

# THE DEMOCRATIC RURAL CONFERENCE OF NEW YORK STATE

Bulletin #38

April 2021

## Message from the DRC Chair

Dear Friends of the DRC:

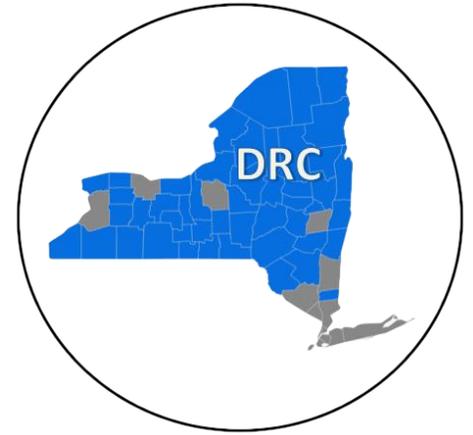
The highlight of the DRC's activities every year has always been our in-person conference. That's when we hold training sessions, hear from our elected officials, and network across counties. Unfortunately, that model cannot work during a pandemic, so our task this year has been to recreate as much of that as possible virtually. We are also using this time to develop new ways we can be a resource to member counties and help them to be as effective as they can. Please read in this bulletin about all the things we're doing, and know we'd welcome your input and help. Feel free to contact me or any of the other DRC Officers or Board Members; our contact information is at the end of this bulletin.

In addition to these formal activities, I'm also spending a lot of time working informally with Democratic leaders from across the rural counties to navigate all the challenges the pandemic presents for politics as usual. A lot of this work has involved making sure the State Committee understands how committees in the rural counties need more support. Please let me know if I can be of assistance to your county. It's really important that we use this time to strengthen our connections instead of isolating.

Spring is bringing hope on so many levels this year, as we all hope we are finally emerging from the COVID crisis. Crisis can also bring opportunity, and my hope for this time is that the DRC will emerge as a stronger, more useful organization that is an important part of Democratic success across rural New York. I look forward to next April, when we can finally gather in person and see each other without being confined to Zoom squares. It will truly be a celebration!

Sincerely,

Judith Hunter  
Chair, Democratic Rural Conference of NY State  
(585) 615-2986



[www.nysdrc.org](http://www.nysdrc.org)

Visit and join our Facebook page at

**Democratic Rural Conference of  
New York State**

## ZOOM CONFERRING PLATFORM AVAILABLE

The DRC has a license to use the Zoom conferencing platform which we can also make available to member counties for their own meetings, subject to scheduling constraints. For information, please contact Judith Hunter at (585) 615-2986 or [judith.hunter@gmail.com](mailto:judith.hunter@gmail.com).

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## WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TO?

One positive side effect of the pandemic has been that with DRC Board Meetings being held over Zoom, attendance has been unusually high. The board has been able to engage with a broader cross-section of its membership on a more frequent basis. We've met monthly from April to August 2020 and bimonthly from October to April 2021. We hosted a discussion with State Committee Chair Jay Jacobs in March and with Senator Kirsten Gillibrand in April.

Chair Judith Hunter also decided to take advantage of the break in normal activities to establish three ad-hoc working groups, which will be strategizing about **Data and Technology, Training and Campaigns**, and **Messaging**. All three have met, some multiple times. Their reports are included with the standing committee reports below.

REACH Program – In February, the Board authorized funding 50% of a pilot project in five counties to implement a tool for relational organizing. It links contact lists on people's phones with data from the VAN and other sources. Committee members and local volunteers can use it to connect with people they already know via text, phone, or email. Persuading people to support a candidate or turn out to vote is much more effective using existing relationships than with contacts from unknown volunteers or paid canvassers. REACH is not allowed to use or sell data from personal phones, to protect privacy. Ian Phillips of Cayuga County is spearheading this effort.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

### Treasurer's Report – Frank Puglisi

Balance at 04/08/2021:	\$18,500.73
Less Encumbered 2020 Conference Fees:	\$9,393.89
Unencumbered Balance	\$9,106.84

Federal PAC: \$956.00

**2021 dues of \$20.00 for members (County Chairs and State Committee members) and \$10.00 for Associate members (any registered Democrat living in NY State) can be sent payable to the DRC,**

c/o Frank Puglisi  
7627 S. Grove Rd.  
Franklinville, NY 14737

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## Conference Committee – Jane Dodds

With regret, the Board has decided that a conference will not be possible in 2021. Too much uncertainty remains about whether capacity restrictions and social distancing requirements will be relaxed sufficiently to allow us to hold a "real" DRC this year. Planning is under way for a conference next year, tentatively scheduled at the Desmond in Albany for Friday April 29 and Saturday April 30, 2022.

## Political Committee – Tim Perfetti

This year's DRC Lobby Day was held 02/25/2021 via Zoom.

At 9:00 am the group met with Senators Harckham, Mannion, and May. Staffers were present from the offices of Senators Hinchey and Brouk. Hal McCabe, Director of Rural Resources, also attended.

At 11:00 am we met with Assembly members Magnarelli, Buttenschon, Woerner, Lupardo, Jones, McMahan and Kelles.

The three topics discussed were:

- Legalizing Recreational Use of Marijuana
- Implementing Universal Broadband
- Increased CHIPS Funding (Consolidated Highway Improvement Program)

Anticipating the impending legalization of recreational marijuana, we worked to make sure that we conveyed to legislators how rural needs could be reflected in the legislation. We emphasized how small farmers needed to benefit and stressed that decisions on whether to opt out of licensing should be made on the most local level possible.

Rural Broadband was on our lobbying agenda last year, too, and likely will remain until the problem is solved. Our elected officials are keenly aware of the problem.

Mr. Perfetti said that the increase in CHIPS funding included in the recent budget is a perfect demonstration that "Democrats Deliver." We should be able to use our success on this issue in local campaigns, since every town will benefit from the increase in CHIPS funding. It is NYS money, not federal rescue money, and so is unlikely to drop next year.

## Nominating Committee – Phil Jones

The DRC held a successful board election in Fall 2020 with presentations over Zoom and voting by mail. The membership voted on four new regional vice chairs for the first time

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and on the five regular board positions up for election in 2021. Later in the fall, the board filled an interim vacancy using an online voting application. We thank the board members who have departed this year for their service to the DRC: Donna Schick, James Sacco, and Lindsay Burris. We welcome new regular board members Susan Ottenweller, Keith Batman, and Margaret Bartley.

We also welcome new regional Vice Chairs Ron McDougal for the North Region, Mike Monescalchi for the Catskill/Hudson Region, Max Della Pia for the Central Region, and Cindy Appleton for the West Region. Regional meetings under their leadership have already taken place. These important new positions will ensure that all regions are represented in the DRC's leadership.

A complete list of current board members with email addresses appears at the end of this bulletin.

## Communications and Outreach – Bill Thickstun

During winter 2020-21 we undertook a major update and cleanup of our Neon database, work which had not been done in several years. Special thanks to Karen Ash of Allegany County for her help with this project! We believe we now have reliable lists of all 231 DRC voting members (county chairs and state committee members), honorary members, and nominating committee members. We've begun work on cleaning up the associate members list. The Board has set up a working group to define associate members, consider how ongoing database maintenance should be managed, and evaluate whether to continue using Neon or explore other options.

It's my hope that you should be receiving DRC emails more reliably and seeing a reduction in duplicate mailings. If you're reading this Bulletin on Facebook and haven't yet seen it in your inbox, please check your spam filter first, then contact me (315-527-1291, [wthickstun@gmail.com](mailto:wthickstun@gmail.com)).

## By-Laws Committee – Darlene Baker

The committee is working on a way to streamline the DRC dues payment process by moving from assessing individuals to assessing counties. The current process is very cumbersome because State Committee and County Chair positions change hands frequently. Any changes to this policy should be revenue neutral, equitable, and would need to be approved by the entire membership at an annual meeting.

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## Issues Committee – Keith Batman

The Issues Committee met on April 21, 2021. They are trying to determine the best way to integrate their work with other committees that address the same topics.

## Messaging Working Group – Susan Ottenweller

The group has met 4-5 times and focused on three areas for messaging:

1. Content – what are the issues
2. Output – what media is most effective
3. Branding – how to keep the message consistent and identifiable

We are continuing to meet but meanwhile offer 2 recommendations:

Establish a DRC repository containing articles on issues and other topics of interest to DRC committee and candidates.

Begin a Branding effort using the tag “Democrats Deliver.”

This is consistent with actions of the NYS Legislature as well as the early work of the Biden administration.

## Training and Campaigns Working Group – Tim Perfetti

The group collaborated with the Data and Technology group on a survey (see results below). Our hope is that counties doing well in each area might be able to help others that are struggling in those areas. We are considering something along the lines of “adopt a county,” making it as geographically sensible as possible. The working group will be meeting via Zoom to discuss next steps.

## Data and Technology Working group – Leslie Berliant

A survey was sent to county chairs and state committee members regarding training needs and technology use. The full results can be found at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gSir9Xgh3A9A1Sq3z3FNrsVVI59VNHrU/view?usp=sharing>

Committee Goals Include

- Recruit new members
- Recruit candidates
- Win elections

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- Improve fundraising
- Improve external communications

## Committee Challenges Include

- Candidate recruitment
- Fundraising
- Committee engagement

## In terms of technology use:

- 73% use VAN
- 63% use Act Blue
- 93% use some form of social media
- Personal email or Gmail are the primary email tool
- Spreadsheets are used to keep historical information which often means that each year committees are recreating information.

## Initial recommendations based on survey results:

- Better use of email. Use an email platform
- Better use of VAN and Act Blue
- Create a Technology Resource page on the DRC web site.
- Organize 3 VAN trainings with Sophia Cangiano on subjects including how to pull a list, cut turf, tag, etc.

## DRC Board Services

Officers and members of the DRC Board of Directors would be happy to speak about the DRC at your county events. Please contact Judith Hunter if you are looking for a DRC speaker.

The DRC Executive Committee has many experienced County Chairs. We are available to mentor and provide support to new County Chairs.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Judith Hunter, Chair

Tim Perfetti, Political Committee, Vice Chair

John Hurley, Secretary

Frank Puglisi, Treasurer

Darlene Baker, Parliamentarian

Ron McDougal, North Regional Vice Chair

Max Della Pia, Central Regional Vice Chair

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Mike Monescalchi, Catskill/Hudson Regional Vice Chair  
Cindy Appleton, West Regional Vice Chair  
Ted Young, Board Member  
Lorie Longhany, Board Member, Bulletin, Program Book  
Jeanne Crane, Board Member and Program Book  
Leslie Berliant, Board Member  
Michael Lausell, Board Member, Diversity and Outreach  
Daniel Sniezek, Board Member  
Bill Thickstun, Board Member, Communications and Outreach  
Susan Ottenweller, Board Member  
Keith Batman, Board Member  
Margaret Bartley, Board Member

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