

Minutes: Democratic Rural Conference Meeting

Albany Hilton, November 20, 2025

Chair Bill Thickstun called the meeting to order at 5:01 pm.

Chair's Report

- Welcome seven new County Chairs to the DRC
 - Deb Spratt (Livingston)
 - Christine Weisenburger (Oswego)
 - Barbara Persico (Montgomery)
 - Stephen Vegliante (Sullivan)
 - Kip Cassavaw (Franklin)
 - Sara Dinhoff (Broome)
 - Anita DiMatteo Mullane (Niagara)
- Announcement that the annual 2026 DRC conference is scheduled for May 1-2 at the Saratoga Hilton. Focus will be on the Congressional races, with breakout sessions. There will be a straw poll for state-wide races. The NYS Young Democrats Rural Caucus will host an after party on Friday evening.
- Celebration of the great Democratic victories in the recent elections across NY and beyond. Among the many highlights, Bill mentioned election of Jackie Salvatore as Columbia County Sheriff (first Black woman sheriff in NYS history), Democratic sweep in Clifton Park, major advances in the Oswego, Otsego, and Ontario County Legislatures, a super-majority in Utica, and more.
- Democrats emerged as big election night winners for New York State Supreme Court, claiming six of seven seats throughout upstate and central and western NY.
- The switch to even year elections means that many terms are up again; this highlights the importance of maintaining momentum.
- Election of Michael Cashman in AD 115 special election
- Bill Thickstun attended a fundraiser in Brooklyn for the DRC and had an opportunity to build awareness of the challenges facing rural areas of our state.

With confirmation from Executive Vice Chair Mike Zagrobelny, a quorum of DRC members was confirmed present at 5:10 pm.

Secretary's Report

Liz Moran moved approval of minutes of the April 26, 2025, membership meeting. The motion was seconded by Corey DeCillis and carried.

Jamal Malik moved approval of minutes of the DRC Board meeting held on October 19, 2025. The motion was seconded by Michael Zagrobelny and carried.

Treasurer’s Report

Treasurer John Hurley summarized the DRC financial status.

<u>Key Bank Operating Account</u>			
Starting Balance October 15, 2025			\$13,383.31
Deposits			\$1,348.44
			\$14,731.75
Disbursements			
Annual Zoom Fee	\$159.90		
Neon - 1 month	\$164.88		
Saratoga Hilton Deposit	\$1,250.00		
Cashman Donation	\$1,000.00	\$2,574.78	
Balance at November 15, 2025			\$12,156.97
<u>Key Bank PAC Account</u>			
Starting Balance October 15, 2025			\$474.11
Deposits			\$0.00
Disbursements:			\$0.00
Balance at November 15, 2025			\$474.11

A motion to accept the Treasurer’s Report was made by Dia Carabajal and seconded by Cindy Appleton. The motion carried.

Ad-hoc Committee on Bylaws Report

Roger Saltman reported on behalf of the committee and acknowledged the contributions of Jamal Malik and Dia Carabajal. Substantive changes (in addition to formatting) included language to:

- Clarify membership categories
- Describe role and responsibilities of Regional Vice Chairs and Parliamentarian
- Outline committee structure and focus
- Commit to review and update document every 2 years

A motion to approve the revised DRC Bylaws was made by Bill Hughes and seconded by Max Della Pia. The motion carried.

Political Committee Report

Liz Moran reported on preparations for the annual Advocacy Days. A small contingent of DRC members will meet in Albany with elected officials to discuss key issues of concern to rural counties. Board members have drafted a concise summary of major topics of concern. These include:

Support

- Legislation to modify election law to enable counties to choose to designate candidates at a convention rather than by petitioning (winter petitioning is a barrier to participation)
- Dedicated funding line for infrastructure (water, wastewater) similar to CHIPS allocation for highways
- Passage of the Bigger Better Bottle Bill
- Legislation requiring financial surety requirements and environmental review for large scale electrical utility projects to support data centers.
- Continued investment in rural broadband and cell service
- Support for EMS and rural hospitals

Oppose

- Judicial re-districting
- Wine in grocery stores
- Limiting dairy herd size to 700 cows

Comments included reference to the National Infrastructure Bank, the value of adopting Medicare for All in NYS, and the risk of adverse environmental impacts of runoff from improperly managed large farms.

Comments from NYS Democratic Committee Chair Jay Jacobs

Chair Jacobs recognized Judith Hunter for her years of leading the DRC. He congratulated attendees on the many successful November elections and noted gains in urban areas of the state as well. Mr. Jacobs noted that the NYS Democratic Committee had distributed housekeeping funds to rural Counties to support their mission and pledged to continue this practice. Additional funding through a coordinated campaign is anticipated in 2026 to enable paid field organizers across the state.

Statement from Jamal Malik

Bill Thickstun recognized DRC Board member Jamal Malik who had filed as a candidate for Vice Chair of the NY State Democratic Committee. Jamal briefly outlined his background and vision for changes to the NYS Democratic Committee. He described himself as a bridge builder, able to reflect perspectives across generations, rural and urban areas of the state, and among immigrant communities. Mr. Malik's priorities include year-round organizing and messaging in language that is understandable and relatable.

Adjournment

Judith Hunter moved to adjourn the DRC membership meeting at 5:40 pm; motion passed by acclamation.

Meeting summary prepared by Liz Moran, DRC Board Secretary