

Democratic Rural Conference
Minutes from a General Membership Meeting
Wednesday May 10, 2023 at 7:15 PM
Albany Hilton

The meeting was called to order by Ms. Hunter at 7:15 PM

Board members in attendance

Judith Hunter	Bill Thickstun	Michael Plitt
Margaret Bartley_	Liz Moran	John Hurley
Keith Batman	Kimberly Davis	Bill Hughes
Darlene Baker	Michael Monescalchi	Tim Perfetti
Jim Mills	Cindy Appleton	Ron McDougall

Board member not in attendance

Jeanne Crane	Ted Young	Tom Schimmerling
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Frank Puglisi

Ms. Hunter welcomed everyone. She hoped that everyone was energized by the DRC Conference in Saratoga. She said that she had received many positive comments and that it was a meaningful experience for many first-time attendees.

Ms. Hunter said that as much as returning to Saratoga in 2024 is desirable, it is not possible because the last weekend in April is “rowing weekend” and there are no deals on rooms.

She said that the DRC has a soft hold at the Desmond in Albany for the last weekend of April 2024.

Chair Jay Jacobs addressed the meeting:

He spoke in favor of Resolution #1

He acknowledged the need to get housekeeping funds to committees in rural counties.

He noted the need to work with the State Senate and Assembly campaign committees to get funds to committees to fund candidates in rural counties.

Approval of Minutes: John Hurley

Ms. Hunter asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the April 15, 2023, General Membership meeting. Ms. Davis moved approval and Mr. Perfetti seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Treasurer Report : Frank Puglisi

Mr. Puglisi was not present so a Treasurers report was not offered.

Report from the Chair: Judith Hunter

Ms. Hunter discussed Resolution 1 – The need for reforms to the Petitioning Process.

She noted that many county committees experienced dismal results despite monumental efforts in 2023.

She shared the harrowing experiences she was made aware of by a few DRC members.

Ms. Hunter emphasized that we were not writing the legislation. Rather we are asking the legislature to make changes to election law that will provide petitioning relief to rural committees that choose a process other than petitioning to designate candidates.

The essence of the resolution is to allow county committees to designate candidates in the same manner as the state committee.

She said that there were lots of options and carve outs that could be considered.

Ms. Hunter asked for a motion of support for Resolution 1

WHEREAS, historically, ballot access petitioning requirements are inherently more difficult for political candidates and committees in rural counties to comply with given relative square mileage, road conditions, terrain, weather conditions, and an increasing reliance on aging committee members when compared to conditions in urban and suburban counties, and

WHEREAS, ongoing changes to the New York State Political Calendar have necessitated that petitioning take place even earlier in the winter during a time when there is still considerable ice and snow buildup throughout much of upstate New York, and

WHEREAS, the dangers of walking on poorly plowed road shoulders, sidewalks, and driveways has discouraged many would-be canvassers, especially retirees and the disabled, from soliciting signatures from even their closest neighbors, and

WHEREAS, the increase in political and social extremism has made it even more dangerous to canvass politically, especially in rural areas of the state, even for simple signatures on nominating petitions, as canvassers are often subject to harassment, verbal abuse, physical altercations and, in some extreme cases, the threat of gun violence, and

WHEREAS, previously proposed legislation such as A01853/S02317 that was proposed in 2013 had prematurely attempted to reconcile the challenges of door to door canvassing for nominating petition signatures by allowing constituted county political parties the opportunity to designate candidates directly by weighted vote while still allowing ballot access for anyone wishing to canvass independently, just as the New York State Democratic Committee does with statewide races, and

WHEREAS, the framework of A01853/S02317 could serve as a model for a bill to be passed this session, to go into effect before the critical 2024 election cycle.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the New York State Democratic Committee calls upon the State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, legislation that would allow county political committees the opportunity to designate candidates for nomination by weighted vote while still allowing ballot access for anyone wishing to canvass independently.

Ms. Davis moved approval of Resolution 1

The motion was seconded by Mr. Ford.

Several questions were raised by members:

What happens to town caucuses?

Will county committees be allowed to keep a full petitioning process?

What about county committee and state committee people?

Assemblywoman Walker – Chair of the Assembly Elections Committee introduced herself and expressed thanks for hearing the concerns of the rural counties.

Motion to Call the Question made by Mr. McDougall and seconded by Mr. Batman.

Motion passed unanimously.

John Scott – addressed the membership about Resolution 2

The resolution calls for LGBTQ inclusive curriculum be mandatory in schools in New York State.

He shared statistics related to suicide and other health issues that LGBTQ youth experiences.

There is a lack of information in schools about LGBTQ students.

Personal safety is a major issue for LGBTQ students.

Ms. Hunter encouraged folks to speak with folks from downstate about the importance of passing resolution 1.

Adjourn

Motion to adjourn made by Mr. McDougall and seconded by Ms. Appleton.

The meeting adjourned at 7:47 PM

Respectfully submitted,

John F. Hurley

Secretary, Democratic Rural Conference