

DRC Board Meeting
Sunday January 11, 2026
Via Zoom

DRC Board Members Present

Cindy Appleton	John Hurley	Michael Plitt
Maggie Bartley	Ram Lalukota	Roger Saltman
Dia Carabajal	Jamal Malik	Tom Schimmerling
Max Della Pia	Ron McDougall	Bill Thickstun
Bill Hughes	Liz Moran	Ted Young
	Betsy Passer	Michael Zagrobelny

DRC Members and Guests Present Jane Dodds, Judith Hunter, Mici Somonofsky, Caitlin Ogden, Joan Davis, Timothy Leach, Cari Gardner, Will Rivera, Morris Owen, Mandy Kellogg-Bushnell, Arlene Feldmeir, Lori Orestano-James, Karen Ash, Abbie Hodgson, Alphecca Muttardy, Bill Liblick

Welcome and Call to Order

DRC Chair, Bill Thickstun called the meeting to order at 7:03 pm

Report from the Chair

Bill Thickstun reported the resignation of Sam Hodge from his position as Columbia County Chair and his DRC Board seat as Catskill-Hudson Regional Vice Chair. Sam has decided to primary Didi Barrett for the AD106 seat. Bill welcomed Abbie Hodgson as new co-chair for Columbia County.

After a brief discussion, consensus emerged to fill the vacancy created by Sam’s resignation at our upcoming membership meeting during the annual conference (May 1-2).

Bill also noted the resignation of Mike Monescalchi as Nominating Committee chair. Former DRC Board members traditionally serve in this role. He has been trying to find a replacement with no luck.

Donna Lupardo has announced that she will not seek re-election to represent AD 123 Binghamton/Endicott. Assemblymember Lupardo has served as Chair of the Agriculture Committee; her retirement will be felt across rural NY.

Bill asked for volunteers to help with several initiatives:

- Finding a Chair for the Nominating Committee. This position is usually a former Board member, able to solicit nominations for Board positions and run the in-person side of the election at our annual conference (confirm email, mobile numbers, etc.)
- Handbook for new County Chairs
- Prepare a DRC newsletter in advance of the annual conference (note that a user-friendly template is available)
- Sort through extensive library of images from the 2025 conference, select a few suitable for our DRC web site, and coordinate getting them uploaded

All are requested to update files of SC members to ensure that DRC files are current.

The Governor's State of the State address is Tuesday, January 13th and will be live streamed.

The State Convention will be in Syracuse, February 5 and 6. Look for 25 day notice. State Committee members will vote their preference for state-wide offices.

The judicial re-districting bill has not been vetoed or signed. Governor Hochul has until February 6th to act. NYS Democratic Committee Chair Jay Jacobs is confident that the Governor will not sign the bill. The letter Bill Thickstun prepared on behalf of the DRC describes the extremely negative consequences for rural NY that would result from the re-drawn judicial district boundaries. Brief discussion of the rationale the proponents of the bill offer (e.g., more opportunity to elect judges other than white men) and how reality of recent elections does not support this framing.

Change in elections to even years, coupled with the abysmal approval ratings of the Trump republicans, offers opportunity for Democratic advances in our rural areas that have long been a challenge.

Status of the petitioning bill- Senate sponsor Chris Ryan (S 7401) and Assembly sponsor Bill Magnarelli (A 583). Will be on the list for Advocacy Days.

Treasurer's Report

John Hurley presented the Treasurer's Report and reported the balances as of December 31, 2025: Operating Account \$12,468.29 / PAC Account \$474.11

Mike Zagrobelney moved to approve the treasurer's report; seconded by Max Della Pia, carried.

John Hurley moved for approval to set the annual dues for county DRC membership at \$90.00. The motion was seconded by Max Della Pia and carried.

Conference Committee Report

Jane Dodds updated the Board on the 2026 Annual DRC Conference, May 1-2 at the Saratoga Hilton. Consensus of the theme and name: Mobilize for Midterms. Program will include Congressional breakout sessions on Friday afternoon. **Regional Vice Chairs need to let Jane know of declared candidates within their Congressional Districts to plan the logistics of the breakout rooms.**

Elected officials' sponsorships are progressing slowly (as is typical). Anticipate Governor Hochul will host the Friday pre-dinner reception. The Friday after-party will be hosted by the Rural Young Democrats. Connor Rohan (Saratoga) is the Chair of the organization.

Saturday will include a DRC business meeting and the straw poll for statewide candidates.

Jane reviewed the fees for the annual conference and proposed a change for the Friday only registration (from \$90 to \$100). Comment that name badges include a designation if attendance is not for both days (color stickers?)

Registration Fees

Voting Members	\$150
Associate Members	\$160
Friday Only	\$100
Saturday Only	\$70

Room rate: \$159

Max Della Pia moved to approve the conference rate structure, seconded by Ted Young and carried.

Program Book Committee Report

Karen Ash reported on progress with preparing the program book for the annual conference, and acknowledged the guidance and mentoring by Cindy Appleton, John Hurley emphasized that income for ad sales represents the DRC's major fundraising activity. All are urged to contact businesses within their rural counties to encourage ad placement. Tom Schimmerling noted that purchase of an ad is NOT a political donation; it is a tax deductible advertising expense.

The 2025 program book dedicated several pages to DRC history, in accordance with the conference theme of 30 years of success. Suggestions are welcome for 2026. The meeting Zoom chat included a suggestion from Mici Simonofsky to mark the 250 year celebration with historical photos of rural NY areas and brief notes of their significance.

Political Committee Report

Liz Moran reported that four DRC officers (she along with Bill Thickstun, Mike Zagrobelney, and John Hurley) will be in Albany for Advocacy Days, January 26th –January 28th. We have scheduled 20 meetings. Legislators have made their preference for a small contingent clear; hence the limited number of DRC representatives. The May conference registration information (link and QR code) will be added to the one-page handout.

Presentation: National Infrastructure Bank

Cari Gardner introduced Alphecca Muttardy to discuss the proposed legislation to establish a National Infrastructure Bank (NIB). Ms. Muttardy is a former Senior Economist at the International Monetary Fund and is the chief economic advisor of the Coalition for a National Infrastructure Bank. More information and slides are available at <https://www.nibcoalition.com/>

Legislation to create the NIB was introduced 9/25/2025- HR 5356. The bill has 11 co-sponsors from NYS, including John Mannion (NY22), Paul Tonko (NY20) and Pat Ryan (NY18) along with 8 Democratic reps from urban districts. Josh Riley (NY19), who is well-known to many of us in the DRC, has not yet signed on. Joe Morelle is another representative who hasn't signed on.

Old Business: None

New Business

- Motion to approve language restating the arguments of why the proposed judicial redistricting is so detrimental to rural areas, since it may be re-introduced after the Governor's veto (or pocket veto). Roger Saltman had an editorial correction, which Bill Thickstun agreed to make. Moved by Max DellaPia, seconded by Ted Young, carried.
- The tentative agenda for the February State Committee/Nominating Convention is anticipated to include caucus sessions. The DRC will convene per the final agenda.

Next Meeting

Sunday, March 15th via Zoom

Adjournment

Ted Young moved for adjournment at 8:32 pm.

Minutes prepared by Liz Moran, Secretary