

Democratic Rural Conference

Minutes from a Meeting of the DRC Board of Directors

Held via ZOOM on September 25, 2021, at 10:01 AM

Meeting of the board called to order by Ms. Hunter at 10:05 AM

Board members in attendance

Judith Hunter	Bill Thickstun	Michael Plitt
Jeanne Crane	Ron McDougall	John Hurley
Ted Young	Keith Batman	Dan Farfaglia
Margaret Bartley	Max Della Pia	Michael Monescalchi
Frank Puglisi	Darlene Baker	Tim Perfetti
Cindy Appleton	Bill Hughes	

Board members absent

Daniel Sniezek

Ms. Hunter opened the meeting with a remembrance of Peter Stein who passed away September 19, 2021. She noted that he was a leader in the state Democratic party as well as in Thompkins County for decades. He was very supportive of his wife, Irene, during her successful tenure as the DRC Chair.

Ms. Hunter proposed that the DRC make donation in Peter's name to the Alzheimer's Association (one of the organizations mentioned in the obituary)

Mr. Young moved that a donation of \$250 be made to the Alzheimer's Association in Peter Stein's name. Mr. Puglisi seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Hurley presented minutes from the July 10, 2021 Board of Directors Meeting.

Ms. Baker moved approval of the minutes. Ms. Bartley seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Treasurer Report

Mr. Puglisi reported the following:

DRC Operating Account

\$20,065.55 Bank balance at 09/24/2021

\$ 9,393.89 Funds encumbered from 2020 conference fees

\$10,671.66 Unencumbered balance at 09/24/2021

Federal PAC

\$956.00 Balance at 09/24/2021

Mr. Young moved approval of the Treasurers report. Motion seconded by Mr. Thickstun. The motion passed unanimously.

Report from the Chair

Ms. Hunter initiated a discussion about a conducting a straw poll at the 2022 conference. She explained that while the DRC can't endorse candidates the straw poll offers an opportunity for members to show their preferences.

Ms. Hunter asked Mike Schell to provide the background of the DRC straw poll.

Mr. Schell offered a brief review of the origins of the DRC and the importance of the straw poll as a means of making candidates aware of and bringing credibility to the DRC.

The first straw poll was in conducted at the DRC conference in1998. Prior to that, in the fall of 1997, the DRC sent a questionnaire to all the candidates who had declared candidacy for a state-wide office. After reviewing the responses from each of the candidates and then interviewing them, the DRC ranked them and then released the results to the press in early 1998.

In April 1998, at a two-day meeting of the DRC, candidates for each office were given the opportunity to address the full membership of the DRC and then a secret ballot vote was taken. The straw poll generated extensive media coverage, including major national news outlets.

Because of the attention generated by the straw poll things began to change. Members from rural counties were appointed to DNC. Speakers from rural counties were given the opportunity to address the state committee. Candidates for statewide office began to campaign in rural counties and once elected continued to reach out to the DRC and member counties.

Side note: Mr. Schell agreed to send Ms. Hunter an electronic version of the book he co-authored that details the founding and early years of the DRC.

Ms. Hunter noted that despite the timing of the primary having changed, the straw poll will still have an important role to play in selecting candidates for state-wide office in 2022.

Ms. Hunter said that conducting a successful straw poll at the April 2022 conference will be complicated and will require significant planning.

She shared that we will have 2 voting machines available for the election and that only in person voting will be allowed.

Ms. Hunter proposed the formation of a Straw Poll Committee to be chaired by Mr. Hurley. Mr. Schell, Mr. Jones and Mr. Thickstun have also agreed to serve. In response to a request for additional volunteers, Mr. Perfetti, Mr. Della Pia and Ms. Dodds offered to serve.

Ms. Hunter advised the board that the Progressive Caucus would like to conduct joint candidate (state-wide only) interviews with DRC prior to the February NYDEMS convention.

She assured the board that this would be completely separate from the straw poll and that the DRC could and would not be involved in any endorsement process.

A long discussion followed. Below are concerns raised and questions asked:

“...we need to be sure that we are not perceived as part of the Progressive Caucus”

“...candidates for office want to speak to the issues of the host so by being part of the Progressive Caucus process the candidates will have to address issues of concern to both the DRC and the Progressive’s.

“...a joint interview is a bad idea because the Progressives clearly have an “agenda” and we will be roped into that.”

“...by participating we take on an association with the Progressives that may taint our identity.

“...it does not make sense to interview candidates in January. Many will not even make it through the petitioning process. We need to focus on candidates who will actually be on the primary ballot.”

“...what is our role, will we ask our own questions”

“...the DRC could use this as an opportunity to rate candidates prior to the state convention”

Ms. Hunter noted that for the DRC to get things done at the state level we need to form relationships, and this is an opportunity to have the Progressive get to know the DRC and our issues better.

She stated that the Straw Poll Committee will be tasked with sorting out the details of working with the Progressive Caucus and then report to the board at a December meeting

Ms. Hunter then discussed the County Chairs call with Governor Hochul. She was delighted to hear Governor Hochul speak to challenges of rural counties. Ms. Hunter noted that the Governor knows us because she has been in all of our counties. The Governor also has firsthand knowledge of rural county issues because when represented 6 rural counties when she was a member of Congress.

The Governor said that she understands that there are lots of appointments to be filled. Marty Mack has been selected as her appointments secretary – good news as he also has firsthand knowledge of life as a Democrat in rural counties.

Ms. Hunter announced that she had arranged a special DRC training on the VAN for Tuesday 9/28/2021 at 7:00 PM. The training will be pretty basic but will focus on using the VAN to win local races.

County chairs need to let her know who from their county will be attending so the link can be sent

She explained that more advanced VAN training will take place in the future.

Committee Reports

Nominating Committee

Mr. Jones announced that there is a vacancy on the board as Susan Ottenweller had to step down as she is no longer the Seneca County Chair

Mr. Jones recommended a virtual election take place as quickly as possible. He will contact the other members of the Nominating Committee

By-laws: Ms. Baker

No Report but noted that she will get current by-laws out to board member soon.

Ms. Bartley suggested that County committees should amend language in their by-laws to allow virtual meetings

Ms. Hunter advised that while the language change can be made, it language and process must follow the process prescribed in state election law.

Issues Committee: Mr. Batman

Issues committee has not met but will meet after the election.

Communications Committee: Mr. Thickstun

Mr. Thickstun announced that a newsletter would be published after the election and asked committee chairs to submit reports.

He also said that he would appreciate help with the newsletter would be much appreciated

Ms. Hunter reminded everyone that the DRC Facebook is an important resource for local committees. The articles and information that she posts will provide messaging assistance and other tools.

Political Committee: Mr. Perfetti

Ms. Bartley provided a 2021 example of why we needed to continue the push for gender equity language in our electoral / governmental system. Ms. Bartley explained that a woman running for a seat on a Class 2 (under 10k population) Town Board must run as a councilman. Class 2 towns mandate that the official name of a member of the Town Board / Council is councilman.

To change the office title at the town level legislation to that effect must be passed in assembly and senate.

Ms. Bartley drafted language to change the law, met with legislators and the League of Women Voters and began the process of having the Assembly and Senate introduce legislation to change the title to council person or council member. (Members of Town Board's in Class 1 towns (greater than 10k population) are designated as council members).

Mr. Perfetti and Ms. Bartley requested that the DRC go on record supporting this change to gender neutral language. The following resolution was offered:

A Resolution in Support of Gender Equality Language in NY Elections and Legal Documents

WHEREAS, in New York Town Law, Article 3, Section 20, 1.b the word, 'councilmen,' is used to refer to members of the Town Council. Furthermore, in Article 3, Section 20, part 5, the word, 'councilman,' is used to refer to a member of Town Council, AND

WHEREAS, In New York Town Law, **Article 3, section 20** states as follows:

1.a "Every town of the first class shall have a supervisor, four **town council members**....."

1.b "Every town of the second class shall have a supervisor, two justices of the peace, two **town councilmen**" Most towns of the second class (*those with populations under 10,000 with certain exceptions*) are located in Rural areas of New York State

WHEREAS, Most towns of the second class are located in Rural areas of New York State

WHEREAS, ballots, petitions, and legal descriptions must follow the language of the law which, in this case, uses the words ‘councilmen’ and ‘councilman.’ This language is biased because it assumes the person running for office will be male, AND

WHEREAS, New York is a leader in gender equality and our language must represent our leadership. To correct the bias of the Articles stated above, the terms ‘councilmen,’ and ‘councilman’ must be changed to the gender-neutral term, ‘*Council Member*,’ NOW THEREFORE BE IT

RESOLVED, the New York Legislature and Governor will adapt the term ‘Council Member,’ in place of the terms ‘councilmen,’ and ‘councilman.’

A motion to approve the resolution was made by Mr. Della Pai. The motion was seconded by Mr. Puglisi. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Perfetti was experiencing internet connection issues so he and Ms. Hunter continued with the Political Committee report.

The NYS Senate committee on Election Reform did statewide tour this summer. Both Mr. Perfetti and Ms. Hunter testified.

They also met with Senator Harckham about legislation to reform local BOE’s. One of the “reforms” being discussed is to take the appointment of election commissioners away from county committees / chairs. The proposal is to change the Election Commissioners subject to civil service appointment.

Ms. Hunter stressed that if the legislation to make Election Commissioner a civil service position it will essentially become a means of insure GOP control of the election process.

They testified that the current process is bi-partisan at root. Each party has its own commissioner and equal levels of staff.

Ms. Hayek expressed concern about the conflict of interest posed when a county chair also serves as the election commissioner.

Mr. Perfetti noted that Senator Harckham’s legislation also addresses concerns about nepotism and cronyism at the BOE’s.

Ms. Hunter asked that board members reach out to Assembly and Senate members to make them aware of our issues

Ms. Hunter reported that the DRC conducted a series of regional legislative meet & greets earlier in the summer. This was a good exercise in educating legislators about the DRC and making them aware that we are their allies. They were made aware that we need their help with messaging. The problem has been that laws are passed and we don’t get the talking points and messaging to help sell the legislation in rural counties (SAFE Act, ball reform etc.)

One clear benefit of the meet and greets is that Senator Breslin acknowledge that the DRC needed to be brought into Senate Democrats communication loop.

Conference Committee

Ms. Dodds reported that because we did not have a conference last year we are actually in pretty good shape for the 2022 event.

The conference will be help April 29 / 30, 2022 at the completely renovated “Desmond” in Albany.

Since the conference will take place in an even year we will need to plan for Congressional, Assembly and Senate candidate breakout sessions. This will be especially important since all of the races will be held with new district lines.

This will also be an opportunity to meet with all the Statewide office candidates a few weeks before the primary.

No decision has been made regarding the conference fee.

Ms. Hunter reported that she has begun reaching out to all Statewide elected to get the conference on their calendars as well as to host their regular events.

Ms. Hunter reported that early Friday afternoon staff members from state-wide elected officials will hold “office hours” to meet with DRC members.

The question as to whether vaccination should we required for conference attendance.

Discussion followed with the consensus being that we should require proof of vaccination .

Mr. Della Pia moved that proof of vaccination be required for in-person attendance.

Mr. Young seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Old business

New business

Working Group Reports

Technology and Campaign training

Covered during VAN discussion

Messaging Working Group

Need new leadership since Susan is no longer on the DRC Board.

The “Democrats Deliver” message should be used by local candidate to ccentuate the positive achievements of Democrats in New York.

Next Meeting: Saturday December 4, 2021

Motion to adjourn made by Mr. Young at 11:57 am. Ms. Crane seconded the motion.
The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

John F. Hurley

DRC Secretary