

# Democratic Rural Conference of New York State

## 2018 DRC Questionnaire Answers

### Candidate – US Senator Kirsten Gillibrand

**1. Ability to lead the entire State: What contact and experiences have you had with parts of the state, other than where you currently reside, which demonstrate your recognition of the geographic, demographic and economic diversity of the state and your ability to provide leadership on behalf of all New Yorkers?**

I was born and raised in upstate New York and continue to make Troy, NY my home. Since becoming your Senator 9 years ago, I have made it a priority to work hard on the challenges facing all of New York. I have made it a priority to consistently visit all 62 counties to be accountable and accessible to as many New Yorkers as possible. From the dairy farmers of Wyoming County to the towns in the far corner of the North Country, I have met with local businesses and people that have offered me a chance to better understand the diverse issues facing our communities. We have a lot of challenges in our rural communities, from the need for more job training and the launch of new businesses to rebuilding our crumbling infrastructure. I am committed to continuing to listen to my rural constituents and deliver on their needs.

**2. Knowledge of the issues - What issue do you believe are of most concern to the voters in rural counties, and what will be your message in addressing those?**

In listening to constituents in my rural counties, I would say that the two biggest issues folks are facing is the lack of quality jobs and healthcare that is priced too high. Many of the well-paid manufacturing and agriculture jobs that our parents and grandparents had are now gone and too many workers today have few options beyond low-paying jobs that offer little security for a family. I have been a strong advocate for bringing back manufacturing jobs through my Made In America Manufacturing Communities Act, legislation that would invest in the rebuilding of our manufacturing regions to create new jobs. I am proud to say that this bill has passed into law this year.

I have also passed into law legislation to help our young people acquire high-tech skills like coding and robotics through the local high schools and community colleges so they are prepared for high-quality jobs. One of my most important priorities in this year's Farm Bill is investing in our rural communities to ensure every New Yorker has access to high-speed Internet and to make it easier for entrepreneurs to turn their ideas into new businesses and new jobs. I am also fighting to make sure the Farm Bill delivers much-needed assistance to our struggling dairy farmers, helping to secure \$77 million for dairy farmers who paid millions of dollars into an insurance program that did not help them when milk prices dropped. Our young people need to be learning coding and robotics through the local high schools and community colleges so that they can get jobs that support their families. The other issue is that we need affordable healthcare. While Obamacare did slow the increase in cost, it's just still too expensive. I have long advocated that what we need is to allow people to buy into Medicare at a percentage of their income. The current system based on for-profit insurance companies doesn't work for anyone and it's time Congress worked together on not-for-profit solutions that would both cover all ailments when it's needed and also be affordable to all.

**3. Party Building - How have you expressed and demonstrated a commitment toward building our party statewide and what are your ideas for future party building, specific to rural communities?**

I am proud to have had the opportunity to help recruit, mentor and support candidates up and down the ballot and will continue to do all I can to help ensure NY has a Democratic led State Senate and a Democratic majority in its Congressional Delegation. I appreciate everything the DRC does to bring together rural counties as one and I will use my voice to amplify your message loud and clear.

**4. In the event of a primary for the office you are seeking, will you support the winner of the Democratic primary?**

NA.

**5. Fairness in sharing political power - How have you and how will you defend and further the rights of small counties to be represented in the decision making process and in governmental and political positions?**

Part of the problem is the corrosive power of money in elections. Money currently dominates politics and drowns out the voices of those we should be listening to the most. It's time to get the money out of politics with publicly funded elections so that members of Congress focus on their constituents instead of money. It is why I have banned corporate PAC donations from my campaign. So whether it's the soft corruption of money in politics or the revolving door between industry and their regulators, or the hard corruption of spending billions of dollars in undisclosed money to sway the elections we need our voices to count – by voting, by speaking out, by not giving up. These are structural problems that we need to solve. We have to fix a system that is stacked against hard working families, union workers, the middle class, and our rural communities who are so often left on their own. Together we will take on the most powerful institutions, corporate giants, and the well connected.

**6. Inclusion - If elected, how would your administration include the people from DRC counties and address the issues of concern in those counties?**

I spent time listening to New Yorkers in all 62 counties of the state last year, sometimes at town halls like the eight I held across the state, but often in small groups in places like Corning, Niagara Falls and Batavia. When you talk to people about their lives and try to understand their challenges it becomes very clear...for too many families the economy doesn't work for them...there are not enough good jobs, affordable education opportunities or access to reasonably priced health care. What I hear is an anxiety and fear for their family and for their future. All of us have to focus on creating a New York where every family has a fair shot at becoming a vibrant member of the middle class. I am running for re-election to serve you. I am running to honor the common bond that drives our advocacy – the fight for the empowerment of others, the fight for those who are most at risk, most at need, who need a voice, who aren't being listened to. Our work is not fully finished as long as anyone is left behind.

**7. Voter Appeal - What qualities or experiences do you have that would attract support from voters in DRC counties, not just from Democrats but also from non-enrolled voters and cross-over Republicans?**

One of my guiding principles as an elected official is that I strive to give a voice to those that need it. Working families that are living paycheck to paycheck, or dairy farmers quietly trying to make ends meet, or small businesses who could use a SBA loan in order to grow and expand, are the people I think about when I'm in DC. I want to help the people who don't have lobbyists and don't have time to write their Congressperson. When I attempt to tackle a problem I don't ask is this a Democratic or Republican solution – I just focus on “will it help people”.

**8. Campaign in DRC Counties - How would you campaign in DRC counties? Will you personally appear with local candidates?**

I will continue to travel the state this year and every year I am in office. I welcome the opportunity to meet and support local candidates.

**9. Other Criteria - Please set further anything else you want us to consider.**

**EMPLOYEE OWNERSHIP LEGISLATION: Gillibrand's bipartisan *Main Street Employee Ownership Act* passed into law as part of the FY19 NDAA bill.** Gillibrand met with businesses in nearly every region of New York State that support workers through employee ownership to help inform her bipartisan legislation. Her bill would improve access to capital and technical assistance to transition small businesses to employee ownership and save thousands of small companies and jobs. Gillibrand's legislation is expected to remain in the NDAA bill through the conference committee process and final passage.

- **Newsday:** [“Kirsten Gillibrand visits Long Island in push to save jobs”](#)
- **Syracuse Post-Standard:** [“Gillibrand promotes bill to expand employee stock ownership plans”](#)

- **Albany Times-Union:** ["Gillibrand backs employee ownership plans during Rotterdam visit"](#)
- **WXXI Public Radio Rochester:** ["Sen. Gillibrand working to get more businesses transitioning to employee owned"](#)
- **Watertown Daily Times:** ["Gillibrand proposes law to aid small business transitions"](#)

**"MADE IN AMERICA" MANUFACTURING COMMUNITIES ACT:** Gillibrand's bipartisan *"Made in America" Manufacturing Communities Act* passed into law as part of the FY19 NDAA bill. This bill would help create new jobs and boost local economies across New York State by designating regions as "Manufacturing Communities." This legislation would create a program for new dedicated federal funding and technical assistance to New York communities that are awarded this designation. Communities would receive federal assistance to grow their manufacturing sectors and help revive their local economy. This program would strengthen the ability for communities across the country to develop and manufacture cutting-edge technology that is foundational to the nation's defense and manufacturing competitiveness. This program is based on Gillibrand's bipartisan Made In America Manufacturing Communities Act, which is cosponsored by Senators Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Angus S. King, Jr. (I-ME), Susan M. Collins (R-ME), Jerry Moran (R-KS), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN).

- **Fox 28 North Country:** ["Gillibrand pushes legislation to create jobs"](#)
- **Wayne Post:** ["Bill to create more NY jobs passed U.S. Senate"](#)

**PREPARING STUDENTS FOR GOOD-PAYING JOBS OF THE FUTURE:** Gillibrand passed into law two bipartisan provisions to promote computer science and advanced manufacturing training in schools. The bipartisan *Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act*, which reauthorizes funding for federal career and technical education programs, included provisions from two of Gillibrand's bipartisan bills. Her bipartisan *Computer Science Career Education Act* would help provide more opportunities for students to learn computer science skills, especially for women, minority, rural, and low-income students across New York State who are underrepresented in STEM careers, in order to prepare them for in-demand careers in computer science. The legislative package also included provisions from Gillibrand's bipartisan *21st Century Strengthening Hands On Programs that Cultivate Learning*

*Approaches for Successful Students (SHOP CLASS) Act*, which would prepare teachers to offer expanded training for students across New York State in advanced manufacturing technologies like 3D printers, laser cutters, and computerized machine tools. Modern manufacturing is increasingly high-tech and creates complex technical jobs that require technical-skill training.

- **Times Herald-Record:** ["Gillibrand pushes for high-tech school programs"](#)
- **Spectrum News:** ["Proposed legislation would benefit tech students in Southern Tier"](#)
- **The Batavia Daily News:** ["More funding for high-tech education"](#)
- **Watertown Daily Times:** ["Bill promising technical education funds passes Senate"](#)
- **Hudson Valley 360:** ["Senate passes expanded grant program for career and tech education programs"](#)

**NORTHERN BORDER REGIONAL COMMISSION:** Gillibrand successfully adds reauthorization and expansion of the Northern Border Regional Commission to **Senate Farm Bill**. The Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) is a federal-state partnership that invests in economic and community development projects throughout the North Country and Central New York. Gillibrand's provision would reauthorize the NBRC for an additional five years to continue to bring critical federal investment to economic development projects in these regions and create a state grant program to help develop projects that support business retention and expansion, increase access to high-speed internet, invest in infrastructure development, and promote job creation.

- **Watertown Daily Times:** ["Gillibrand attaches reauthorization of Northern Border Regional Commission to Farm Bill"](#)

**RURAL BROADBAND:** Gillibrand's bipartisan rural broadband legislation passed the **Senate as part of the Farm Bill**. Following her push on the Senate Agriculture Committee, Gillibrand's provision to expand access to high-speed broadband was included in the Senate Farm Bill that has passed on the floor. This provision, based on Senator Gillibrand's bipartisan *Broadband Connections for Rural Opportunities Program Act* (B-CROP Act) introduced with Senator Shelley Moore Capito would help encourage more high-speed broadband deployment to high-need areas by awarding grants in combination with the current loan funding available through the USDA's Rural Utilities

Service. Federal funds would target the highest-need rural and tribal areas, allowing for grants of up to 50 percent of a project's cost, and up to 75 percent for remote, high-need areas, to be awarded in combination with the current loan funding available through USDA. The Senate Farm Bill also increases the annual funding level of the USDA broadband program to \$150 million. The press release may be found [here](#).

**RURAL JOBS AND INVESTMENT:** Gillibrand's bipartisan *Rural Jobs and Investment Act* passed the Senate as part of the Farm Bill. Following her push with a floor amendment, Gillibrand successfully included provisions from her bipartisan *Rural Jobs and Investment Act* in the Senate-passed Farm Bill. This provision expands access to much-needed resources and investment for rural entrepreneurs in Upstate New York to start and expand local businesses. It would also create a new grant program to invest in local efforts to launch new companies and create new jobs in New York's rural communities. It would also expand the use of the USDA Community Facilities Program to invest in business incubators, makerspaces, and job training centers to provide additional resources for communities to support their entrepreneurs.

- **Watertown Daily Times:** ["Gillibrand announces new Farm Bill amendment to provide capital to rural entrepreneurs"](#)

**DAIRY PREMIUM REFUND ACT:** Gillibrand secured \$77.1 million in money for dairy farmers in New York and across the country in this year's Senate Farm Bill. Earlier this year, Gillibrand announced the Dairy Premium Refund Act, which would return millions to farmers who paid into an insurance program that left them empty-handed when milk prices plummeted. The dairy industry is the backbone of the local economy in rural communities across Upstate New York.

- **Watertown Daily Times:** ["Senate Farm Bill includes \\$77 million MPP reimbursement"](#)
- **7 News/Fox 28 North Country:** ["Gillibrand tries to get money back for 'ripped off' farmers"](#)

**POSTAL BANKING:** Gillibrand announces new legislation to create a postal bank. Gillibrand's legislation, which would create a retail bank in all of the USPS's 30,000 national locations, would effectively end predatory payday lending industry practices overnight by giving low-income Americans, particularly communities of color and rural communities, access to basic banking services that they currently don't have.

This legislation would give low-income Americans access to low-interest, small-dollar loans, small-dollar checking and savings accounts, and basic transactional services. This proposal would help end banking deserts in both urban and rural America.

- **Huffington Post:** ["Kirsten Gillibrand Unveils a Public Option for Banking"](#)
- **Slate:** ["Kirsten Gillibrand Unveils Her Ambitious Plan to Turn the Post Office Into a Bank"](#)
- **NY Post:** ["Gillibrand Proposes Legislation to Bring Banking to Post Offices"](#)

**GIVING WORKERS A VOICE IN THE WORKPLACE:** To reward work again in this country, Gillibrand has pushed legislation that would make sure every worker has a voice in the workplace and a right to join together in a union to fight for the pay and protections they deserve. She co-led the *Workplace Democracy Act* that would protect and strengthen workers' rights, including removing unnecessary hurdles to forming a union and ensuring employers can no longer avoid responsibility and prevent workers from organizing by designating certain workers as independent contractors. There is no doubt that union membership is good for workers: union workers earn 26% more, on average, than non-union workers. Union workers are also half as likely to be victims of health and safety violations or of wage theft, 18% more likely to have health coverage, and 23% more likely to have either an employer-sponsored pension or 401(k). A summary of the legislation is available [here](#).

- **Washington Post:** ["Bernie Sanders has a new plan to raise wages: Save the unions"](#)

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**TAA FOR AUTOMATION ACT:** Gillibrand has pushed for Congress to pass the **TAA for Automation Act**. She is a co-lead of this legislation with Senators Donnelly and Peters. The bill would provide Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) benefits, including job training and reemployment services, to workers who are displaced due to automation.

- **Watertown Daily Times:** ["Gillibrand introduces bill to add protections for workers at risk of automation"](#)
- **Auburn Citizen:** ["With automation threatening NY jobs, Gillibrand wants to help affected workers"](#)

**END OUTSOURCING:** Gillibrand co-led legislation to help prevent the loss of jobs through outsourcing and bring back good-paying jobs to New York. The *End Outsourcing Act* would require the federal government to consider, when awarding its annual \$400 million in federal contracts, whether a company has outsourced jobs. It would stop the federal government from giving tax rewards to companies that have shipped jobs overseas. And it would give new tax incentives to companies that bring foreign jobs back to the United States, because these are the companies we should be rewarding – not the companies that have turned their backs on New York State and our country.

- **Auburn Citizen:** ["Gillibrand seeks to keep jobs in U.S., hopeful Trump will support bill"](#)
- **WENY:** [Gillibrand Announces "End Outsourcing Act"](#)

**JOBS ACT TO SUPPORT TRAINING FOR IN-DEMAND JOBS:** Gillibrand has pushed Congress to pass the *Jumpstart Our Businesses by Supporting Students (JOBS) Act* to help students better afford quality skills training through Pell Grant funding. This bipartisan legislation would expand Pell Grant eligibility to cover high-quality and rigorous short-term job training programs, changing the requirement from 600 instruction hours to at least 150 hours over a period of 8 weeks. Eligible programs would include training programs in engineering and high-tech manufacturing that could lead to a job in advanced manufacturing and training programs in coding for a job in cybersecurity. These programs would be developed in partnership between colleges and local employers to ensure that participating students receive the skills training and credentials they need to put them on a path to a good-paying, in-demand job in their local communities.

- **WENY News:** ["Senator Gillibrand announces new job training legislation"](#)

**STUDENT LOANS:** Gillibrand called for new oversight regulations and legislation that could lower student loan payments. Gillibrand held a press conference in NYC and satellite time with upstate media outlets to announce her push to lower student loan payments following the Trump Administration announcement that it would eliminate the office that protects graduates from predatory loan practices, which could create massive financial burdens for recent graduates and push them into default when they are just entering the workforce.

- **NY Daily News:** ["Gillibrand demands new rules to aid student loan borrowers"](#)
- **NBC New York:** ["Gillibrand: Beware of predatory student loan practices"](#)
- **Spectrum News:** ["Gillibrand working to ease pain of student loan debt"](#)