

NYS Democratic Rural Conference  
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes  
Sunday, March 30, 2025  
Zoom

The meeting was called to order by Judith Hunter at 7 pm.

**Board members in attendance**

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

**Board members not in attendance**

Sam Hodge	James Mills	Ted Young
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**Other attendees**

Lena Bishop	Lynne Boecher	Bekkie Bryan	Amy Connolly
Brien Connolly	Joan Davis	Jane Dodds	Dan Farfaglia
Vivian James	Hal McCabe	Jess Marciano	Cori Orestano-James
Betsy Passer	Tim Perfetti	Paul Phister	Anne Saltman
Kelli Samson	Joe Samson	Barb Turpin	Ken Warner

**Approval of Minutes (Bill Thickstun)**

Michael Plitt moved to approve the minutes of the January 12, 2025 board meeting, Maggie Bartley seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

**Treasurer's Report (John Hurley)**

No formal report, but John said that conference registrations were coming in well (138 to date), and most counties have paid their dues.

## **Chair's Report (Judith Hunter)**

Judith opened by saying that the withdrawal of Elise Stephanik's nomination to be UN Ambassador is a credit to our party's successful process to nominate a strong candidate in NY-21. Blake Gendebien has already raised \$3 million and intends to stay in the race for 2026. This result reflects our party's strength and sends a message on the importance of being prepared and united, while the other side has shown considerable public disarray.

Judith urged people to participate in the upcoming April 5 protests to show that we are not consenting to the destruction of America. We have to show up. In response to a question, she clarified that while outside sponsors of this event like Indivisible (which is a PAC) and Hands Off cannot coordinate with campaigns, we should feel free to cross-post their events.

## **Nominating Committee (Dan Farfaglia)**

Dan sent out an email to the voting membership announcing the board election. He has received statements of interest from several incumbents. He made an appeal for more candidates. Judith mentioned that following recent practice, the election will be conducted electronically with Election Buddy, so that all voting members can participate whether they attend the convention or not, eliminating the need for proxies. All officers (Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer, Secretary and Parliamentarian) and half the board member positions (5) are up for two-year terms. Also up for election are three one-year positions to which the board made vacancy appointments this year: one board member, and regional Vice Chairs in the Central and Catskill/Hudson regions.

## **2025 Advocacy Days (Liz Moran and Judith Hunter)**

Judith Hunter, Liz Moran and Bill Thickstun went to Albany the first week of February to advocate for DRC issues with our state legislators. We had 19 meetings that week, and subsequent meetings over Zoom with Kristen Gonzalez, the new Senate Elections committee chair, and Pat Fahy, the

new Senator in District 46 (Neil Breslin's old seat). As a first-time participant in this process, Liz spoke strongly about the value of establishing these personal connections with the legislators from our counties.

Our main issue this year was the bill to replace petitioning with county conventions in most cases. It received a generally favorable hearing from our representatives. Senator Gonzalez wants to meet again, and Senator Chris Ryan (District 50, John Mannion's old seat) has agreed to be the Senate co-sponsor (it previously was Senator Breslin). The Assembly sponsor is Bill Magnarelli (AD 129). Judith mentioned that the bill's endorsement by the bipartisan association of election commissioners has been very helpful in building support and showing that it's a general rural issue, not just a party issue.

### **Conference Committee Report (Jane Dodds)**

Jane Dodds reported that we have sponsorship commitments from Comptroller Tom DiNapoli for Saturday breakfast and AG Tish James for Friday dessert. Judith is negotiating with the Governor's office to confirm sponsorship for the opening reception. For the past two years they have offered to hold the reception at the Governor's Mansion; this year, we have held our Friday programming slots open so that we could accept that invitation if they make it again.

Saturday lunch was originally planned to highlight the Blake Gendebien campaign in NY-21. In response to a question, Judith explained that since the 2026 race could now potentially include a Democratic primary, our bylaws don't allow us to support Blake as directly as would have been the case for a special election. Instead, with the help of Mike Zagrobelny, we are trying to reposition lunch as a union-sponsored event that might highlight a labor speaker. It's still a work in progress, but we have some provisional commitments. We can make a strong case that with the administration in Washington canceling collective bargaining for federal workers, it's time for labor to make a stand.

Cindy Appleton reported that the program book is coming along well, with 35 counties having submitted ads to date. Founding DRC chair Mike Schell

is providing an early history of the DRC for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary which will appear, at least in outline form, in the book. Ads from outside sponsors at the higher patron rate are also coming in. A point Tom Schimmerling made at the last meeting was emphasized again: while political contributions are generally not deductible for businesses, purchases of space in the program book can be written off as advertising.

Jane Dodds reminded us to encourage new people, committee members and local candidates to attend the conference. Judith mentioned that for the session on social media, presenter Chris Ryan has asked that folks bring their laptops.

Roger Saltman made a pitch that we look at reviewing the bylaws after the conference.

Bill Thickstun asked people to sign up for a tech group to review and work on the DRC web site, our Facebook page, our Neon database and other possible options for event management, email, and other forms of social media that are increasingly popular with our younger members. Michael Plitt volunteered.

Cindy Appleton moved that we adjourn, Maggie Bartley seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Thickstun

Secretary, Democratic Rural Conference