

Minutes: Democratic Rural Conference Meeting

Embassy Suites, Syracuse

February 5, 2026

Call to Order

Chair Bill Thickstun called the meeting to order at 1:15 pm and announced that a quorum of DRC Board and general membership was in attendance. Bill Thickstun spoke to the significant national peril and threat to democratic norms and values underway on multiple fronts. The ICE raids continue to escalate in targeted areas and are mobilizing citizens to stand against the Trump Republican regime. He called for a moment of silence to reflect on the murders of Renee Good and Alex Pretti in Minnesota at the hands of federal agents. The actions of the White House administration and its congressional enablers are a call to action: write letters, register voters, demonstrate, and protect the vulnerable among us. Our job as the DRC is to recruit a candidate for every ballot line across rural New York. We need to get candidates on the ballot, do all we can to support them, and protect our election workers and volunteers this fall.

Approval of Minutes

Chair Thickstun asked for a motion to approve minutes of the November 20, 2025, general membership meeting. Motion was made by Max Della Pia, seconded by Judith Hunter, and carried.

Michael Plitt moved approval of minutes of the DRC Board meeting held January 11, 2026. The motion was seconded by Cindy Appleton and carried.

Treasurer’s Report

Treasurer John Hurley summarized the DRC financial status and noted that the PAC account was expected to be reactivated soon to support campaign efforts.

Key Bank Operating Account				
Starting Balance December 31, 2025				\$12,468.29
Deposits				
	Neon Payout	1/20/2026	\$3,032.66	
	Neon Payout	1/27/2026	\$2,603.55	\$5,636.21
Disbursements				
	Neon - 1 month	1/12/2026	\$164.88	\$164.88
Balance at January 31, 2026				\$17,939.62
Key Bank PAC Account				
Starting Balance December 31, 2025				\$474.11
Deposits				\$0.00
Disbursements:				\$0.00
Balance at January 31, 2026				\$474.11

A motion to accept the Treasurer's Report was made by Cindy Appleton and seconded by Max Della Pia. The motion carried.

Report from the Chair

Chair Thickstun reminded attendees to register for the DRC Conference scheduled for May 1-2 at the Saratoga Hilton. The conference theme is *Mobilize for Midterms!* The agenda includes a legislative update panel, breakout sessions by congressional district, and a straw poll of DRC members for state-wide races. Meals and receptions will be hosted by elected officials and unions. The NYS Young Democrats Rural Caucus will host an after party on Friday evening. Registration links for the conference and hotel are at the DRC website: www.nysdrc.org

A fundraiser for Blake Gendebien and John Mannion is planned for Friday Feb. 6 at the Century Club in Syracuse.

Chair Thickstun reported on the 2026 DRC Advocacy Days. Bill Thickstun was joined by Mike Zagrobelny, Liz Moran, and John Hurley in meetings with 21 legislators and/or staff members in Albany (or by Zoom) between January 26th and 30th. Topics included: election law reform enabling counties to opt into holding a nominating convention (like the NYS Democratic Committee process); opposition to proposed judicial redistricting, support for measures to facilitate and regulate harvesting methane from manure digestors as a domestically produced fuel resource (Renewable Natural Gas Standards Act and Clean Fuels Act), support for the bottle bill, support for rural EMS and hospitals, continued investment in rural cell service and broadband. A new issue was added to the list this year: support for efforts to constrain agreements that would allow local law enforcement agencies to participate in federal immigration actions that bypass legal protections.

New Business

Comments from NYS Democratic Committee Chair Jay Jacobs

Chair Jacobs noted that plans are underway to build out a coordinated campaign, with resources to support paid field organizers across the state. He noted that the switch to even year voting will likely increase voter turnout and help amplify the Blue Wave. The matching funds program will be available to support races for state and local positions.

Comments from Drew Warshaw, Candidate for NYS Comptroller

Mr. Warshaw introduced himself and outlined his priorities and qualifications to serve as the NYS Comptroller.

Comments from Tom DiNapoli, NYS Comptroller and Candidate for Re-election

Tom DiNapoli spoke to his successful tenure as NYS Comptroller and asked for continued support from the DRC to ensure that NYS pension fund and the millions who depend on it remain protected.

Adjournment

Cindy Appleton moved, and Mike Zagrobelny seconded, to adjourn the DRC membership meeting at 1:55 pm; motion carried..

Meeting summary prepared by Liz Moran, DRC Board Secretary