

THE DEMOCRATIC RURAL CONFERENCE OF NEW YORK STATE

Bulletin #37

July 2020

Message from the DRC Chair

Dear Friends of the DRC:

2020 has been a year when customary practices and traditions have had to give way to the realities of a pandemic that has upended just about everything. When it became obvious that it would be unsafe to meet in April, the DRC Board and Officers postponed our annual conference until September. Since then New York has done extraordinary work in controlling the spread of COVID-19, but that is not true of the rest of the country. No one knows what the next few months will bring, and, as things currently stand, a gathering as large as the DRC would not be permitted. There's no way we can be confident it will be possible to meet in person this fall. Given the large financial commitment to the venue our conference requires, the Officers and Board have decided that this year's DRC will be a virtual, online one.

The main business we have to conduct virtually is to hold our 2020 elections. Besides half of the Board members, each region will be electing someone to the new positions of regional Vice Chairs. Please expect to be hearing from Chair Phil Jones and the rest of the Nominating Committee about how this year's elections will be conducted. The intention is that votes will be cast by regular mail both for security and to accommodate the DRC's weighted voting system. However, candidates will make their presentations prior to the voting by email and Zoom sessions (Zoom sessions can be done like a conference call, in case your computer or internet won't support video).

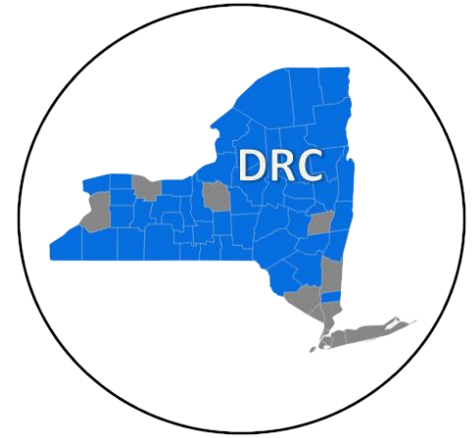
Because we need to reach the correct potential voters for each county (Chairs and all State Committee members), it is essential that we have the most current names, email addresses, and mailing addresses for them. We have found that the State Committee's information is all too often out of date, so we need the current information as soon as possible. Please note that new State Committee terms do not begin until county reorganizations occur, so even if your county has new incoming State Committee members the information we need is for members whose terms will soon be expiring. Please send to the DRC Secretary John Hurley (jfhurley@rochester.rr.com) or the DRC Communication and Outreach Chair Bill Thickstun (wthickstun@gmail.com).

For those of you who have already registered for the 2020 DRC, please know that we will be happy to count your payment as your registration for the 2021 DRC. If you would prefer to get a refund for your registration fee, please contact DRC Treasurer Frank Puglisi at fvp9900@yahoo.com or 716-861-9749.

Taking the DRC virtual for 2020 was a difficult but unavoidable decision. Please know that we have every intention of bringing you a fantastic DRC in 2021, and we look forward to the time when we can all gather in person again.

Sincerely,

Judith Hunter
Chair, Democratic Rural Conference of NY State
(585) 615-2986



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Democratic Rural Conference of New York State

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WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TO?

In March, as the pandemic first began to affect daily activities in New York, the DRC lobbied state officials successfully to shorten the petition period and reduce the number of required signatures by 70%. Later, we lobbied for changes in voting procedures, which helped drive the Governor's decision to permit all voters to use the absentee excuse 'temporary illness' in the June 23rd primary. More recently, we have been lobbying for authority to conduct judicial conventions and county reorganizational meetings via video or telephone conference, an effort that became successful Friday July 3rd when the Governor issued an Executive Order making party activity permissible virtually, notwithstanding any rules the particular body might have.

The Board held a conference call meeting on April 25 and Zoom meetings on May 16 and June 27. The April meeting included a presentation by Senator Schumer on legislation in Washington to address the pandemic. In May, Lt Governor Kathy Hochul spoke to us about efforts at the state level. The June meeting included a presentation by NYS Comptroller Tom DiNapoli. The business part of these meetings was mainly focused on lobbying efforts and planning in response to the pandemic.

In May, we sent a letter to NYS Senator Rachel May and Assembly Member Robert C. Carroll in support of their bill to permit online petitioning, S. 8238/A.10345. Online petitioning would not replace traditional door-to-door petitioning but would be an additional way to collect signatures for candidates. Our letter expressed caveats about the ongoing need for rural broadband support, the hope that the bill would not create another unfunded mandate for our counties, that it would be amended to include party positions (state committee members and judicial delegates), and that any online system would maintain local control of the process.

In June, we adopted the two resolutions which follow on the next page.

ZOOM CONFERENCING PLATFORM AVAILABLE

The DRC has purchased 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 at (585) 615-2986 or judith.hunter@gmail.com.

THE DEMOCRATIC RURAL CONFERENCE OF NEW YORK STATE

DRC Statement Regarding Systemic Racism, Police Reform, and Black Lives Matter

Drawing on the tradition and history of rural New York's role as a source of many movements for reform and equality in America, the Democratic Rural Conference of New York State affirms that Black Lives Matter. Recent events have all too painfully demonstrated yet again that racism is systemic and pervasive, especially in our policing and criminal justice. We urge all communities in the rural counties to enter into the State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative with the seriousness and openness to change it deserves.

We note with approval the countless peaceful demonstrations occurring all over rural New York calling for reform and racial justice. For so many of these small communities to turn out in such numbers shows how important this moment is. We commend the many Democratic candidates who have added their voices to this movement. And we will redouble our efforts to welcome, recruit, and encourage people of color to participate in every level of the political system.

DRC Resolution Commemorating Steven Jones

WHEREAS the board of directors of the Democratic Rural Conference has noted with sadness the passing of Steven Jones, founding secretary of the Democratic Rural Conference, on Tuesday, June 2, 2020, at home in Morrisville, and

WHEREAS Steven Jones demonstrated throughout his lifetime his belief in our country and its promise, and worked hard to see that upstate was not left out when it came to New York State politics, and

WHEREAS He took the NY Democratic Rural Conference from an idea to an integral part of the state Democratic party, and as the founding secretary of the DRC he drafted the bylaws that largely exist today, and helped guide the organization through its formative years, and

WHEREAS Steven Jones was selfless in contributing to his community in Madison County through service to his clients, including municipalities and school districts, to local service clubs, to American Legion Boys State, and to many others, and

WHEREAS Steve's kindness, sunny disposition and relentless positivity were key to the DRC's success, and

WHEREAS He served as Madison County chair and on the state Democratic Committee for many years, and gave of his time and expertise to many campaigns, from local to presidential, and

WHEREAS as members of the DRC, all of us benefited from Steve's work as he set the standard for what we, as underdog upstate Democrats, should aspire to: persistence, integrity, humility, humor, and love,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Directors of the Democratic Rural Conference of New York State hereby recognizes, commemorates and honors the contributions of Steven Jones to the nation, the state, and his community through his hard work, devotion and time, and his role in the founding and success of the DRC;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Directors mourns the loss of Steven Jones and extends its sincere condolences to his wife Cindy and family members.

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COMMITTEE REPORTS

Treasurer's Report – Frank Puglisi

Net bank account balance as of February 7, 2020 – \$11,262.70

Federal account balance as of February 7, 2020 -- \$5,956.00

At the June meeting, the board voted to donate \$500 from the Federal account to each of the 9 Congressional candidates in the DRC counties.

2020 dues of \$20.00 for members (County Chairs and State Committee members) and \$10 for Associate members (any registered Democrat living in NY State) can be sent payable to the DRC,

c/o Frank Puglisi
7627 S. Grove Rd.
Franklinville, NY 14737

Political Committee – Tim Perfetti

- 1) We continue to lobby for universal rural broadband, which has become even more important under present conditions.
- 2) We will be lobbying for a November General Election COVID-19 absentee excuse like the one in place for the primary; the mailing of absentee applications to all registered voters; and additional time, resources and support for local Boards of Election to complete these tasks. Longer term, we will strongly support the proposed ballot resolution for fall 2021 to amend the state constitution and make direct mail balloting possible in New York.
- 3) The board continues to seek out attorneys who would be willing to serve on the Legal Service Bureau.
- 4) We continue to work on assembling a group that would travel to individual counties or do regional training on political how-to: building committees, recruiting candidates, running campaigns, fundraising, and get-out-the-vote work.

Communications and Outreach – Bill Thickstun

We continue to get reports that emails have not been received by people who are on our lists. We're planning to post this bulletin, the first since February, on our Facebook page as well as sending it out by email. If you see it on Facebook and haven't received it, please check your spam filter first, then contact me (315-527-1291, wthickstun@gmail.com).

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Diversity and Outreach – Michael Lausell

In these historic times, I introduce myself as the Diversity Outreach Chair for the Democratic Rural Conference. Why me? My father, a Puerto Rican - and also an American citizen - gives me the Hispanic heritage that is a core value in my life. He married my mother, from Columbus, Ohio.

My father, Demetrio, suffered discrimination for who he was, and I have experienced the prejudice that we as a people, face on a daily basis. Don't be surprised when you meet me, I can pass for white. I can hear comments muttered, and choose to address them or not.

Along with that, from an early age I knew I was gay, and from early on was out and proud. At the advanced age of 66, I can share that I am happily married and have served on the Schuyler County Legislature since 2014.

The events of the last month have thrown into sharper focus that our nation was conceived and built under the institution of slavery. Recent events bring to the forefront the continuing oppression and violence that is the legacy of treating human beings as less worthy than others. On a positive note, Black Lives Matter has been embraced by many of us as a legitimate cry for equality.

We can all bear testament in our own ways. People drive by our house and feel compelled to shout slurs in our direction, acts that only strengthen my determination to be public and present, and with quiet strength carry forward our cause of equality.

Let us all resolve more than ever, to continue forward. I encourage all members of all minorities to embrace the course of service and prominence in our political sphere. Only by making ourselves known can we be represented at all levels of government, in the pursuit of the ideal and challenge of a true democracy.

The Democratic Rural Conference is committed to these goals, and we are here to assist and encourage you in whatever way we can.

Michael Lausell
michaellausell@aol.com

DRC Board Services

Speakers Bureau

The following DRC members are available as speakers at DRC County Events: Bill Wood, Judith Hunter.

Mentoring Services

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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CONTACT INFORMATION

Judith Hunter, Chair

Judith.hunter@gmail.com

Tim Perfetti, Political Committee, Vice Chair

timothyperfetti@gmail.com

Ted Young, Board Member

tyoung28@rochester.rr.com

Lorie Longhany, Board Member, Bulletin, Program Book

lorie.longhany@gmail.com

Jeanne Crane, Board Member and Program Book

jeannecrane01@localnet.com

John Hurley, Secretary

jfhurley@rochester.rr.com

Donna Schick, Women's Liason, Board Member

donnaschick@yahoo.com

Bill Thickstun, Communications and Outreach, Board Member

wthickstun@gmail.com

EDITOR: Bill Thickstun

FORMATTED BY: Lorie Longhany