

THE DEMOCRATIC RURAL CONFERENCE OF NEW YORK STATE

Bulletin #43

June 2025

Message from the DRC Chair

DRC Members and Friends,

You will find news in this bulletin about our successful 2025 conference but, in this space, I want to look ahead to this fall's local elections and to the midterms in 2026. These difficult days give us a chance to create real change in our counties.

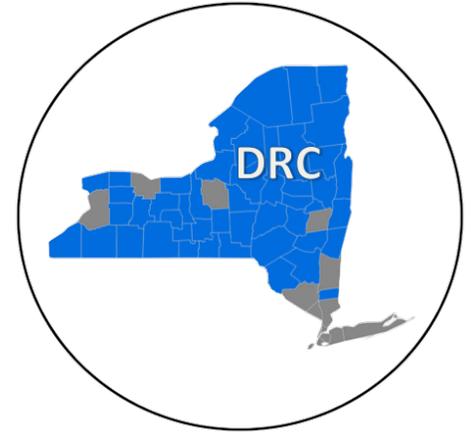
Our rural constituencies are under threat. Farmers have lost an important market in USAID and fear that their workers will be arrested. Hospitals and nursing homes face crippling revenue losses from Medicaid cuts. Veterans are experiencing reductions in services. It's hard to get anybody on the phone at Social Security. Colleges and universities, major economic drivers in many of our counties, are losing research funding and tuition-paying international students. Business and labor have seen federal contracts canceled.

What voters want from the Democratic Party is not handwringing and finger-pointing but real commitments. In local elections, we must lean into being the party dedicated to making government services work for people. The DRC has been advocating with our state legislators to bring resources to communities for roads and bridges, water and sewer, rural broadband and Emergency Medical Services.

We know that majorities of rural voters will support preserving Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and the Affordable Care Act. They support veterans, farmers, public education, and the Post Office. They support raising the national minimum wage. They would welcome good union jobs building housing, wind turbines, solar panels, and improving the electrical grid. They support campaign finance reform. They support higher taxes on the wealthy to reduce inequality and restore basic fairness to our economy. These are our issues.

If we listen to our voters, we will win.

Bill Thickstun, Chair
Democratic Rural Conference of New York State



www.nysdrc.org

Visit and join our Facebook page at

**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 Liz Moran.

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WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TO? SUCCESSFUL ANNUAL CONFERENCE



The DRC held its 2025 spring conference on April 25th and 26th at the Albany Hilton.

The theme of the 2025 conference was **Celebrating 30 Years of Connection!** Yes, it's been three decades of bringing rural Democrats together to share our perspectives and priorities and make our voices heard. The conference was well attended, with engaging speakers and lots of opportunities for networking.

The Friday afternoon sessions began with a presentation by Steven Gamache, Deputy Director of the NY Legislative Commission on Rural Affairs. Steve described the organizational structure and priorities of the Commission and its significance to the well-being of all New Yorkers. His background in education provided a thoughtful lens for considering issues of effective communication and youth engagement.

Congressman Paul Tonko and NYS Senator Pat Fahy took the podium for the second session to review the many ways the new Trump administration is affecting rural New Yorkers. They covered a range of issues: tariffs, relations with Canada, lost support to farmers for climate resilience, impacts on health care and much more. They reviewed how cuts to federal programs in education and health care could impact state and county budgets. The lively panel discussion and Q&A session continued with Assembly members Carrie Woerner and John McDonald and Senator Chris Ryan joining to review the status of the 2025 annual session.



A highlight of the end of the Friday session was the presentation of a proclamation from the NYS legislative delegation honoring Chair Judith Hunter for her dedicated and effective leadership of the DRC.

Following the panel discussions, the focus turned to networking. Governor Kathy Hochul hosted the welcome reception, which was followed by a dinner for over 200 members, elected officials, and guests. We heard inspiring messages and calls to action from NYS Democratic Committee Chair Jay Jacobs, Comptroller Tom DiNapoli, Attorney General Tish

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James, Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, and Lt. Governor Antonio Delgado. The evening wrapped up with a dessert reception hosted by Tish James and a lively after party.

Saturday brought more opportunities for connection. Comptroller DiNapoli hosted a breakfast buffet to kick off the day and continue the important conversation on unity.



The annual DRC business meeting and election was called to order shortly after 9 am by outgoing DCR Chair Judith Hunter. Board members were joined in the meeting room by over 100 DRC members and guests. Following the acceptance of minutes and the Treasurer's report, Judith Hunter recognized Dan Farfaglia, Chair of the Nominating Committee, to announce candidates for open Board positions. Phil Jones participated via Zoom and was prepared to finalize ballots and launch the election using the Election Buddy software. The open positions and declared candidates included:

Chair: Bill Thickstun

Executive Vice Chair: Michael Zagrobelny

Secretary: Liz Moran

Treasurer: John Hurley

Catskill/Hudson Regional Vice Chair: Sam Hodge

Central Regional Vice Chair: Roger Saltman

Parliamentarian: Dia Carabajal and Jason Clark

At-Large Directors: Summer Downing, Michael Plitt, Maggie Bartley, Jamal Malik, William Hughes, and Ram Lalukota.

A motion to elect the four officer candidates and two Regional Vice Chairs running unopposed as a slate was passed by acclamation. The election of Mike Zagrobelny as DRC Vice Chair created a seventh opening for an At-Large Board member. Elizabeth Passer was nominated to fill this vacancy. Phil Jones finalized the ballots and voting members (present or absent) had until noon to cast their ballots. All candidates for At-Large Directors were elected and Dia Carabajal was elected as Parliamentarian.

In her closing remarks as Chair, Judith spoke about the importance of the DRC's advocacy for our County Committees, as they fall under none of the state level funding and support silos. She also noted the importance of succession planning and recognized Jane Dodds for her immense success in organizing the annual conference and for mentoring Summer Downing. Judith expressed her gratitude and appreciation to Cindy Appleton and Karen

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Ash for their efforts on the Program Book and to Ed Reed for his expert technical support as the DRC migrates its website to the template supported by the NYS Committee.



Judith then passed the gavel to incoming Chair Bill Thickstun who thanked the members for the honor of serving in this role and recognized Judith for her mentorship. Bill has been an active leader of the Oneida County Democratic Committee and has been a DRC Board member since 2019.

The annual business meeting was followed by a hands-on communications and social media training session with Ryan Adams. The workshop “What’s New, What’s Blue” introduced tools and best practices for enhanced outreach and messaging within and among our County committees. The morning wrapped up with well-attended County Chairs Roundtables organized by Congressional District.



The closing luncheon was highlighted by remarks from Fred Kowal, Chair of United University Professions (UUP), a NYS United Teachers affiliate, and by an impassioned call to action by Congressman Dan Golden (NY-10).

The DRC was honored to have strong labor sponsorship for the 2025 luncheon:

- **NYS United Teachers (NYSUT)**
- **NYS American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)**
- **American Federation of State and Municipal Employees (AFSME)**
- **International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Locals 2104 and 2032**
- **Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 1124**
- **Service Employees International Union (SEIU) 1199 Healthcare East**
- **Teamsters Joint Council 18**

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WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TO? ADVOCACY

Each year, DRC representatives travel to Albany early in the legislative session to meet with members of the NYS Senate and Assembly. Our team held 20 in-person meetings with legislators and staff over three days in February. We were not alone in Albany! Many interest groups and protestors crowded the Capitol area during Advocacy Days. Our team had productive and positive discussions on a range of issues that affect our rural communities and County Committees. We shared DRC perspectives on six initiatives included in the 2025 legislative session.

Election Law Modification. Support legislation allowing County Committees to decide whether to designate candidates for county-wide offices at a convention.

Wine in Grocery Stores. Oppose this change to the state liquor laws based on impact to small wineries, tourism, and small business.

Dedicated Funding for Water and Wastewater Infrastructure. Support an annual funding line for municipalities to maintain and upgrade water and sewer lines.

Bottle Bill. Support adoption of the Bigger Better Bottle Bill to ensure viability of local return processing centers.

Rural Broadband and Cell Service. Progress has been made to improve connectivity in our rural counties; more needs to be done.

Emergency Medical Services (EMS). Rural communities are facing an EMS crisis; there are fewer EMS/ambulance providers, increased demands for service, and longer wait times.

WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TO? ENHANCING OUR WEB SITE



<https://www.nydrc.org>

With funding support from the NYS Democratic Committee, the DRC website has a new look and improved functionality. The new web

template, which has been adopted by many DRC county committees, was developed and supported by the State Committee to promote a more cohesive image across New York. We are grateful to the technical team, Edwards Reed and Bill Thickstun, for leading us forward.

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LOOKING AHEAD: CONTINUE TO STAY ENGAGED

Save the Date: Board Meeting

The DRC Board will meet in person on **Saturday August 2nd at 10:00 am**. The meeting will be at the Owera Vineyards Bistro, 5276 E Lake Rd, Cazenovia, NY. Agenda and details to follow.

Save the Date: 2026 Conference

Plans for the 2026 conference are already underway. Target dates are **Friday and Saturday, May 1st and 2nd**. The mid-term elections will be a major topic of conversation, and we anticipate an exciting program with opportunities to meet many congressional candidates. Details of the agenda and registration will be announced early in the year.

Communications and Outreach

To build on Bill Thickstun's letter on page one, we need to focus on the real impacts of the Trump regime and their congressional enablers on our rural communities. Letters to the editor, social media posts, and attendance at rallies are all effective tools. Stand firm, stand together, and tell the stories that matter.

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 General 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 DRC Secretary Liz Moran at liz.moran11@outlook.com or text to 315-247-2008.

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 Bill Thickstun 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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