on extending the Liberty Bond program.

We will ask our representatives to include a rider to the extension requiring an independent, long overdue, cost/benefit analysis be done before federal or state authorities spend another taxpayer penny on the project. Whatever is built could stand for centuries. We can't afford to get it wrong.

If our claims are unfounded they can quickly be dismissed. But if they are credible, then the good men and women who are working at the site can start whistling as they quickly demolish the beginnings of the so-called Freedom Tower, knowing it's the first step towards at long last raising the spectacular Twin Towers. After all, these are the builders who not so long ago offered to work for nothing if only they could put the Twin Towers back where they belong.

The current project was a bust in the boom years. It offends our common sense and our common bond. But there is an elegant solution to the current challenge. And far from being a diversion, meeting it is central to our nation's well-being. It would be the ultimate stimulus not only for our city and economy, but for our confidence and spirit. It is the only measure we can take that promises to actually cure us of what ails us overnight.

Five years ago, Nicole Gelinas wrote in a column in the *New York Post*: "To watch the steel structures of new Twin Towers pierce New York's skyline floor-by-floor – after all New York has been through – would be to experience one of the greatest moments in modern history." The opportunity to take control of our collective destiny beckons. Let it begin here. Thank you.



*The World Trade Center and its Twin Towers are among the handful of instantly recognizable structures on the entire planet, like the Pyramids at Giza or the Great Wall of China. – Port Authority Press Release, July, 2001*

*The values of this Western civilization under the leadership of America have been destroyed. Those awesome symbolic towers that speak of liberty, human rights, and humanity have been destroyed. They have gone up in smoke.*

*– Osama bin Laden, October, 2001*

