

THE DEMOCRATIC RURAL CONFERENCE OF NEW YORK STATE

Bulletin #42

Sept. 2024

Message from the DRC Chair

Hello, DRC Members and Friends,

2024 is speeding by. The primaries and Labor Day are behind us and the countdown to November is underway. Although we often refer to elections as critical, I'm confident many of us share the perception that our democracy is hanging by a thread. Between the Supreme Court, Project 2025, and the ascendance of Christian nationalists, it's hard to overstate the threat. But, with incredible new energy nationally, we're going to meet that threat. The excitement everyone is reporting from the rural counties about Kamala Harris is astounding, and I can't stress enough how helpful having Tim Walz on the ticket will be for rural Democrats.

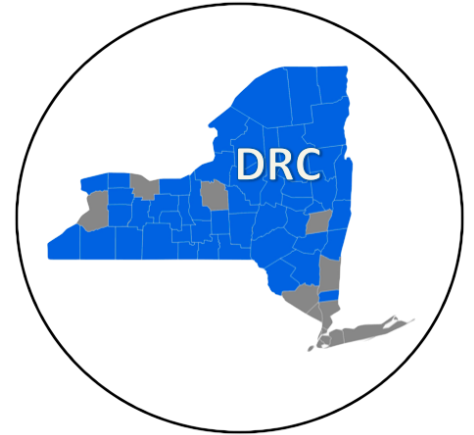
The path to control of the House runs directly through upstate New York. We rural Democrats may be a minority in registration, but our positions on reproductive rights, climate action, and freedom of religion are embraced by a majority of rural New Yorkers. Our challenge is to convey a clear message that can cut through the endless noise.

One thing the DRC can do that you may not be aware of is to contribute to federal candidates through our PAC. Based on a formula of how many rural counties are contained within each congressional district, we were able to give much needed help to each Democratic candidate running to represent DRC counties.

This edition of the DRC Bulletin summarizes our events and accomplishments so far in 2024. One major success we can celebrate is the effectiveness of the public financing program for state elections. Much work lies ahead, and we stand ready to ensure that the voices of rural New York are heard.

Sincerely,

Judith Hunter, Chair
Democratic Rural Conference of NY State
judith.hunter@gmail.com, (585) 615-2986



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**Democratic Rural Conference of
New York State**

ZOOM CONFERENCING 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.

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WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TO? ADVOCACY

Once again, a DRC contingent made a strong showing in Albany during January advocacy days. Tim Perfetti, who recently stepped aside as Chair of the Cortland County Democratic Committee and Executive Vice Chair of the DRC to join Comptroller DiNapoli's staff, helped organize a full slate of meetings. We were able to meet with 21 elected officials in addition to Leader Stewart-Cousins and staff from the Speaker's office. Many thanks to Senator Rachel May and Corey Mosher for their support.



The issues the DRC team discussed included:

Election Reform

- The need for full time election commissioners in every county with adequate support staff.
- The need to modify the petitioning process to reflect the reality of conditions in rural counties and winter weather. As proposed by Assembly Member Bill Magnarelli (A-253) for counties with fewer than 1 million voters, the reform would allow county committees to designate candidates at a county convention instead of petitioning.

Wine sales in grocery stores

- Opposition to the proposal for its risk of adverse harm to the local economy of rural communities.

Universal Broadband

- Continued to press the case that there is no equity without universal access. While there has been progress in extending service to rural communities, the lack of access is a serious harm to all rural community members, particularly school children.

CHIPS Funding

- Continued to advocate for sustained investment in this important funding to local governments.

Foundation Aid

- Opposed removing the Hold Harmless provision for its adverse impact on local school districts.

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WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TO? SUCCESSFUL ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The DRC held its annual spring conference in April 2024 at the Crowne Plaza/Desmond Hotel in Albany. The Friday afternoon sessions led off with a presentation by Kristin Dart, Vice President of Political Affairs at Planned Parenthood, on the Equal Rights Amendment ballot measure. Her presentation spurred discussion of the importance of spreading the word on this ballot measure to further motivate voter turnout. The next session was led by Ny Whitaker of the New York for Biden-Harris Campaign who spoke on 'Fighting with Facts: Winning the War against Misinformation'. These dynamic speakers were followed by a panel of legislators from across the state, moderated by Senator Neil Breslin. Hearing the panelists' perspectives was engaging and built our collective appreciation of the diversity of our electorate and representatives. Net proceeds from the 2024 conference have been shared among our 46 member counties to support their efforts and candidates.

The welcome reception hosted by Governor Kathy Hochul offered a chance to meet and greet the many DRC members and guests in attendance. Dinner followed, with inspirational speeches from Lt. Governor Antonio Delgado, Comptroller Tom DiNapoli, and Attorney General Tish James. A dessert reception was hosted by the Attorney General.

Saturday's program began with breakfast with Comptroller DiNapoli, followed by the DRC annual business meeting and elections. Board members were joined by over 100 DRC members. The elections resulted in the following appointments to the DRC Board:

Treasurer, 1 year term—John Hurley (Ontario)

Secretary, 1 year term—Bill Thickstun (Oneida)

Regional Vice Chairs:

North—Ron McDougall (St Lawrence)

Catskill/Hudson—Michael Monescalchi (Rensselaer)

Central—Liz Moran (Madison)

West—Cynthia Appleton (Wyoming)

At-large Board members:

Ted Young (Seneca)

Tom Schimmerling (Delaware)

Max Della Pia (Tioga)

Roger Saltman (Madison)

Michael Zagrobelny (St Lawrence)

The annual meeting was followed by breakout sessions to facilitate networking among DRC members and to engage with candidates within the newly drawn congressional districts. The conference closed with luncheon and calls to action from key state legislative leaders.

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WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TO? PLANNING A ROBUST COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

At the board meeting held in Cazenovia on July 27th, Rick Gell provided an update on three interconnected software solutions designed to enhance organizational infrastructure at the County and Caucus level: 1) the Democratic Civic Network (DCN), a private professional social network similar to LinkedIn or Facebook, 2) the State Party web template, and 3) the Democratic County Manager (DCM), a membership management tool customized for the Democratic Party that resides behind the other two.

The state committee has agreed to fund the web template for County Committees if they wish to adopt it. We are urging them also to fund it for the DRC, the Progressive Caucus, and the other caucuses.

This infrastructure provides several important benefits: first, privacy- personal emails are stored only in the database and don't appear on any public-facing web pages which reduces the risk of being targeted by scammers. Second, the DCM database already contains the county and state committee structure by election districts. This structure will enable County chairs or their designees to more easily update the membership list. Third, there is a robust support team in place. Looking ahead, as more Counties and Caucuses adopt the web template, our State Party will acquire a more cohesive image. Chair Judith Hunter and her husband currently maintain and fund the DRC web site. This is not a viable long-term strategy. The DRC Board voted unanimously to migrate the DRC website to the state party template and establish linkages with the DCN and DCM tools.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Treasurer's Report – John Hurley

John Hurley has stepped in as Treasurer and prepared a report dated July 15, 2024, documenting that the Key Bank Operating Account balance was \$25,079.69 and the Key Bank PAC (federal) account balance was \$18,348.59. The Operating Account balance reflected the proceeds of our 2024 Annual Conference. As a result of the successful conference, the 46 active County committees received \$425 in early September to support their activities and candidates.

Conference Committee – Jane Dodds

Our 2025 DRC Conference is planned for the last weekend in April at the Albany Hilton. We look forward to being in Albany and the opportunity to connect with our State elected officials. The 2025 conference will celebrate our 30th anniversary. The focus will be on training. Details of the agenda and registration will be announced early in the year.

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Nominating Committee – Dan Farfaglia

At the July 2024 Board meeting, Liz Moran was elected to fill the vacancy in the position of DRC Executive Vice Chair; the vacancy was created when long-serving Board member Tim Perfetti resigned to take a position with Comptroller Tom DiNapoli's office. Liz, who was the Regional Vice Chair (Central), will serve the remainder of Tim Perfetti's term, through April 2025. Recently, Michael Monescalchi relocated to Oneida County and stepped down as Regional Vice Chair (Catskill-Hudson). These two Regional Vice Chair vacancies will be filled temporarily at a Board meeting to be held after the November election. The positions will be voted on by the full membership at our annual conference in April 2025.

The membership will vote in April to fill the four DRC officer positions: Chair, Executive Vice Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. In addition, five Directors At-Large will be elected during the Annual Conference. The term of office for these Board positions is 2 years. To be a candidate, you must be from a DRC County that has paid their 2025 DRC dues and be a County Chair or State Committee member. More information and details regarding the election will be forthcoming early in 2025. Statements of interest from candidates for these eleven slots will be requested in advance of the meeting. See map at this link:

<https://drcny.app.neoncrm.com/neon/resource/drcny/files/State%20Map%20as%20of%20January%202024.pdf> to review Board members, appointment terms, and their county of residence. In addition to the Board seats, the DRC will be recruiting new members and leaders of Standing Committees.

Communications and Outreach – Bill Thickstun

As always, anything you can do to keep us current with changes in County Chairs, State Committee members and their email addresses will be extremely helpful. DRC voting members (county chairs and state committee members), nominating committee members, honorary members, and associate members should have received this bulletin by email. If you did not—if you're seeing it for the first time on the DRC web site, or if someone forwarded it to you—please check your spam filter first, then contact Bill at 315-527-1291 or wthickstun@gmail.com).

DRC Board Services

The DRC has a license for Zoom that we can share with County committees. If you're interested, please contact Judith Hunter.

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.

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Vacancy: Central Regional Vice Chair

Vacancy: Catskill-Hudson Regional Vice Chair

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