

Democratic Rural Conference
DRC Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

Sunday, January 12, 2025

Zoom

The meeting was called to order by Judith Hunter at 7 pm. She opened the meeting with a moment of silence in honor of Jimmy Carter and of recent NY-24 congressional candidate David Wagenhauser, who died unexpectedly on January 11.

Board members in attendance

Cindy Appleton	Karen Ash	Maggie Bartley	Max Della Pia
Summer Downing	Sam Hodge	Judith Hunter	John Hurley
Ron McDougall	Liz Moran	Michael Plitt	Roger Saltman
Tom Schimmerling	Bill Thickstun	Ted Young	Mike Zagrobelny

Board members not in attendance

Bill Hughes	James Mills
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Other attendees

Lena Bishop	Lynne Boecher	Bekkie Bryan	Jason Clark
Brien Connolly	Joan Davis	Martha Devaney	Jane Dodds
Arlene Feldmeier	Cari Gardner	Anne Hart	Mona Heck
Linda Hoffmann	Hilda Lando	Dan Lamb	Marcia Johnson
Jean Lapper	Marjorie Lawlor	Jamal Malik	Hal McCabe
Caitlin Ogden	Betsy Passer	Paul Phister	Susan Schofield
Susan Sklenarik	Barb Turpin	Ken Warner	

Approval of Minutes (Bill Thickstun)

Ron McDougal moved to approve the minutes of the November 24, 2024 board meeting, Ted Young seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Treasurer's Report (John Hurley)

Key Bank Operating Account

Starting Balance November 22, 2024					\$2,729.47
Deposits					
		12/26/224			\$127.72
Disbursements					
	Neon	2 months		\$318.04	
	Service Chg			\$25.00	
					\$343.04
Balance at January 9, 2025					\$2,514.15

Key Bank PAC Account

Starting Balance at November 22, 2024					\$65.42
Deposits		Riley Refund			\$408.69
Disbursements:					
					\$0.00
Balance at January 9, 2025					\$474.11

John is still trying to get the bank to remove the service charges which, as he understands it, should not have been assessed.

Because filings were not done when Frank Puglisi was ill, our Federal PAC account has technically been “administratively terminated.” But John has been in touch with the FEC and learned that it can still function as our Federal PAC account, the remedy being to file quarterly (more often than required) for the next 12-18 months to get activity on the account.

Liz Moran moved and Judith Hunter seconded accepting the Treasurer's report, which passed unanimously.

John proposed that we retain the current dues structure for 2025, which is \$90 per county for voting members and \$10 per person for associates. Judith moved and Maggie Bartley seconded this proposal, which passed unanimously. John will send a letter to each County Chair of record with the dues assessment.

Chair's Report (Judith Hunter)

Judith and others will be traveling to Albany for the State of the State speech, which is also being livestreamed at 1pm on Tuesday, January 14. The Governor, the AG and the Comptroller will be holding receptions after the speech.

We will see committee assignment changes in the new sessions of Congress and the State Legislature. Kirsten Gillibrand will no longer be on the Senate Agriculture Committee, though as Jane Dodds noted, she will now be chair of the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee. Donna Lupardo will chair the Agriculture committee in the Assembly and Michelle Hinchey in the Senate.

NY-21 Special Election

Judith again explained the process for a special election to replace Elise Stephanik once she is appointed to the cabinet. The Governor will have 10 days from when Stephanik resigns her congressional seat to call a special election, which then needs to be held within 70-80 days. There will be no primary. Candidates will be nominated by a weighted vote of the 15 county chairs in the district.

Lynne Boecher, Warren County Chair, then spoke about what has been done so far. She thanked Judith and the DRC for making our Zoom account available and for helping to administer meetings of the 15 county chairs.

Billy Jones, 115th AD representative, has decided not to run. So have Carrie Woerner, 113th AD representative, Matt Castelli, the Democratic candidate in 2022, and Bill Owens of Plattsburgh, who held the seat from 2009-2013.

But the chairs have received materials from and held Zoom interviews with ten candidates, many of whom seem quite promising. In a straw poll, all 15 chairs agreed on a first choice candidate, and agreement on second and third choices was pretty universal. Lynne believes that the group will achieve consensus and that a weighted vote will not be needed. The chairs will interview their top four choices in person in Lake George on January 22. All but one chair (who is ill and will send their vice chair) plan to attend.

The district remains a +20 Trump district, but Judith noted once more that Democrats overperform in special elections. In 2011 Kathy Hochul won a special in a Republican district because Republicans in Congress had over-reached by going after Medicare. We have every reason to believe they may over-reach again in 2025. Bill Owens won a special in 2009 in much the same district as the current NY-21.

The other party has 19 prospective candidates including Steve McLaughlin (Rensselaer County Executive), Dan Stec (45th Sen), and Chris Tague (102nd AD). Anthony Constantino, CEO of Sticker Mule in Amsterdam (who put up a Vote for Trump sign on his business in view of the Thruway) might mount an independent campaign if he does not get the Republican line, which would divide the opposition and improve our chances.

As we discussed at the last meeting, we can raise up to \$5,000 with our Federal PAC to help the eventual candidate.

2025 Advocacy Days (Liz Moran and Judith Hunter)

Liz has been lining up meetings for our advocacy days in Albany, which will be February 3-5 this year. We now have potential meetings with 18 Assembly members representing all or part of DRC counties and 7 State Senators, as well as key committee chairs, Senate Majority leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie.

Our top issue this year will be petition reform. We expect to see a new version of the Magnarelli/Breslin bill from the last session, which would provide for county conventions to replace petitioning in most races. Our second issue needs to be Foundation Aid for education, as our rural districts would be seriously hurt by cuts to “hold harmless” provisions (which maintain current aid levels to cover fixed expenses in the face of declining enrollments).

Other issues under consideration include the perennial rural broadband and cell service, the new bottle bill that failed to pass last session, and blocking the sale of wine in grocery stores (which would damage small liquor stores in rural communities and hurt the Finger Lakes wine tourism industry).

Dan Lamb spoke for the need to support a bill to make EMS an essential service. Maggie Bartley mentioned the need for all election commissioners to be full time, an issue we have brought to Albany in the past. Among others, Genesee, Wyoming, Delaware, Essex, Allegany, Cayuga and Schoharie Counties all still have part time commissioners. Betsy Passer spoke for the Rural Mental Health commission that the Governor just vetoed. Cari Gardner suggested that we advocate for the NY Health Act. Marjorie Lawlor asked about substitute pools for child care workers, and Susan Schofield about the Access to Representation Act for immigrants. In addition to these, Mike Zagrobelny had spoken in November about the need for a CHIPS act for water and sewer infrastructure, and Bekkie Bryan about drivers licensing issues for foreign farm workers.

Conference Committee Report (Jane Dodds)

We have a signed contract with the downtown Albany Hilton for April 26-27. It will be the 30th anniversary of the DRC. Judith has asked Mike Schell to invite other founders of the DRC to attend so that we can honor them. Judith is negotiating with the Governor’s staff on a possible opening reception at the Governor’s Mansion. We are now in a holding pattern on setting up other Friday sessions, pending the results of that discussion. Jane said we will probably have to put out a registration form before the agenda is finalized. We should encourage our committee people and local candidates to attend.

John Hurley urged people to begin lining up folks now to buy ads in the program book. Tom Schimmerling mentioned that while political contributions are generally not deductible for businesses, purchases of space in the program book can be written off as advertising.

Ted Young moved that we adjourn, Tom Schimmerling seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Thickstun

Secretary, Democratic Rural Conference