

Democratic Rural Conference

Minutes from a Meeting of the DRC Board of Directors

Saturday January 21, 2023 at 10:00 AM

Via Zoom

Meeting of the DRC Board of Directors called to order by Ms. Hunter at 10:01 AM

Board members in attendance

Judith Hunter	Bill Thickstun	Michael Plitt
Jeanne Crane	Liz Moran	John Hurley
Keith Batman	Darlene Baker	Ted Young
Margaret Bartley	Michael Monescalchi	Tom Schimmerling
Frank Puglisi	Tim Perfetti	Bill Hughes
Cindy Appleton	Ron McDougall	Kimberly Davis

Board member not in attendance

Dan Farfaglia

Guests

There were approximately 55 guests in attendance. As has been the practice for meetings held via Zoom the names are not listed.

Approval of Minutes: John Hurley

Mr. Hurley presented the minutes from the November 19, 2022 Board of Directors meeting. He noted corrections offered by Ms. Hunter and Mr. Thickstun.

Mr. Thickstun moved approval of the minutes. Mr. Hughes seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Hunter noted that the amended minutes from the July 23, 2022 board meeting had not yet been presented for approval by the board.

Mr. Hurley acknowledged that he forgot again to include them and will make sure they are on the next agenda.

Treasurer Report : Frank Puglisi

Mr. Puglisi presented the Treasurer's report:

REPORT IS AS OF 1/21/2023

STATE ACCOUNT-

BALANCE AS OF NOVEMBER 18, 2022, \$11,249.43

11,249.43

- 150.11 – NEON MONTHLY CHARGE (DECEMBER)

11,099.32

+ 6,000.00 – RETURN OF DEPOSIT FROM SYRACUSE HOTEL

17,099.32

- 2,425.16 – CHAIRS SUMMIT

16,949.21

- 150.11 – NEON MONTHLY CHARGE (JANUARY)

16,799.10

- 100.00 – FACEBOOK ADS

16,699.10 (BANK BALANCE AS OF JANUARY 21, 2023)

FEDERAL PAC –

BANK BALANCE AS OF NOVEMBER 18, 2022, \$56.00

NO TRANSACTIONS

\$56.00 (BANK BALANCE AS OF JANUARY 21, 2023)

Mr. Puglisi reported that he sent the 2023 dues notice to each county chair two weeks ago and payments were beginning to come in.

He asked any county chair who did not receive the dues notice to contact him after checking their SPAM folder.

Mr. Thickstun moved for approval of the Treasurer Report. Mr. Perfetti seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Ms. Hunter reminded those present that the purpose of the Federal PAC is to spend it down during the federal election cycle so the \$56.00 balance is not a concern.

Nominating Committee: Phil Jones

Ms. Hunter shared that all members of the Nominating Committee were former DRC board members. No current members of the DRC Board are involved in the execution of DRC elections.

Mr. Jones announced that Kimberly Davis was elected by the board to fill a vacancy that was created in October 2022. She will fill the vacancy until the seat is voted on by the full membership during elections at the April DRC Conference. Mr. Jones expressed appreciation to the 5 people who came forward to fill the vacancy and hoped that enthusiasm to serve would be reflected again during the April elections.

Regarding elections to be held during the business meeting at the April 2023 DRC Conference in Saratoga, Mr. Jones said that a detailed notice would be emailed to the entire membership in the middle of February 2023.

Mr. Jones shared that the Board positions that will be voted on at the Spring Conference are the 5 Officers: Judith Hunter, Tim Perfetti, John Hurley, Frank Puglisi, Darlene Baker and board positions currently held by Maggie Bartley, Michael Plitt, Dan Farfaglia, William Hughes, Tom Schimmerling and Kimberly Davis.

Ms. Hunter noted that the 4 Regional Vice-Chairs are elected during the even year elections.

Candidates will need to notify the Nominating Committee of their intent to contest for an officer position or board seat by early April – dates to be included in the February notice.

For a person to run for office or to vote, their county must have paid their 2023 dues prior to the start of the conference – deadline to be announced.

Mr. Jones noted that the elections will be conducted using the Election Buddy software – just as was done in 2022. Because there will be virtual

voting, all members will be able to participate, whether in attendance or not, so proxies will not be allowed.

In response to a question about weighted voting Ms. Hunter and Mr. Jones explained that a founding principle of the DRC is that all DRC counties are treated equally, regardless of population. Each county is allotted 10 votes to be allocated among the chair and SCM in that county. (ie – a county with 2 Assembly Districts and a county chair would have the 10 votes allocated to 5 people – 2 votes each. A county with 4 Assembly Districts would have the 10 votes allocated to 9 people so that each SCM would get 1 vote with 2 going to the chair.) If a county has vacant state committee those votes are forfeited.

Report from the Chair: Judith Hunter

Ms. Hunter opened by noting that for most rural counties the results of 2022 elections were bruising.

She said that the results created a sense of urgency about the importance for the DRC to use this opportunity to try to shape the future of state party operations and structure. This prompted her to call an urgent meeting of DRC chairs to develop recommendations to address this situation. The recommendations would be submitted to the leadership of the state committee.

Ms. Hunter said that she was delighted to report that despite only 2 weeks' notice, 41 of 47 counties were present at the Chairs summit on Saturday 12/03/2022 at the Saratoga Hilton. (all counties would have been in attendance were it not for some last minute cases of Covid and the flu).

She was appreciative of the enthusiasm all attendees brought to the task of coming together and getting behind a series of recommendations for improving the state committee.

Those recommendations were forwarded to Chair Jay Jacobs.

Ms. Hunter noted that the January 2, 2023 report from Chair Jacobs included a number of items that mirrored very closely some of the recommendations made by the DRC. In particular were proposals to expand the “footprint” of the state party and to hire permanent staff to support upstate counties.

Ms. Hunter said that Mr. Jacobs told her that he planned to call an in-person joint meeting of the 62 county chairs and the Executive Committee of the state party to discuss proposals to improve the operations and effectiveness of the state committee.

Ms. Hunter said that she would keep pushing to make sure the joint meeting happens and in a venue other than Manhattan.

A question was raised about whether the state committee would be providing housekeeping funds again this year. Per Mr. Perfetti, Chair Jacobs said that it depends on the resources available and the costs associated with implementing some of the recommendations being proposed.

Ms. Hunter said that the DRC would take on one of the recommendations – providing resources for county chairs, especially newly elected chairs. To that end, Dustin Czarny, Onondaga County Democratic Election Commissioner and chair of the NYS Association of Democratic Election Commissioners, has agreed to conduct a training to be held via Zoom. The training will focus on the nuts and bolts of the petitioning process. The training, open to all DRC chairs, will be held February 4 and February 11 at 10:00 am.

Mr. Czarny has also been invited to attend the DRC conference in April to lead a session about the relationship between county chairs/committees and their respective Board of Elections.

In response to a question Ms. Hunter said that a training session about the caucus process will be considered for the spring since towns have until early July to hold caucuses.

Committee Reports

By-Laws Committee: Darlene Baker

No Report

Issues Committee: Keith Batman

Mr. Batman explained that he felt that the committee needed new leadership and that while he would remain a member of the committee he would no longer be able to act as the chair.

Ms. Hunter stressed the importance of the Issues committee in providing background and details on issues of concern to all DRC counties. She asked for anyone interested in chairing the committee to contact her.

Communication and Outreach Committee: Bill Thickstun

Mr. Thickstun was delighted to announce that the 40th edition of the DRC Newsletter was “on the streets” and in-boxes!

He reminded those who did not receive the newsletter to look in their spam filter.

Mr. Thickstun expressed thanks to Karen Ash and Michael Plitt for their work to update NEON the data base. Fully 33% of member records needed to be updated because of the new Assembly district lines and the number of new chairs. He noted that this will need to be done again when the new Assembly District lines are established for the 2024 cycle.

Political Committee: Tim Perfetti

Mr. Perfetti reported that he is finalizing plans for the DRC in-person Advocacy Days for 2023. The tentative schedule is:

Monday January 30: 8 appointments starting at 10:00 am

Tuesday January 31: 7 appointments starting at 9:30 am

Wednesday February 1: 5 appointments starting at 10:30 am

He is working to set up 7 more appointments. All appointments are with members of the State Assembly and State Senate whose districts include all or part of a DRC county.

Mr. Perfetti then gave a brief history of DRC Advocacy Days. The first was in-person in 2020 just as Covid was beginning to impact the nation. Advocacy Days in 2021 and 2022 were done virtually. As effective as the virtual events were, he acknowledged that he was looking forward to a return to in-person meetings.

The three topics to be discussed at the meetings are:

- Election Reform

- We will be advocating for some reforms that should be done but as importantly, persuading legislators not to move forward with proposals that would harm rural counties.
- A brief discussion about the changes being proposed for selection of Election Commissioners and the number of signatures required on petitions took place.
- Rural Broadband
 - Mr. Perfetti acknowledged that this topic has been on the agenda every year but noted that the DRC will stop talking about it when the legislature fully funds broadband access for all New Yorkers.
- Adult Use Cannabis
 - The focus will be on making sure that the social equity parts of the legislation are being effectively implemented.

Mr. Perfetti encouraged board members and others to attend Advocacy Days but with the caveat that typically only 5-7 people are allowed into each meeting. He will work out a schedule to accommodate everyone who attends. He and Ms. Hunter stressed that those who planned to attend need to let them know what day(s) they plan to attend.

He cautioned those considering attending that this can be expensive and that they should be aware of travel and lodging arrangements before committing to attending.

Mr. Perfetti was asked how the topics were selected and what process was used to define the DRC position.

He explained that he asked for ideas from the board at the last 2 board meetings. The important criteria was that the issues selected had to impact all DRC counties and members. He also noted that DRC doesn't necessarily go into meetings with firm positions. In many cases the purpose of the meeting is to make legislators aware of the DRC and of the impact proposed legislation could have on rural counties. The goal is to educate as much as advocate.

He acknowledged that he would look into the suggestion to conduct a virtual "meet up" prior to gathering for Advocacy Days so that talking points could be shared.

Mr. Hughes raised the issue of proposed “Clean Slate” legislation. The bill has passed the State Senate but “died” in the Assembly.

He explained that the purpose of the legislation is to seal the records of some people being released from prison so that they can try to reclaim a “normal” life.

Mr. Hughes recommended that the DRC board meet with the sponsors of the legislation to make them aware of the unintended consequences when the GOP in upstate counties seize the messaging advantage. He wants to make sure that we don’t get caught short like what happened with the SAFE Act and Bail Reform.

Mr. Perfetti said that creating opportunities to mentor new chairs was a priority for the Political Committee – after Advocacy Days.

2023 Conference Report: Judith Hunter for Jane Dodds

Ms. Hunter outlined the programming that has been confirmed at this date:

- ActBlue will host a session explaining how ActBlue can be used with local races. They will also host a training session for treasurers.
- Citizens Action will host a session explaining the mechanics of the public financing state campaigns. State Senate and Assembly candidates will be eligible to have their low donor contributions match by a multiple of 10.
- The DNC will host two sessions. The first will focus on Deep Canvassing and the second will explain effective field operations in all campaigns.
- The Friday dinner will again feature an array of elected officials followed by a dessert reception hosted by AG James.
- Saturday will kick-off with Comptroller DiNapoli’s breakfast.
- The DRC business meeting and elections will be held Saturday morning.

Ms. Hunter said that she was continuing to secure a sponsor for the Saturday luncheon.

Ms. Hunter remarked that as valuable as the opportunities to meet with elected officials and enhance knowledge through the training sessions are,

the real value of the DRC conference is the opportunity to meet with rural Democrats from across the state. It is a chance to network with new and long-time DRC members to learn from each other and share experiences.

She then raised the need to increase the conference registration fee due to a combination of the Saratoga location and generally increased costs. She and Mr. Puglisi recommend increasing the fee from \$125.00 to \$135.00 for two-day registration. The single day and Young Democrat fees will be increased proportionally.

The room rate for the Saratoga Hilton is \$139.00 per night. The link to reserve rooms is in the newsletter and is open now.

Mr. Schimmerling moved for approval of the proposed registration rates. The motion was seconded by Mr. McDougall. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Hunter stressed the importance of selling ads for the conference program book. The money that the DRC is able to return to county committees each year is significantly increased by the success of the program book. Each county is encouraged to place an ad (at a discounted rate). She encouraged board members to sell ads in their local area.

Old Business

None

New Business

None

Announcements

No Announcements

Next Meeting

Sunday February 26, 2023 at 1:30 PM via Zoom

Adjourn

Motion to adjourn made by Mr. Young and seconded by many. The motion passed unanimously at 11:59 AM

Respectfully submitted,

John F. Hurley

Secretary, Democratic Rural Conference