

THE DEMOCRATIC RURAL CONFERENCE OF NEW YORK STATE

Bulletin #41

January 2024

Message from the DRC Chair

Hello, DRC Members and Friends,

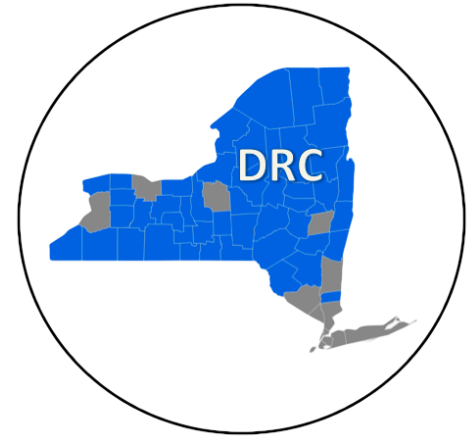
2024 has arrived, and it is more important than ever that rural Democrats perform well in New York. In addition to everything else we'll be doing, we have a chance to be key players in making Hakeem Jeffries Speaker of the House and putting a party which actually believes in governing back in control!

Winning back the House will be one of the main focuses of this spring's DRC. Registration will open next month, but please mark your calendars and plan to join us at the Desmond in Albany on April 26 and 27.

One of the most important things the DRC can do is to educate our downstate colleagues about the different conditions many of us face, compared with the bluer parts of New York. They simply don't believe what Republicans get away with in some of our counties! So please, send me verifiable anecdotes of things that the opposition is doing in your area. I've received a few already, but I don't yet have a critical mass of "upstate outrages" to share.

Finally, I'd like us all to take a victory lap. The DRC Board wrote a letter to Governor Hochul urging her to veto a bill passed last session that would have damaged the new public financing program for state elections. She listened to us about the importance of maintaining the original purpose of public financing: elevating the impact of small donors. Having this new system intact, thanks to the Governor's veto, makes a convincing argument to potential candidates for State Senate and Assembly. Having contributions from donors who give under \$250 matched 6:1 can be a game changer for rural Democrats!

Sincerely,
Judith Hunter, Chair
Democratic Rural Conference of NY State
judith.hunter@gmail.com, (585) 615-2986



www.nysdrc.org

Visit and join our Facebook page at

**Democratic Rural Conference of
New York State**

FACEBOOK ADS

The DRC has obtained a Promotions Business License for Facebook ads which is available for use by county committees. If you're interested, please contact Judith Hunter.

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 Judith Hunter.

THE DEMOCRATIC RURAL CONFERENCE OF NEW YORK STATE

WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TO?

Last year a group from the DRC attended advocacy meetings in Albany between January 30 and February 1, 2023. Beyond the specific issues covered, these meetings help the DRC establish productive relationships with our state legislators and their staff.

We met individually with Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and all 21 State Senators and Assembly members from DRC counties, 20 over the course of the three days and the last in a follow up Zoom call. We also had a very productive meeting with Senator May's Commission on Rural Resources, which is now being headed up by Corey Mosher of Madison County. Our 2023 lobbying issues included:

- 1) Election Reform—we supported minimum staffing standards for Boards of Election in small counties and continuing education for staff, while we opposed mandated public hearings, arbitrary minimum standards, or civil service commissioners, which would effectively turn election administration over to Republicans in about 40 counties.
- 2) Adult Use Cannabis—social justice on implementation rules and distribution of revenue.
- 3) Rural Broadband, as many residents in our counties still don't have high-speed access.

Many other issues came up in these meetings, notably the move of many local elections to even-numbered years, which we supported, the legislature passed, and the Governor has recently signed into law.

The DRC held its annual spring conference in April 2023 at the Hilton in Saratoga Springs. The theme was "Building the Bench." The schedule included workshops on the new NYS campaign finance program (by Karen Wharton of Citizen Action), on Act Blue (by Jamil Siddiqui and Aleah LaForce of Act Blue), on Field Work and Deep Canvassing (by Liza Abraham, DNC), on How to Run a Caucus (by Frank Puglisi, DRC Treasurer), on Assistance with Federal Grants (Senator Gillibrand's staff), and a state legislative update hosted by Assemblymember Carrie Woerner with guests NYS Senators Michelle Hinchey and Lea Webb. The opening reception was sponsored by Governor Hochul, Friday night dessert by Attorney General Tish James, Saturday breakfast by Comptroller Tom DiNapoli, and Saturday lunch by Senator Gillibrand, with remarks by Lt. Gov. Antonio Delgado.

At the general membership meeting, we re-elected Judith Hunter as Chair, Timothy Perfetti as Vice Chair, Frank Puglisi as Treasurer, John Hurley as Secretary, and Darlene Baker as Parliamentarian. We re-elected Kimberly Davis, Maggie Bartley, Michael Plitt, William Hughes and Tom Schimmerling as at-large Directors and elected James Mills for the first time. No races were contested.

THE DEMOCRATIC RURAL CONFERENCE OF NEW YORK STATE

As a result of the successful conference, we were able to allocate \$450 per county to the 47 DRC counties.

In May, we sponsored a Zoom session on candidate recruitment with guest presenters Molly Kraus (Eleanor's Legacy), Julie Leitner and Tisa Rodriguez.

At the state committee meeting in May, the DRC sponsored a resolution calling on the state legislature to pass legislation that would allow county committees to designate candidates for nomination by weighted vote (as the state committee does for statewide candidates) while still allowing ballot access to anyone wishing to petition independently. The motion received support from the Progressive Caucus, the Resolutions Committee, and the state party Chair, and passed the state committee on a voice vote.

In June we sent a letter to Governor Hochul urging her to veto S07564/A07760, which would have undermined the 2019 campaign finance reform law by raising the number of donors needed to access the public system and by matching the first \$250 of any donation, no matter how large. In December she vetoed the bill.

At the State Committee meeting in November, the DRC supported five reform resolutions. The first called for adding two virtual state committee meetings per year to focus on party building and expanding the time for caucus and committee meetings at the two in-person meetings. It passed on a voice vote. The second called for better reporting to members from the leadership of the state committee and its subcommittees. It was tabled. The third called for funding county committees in the first quarter of each calendar year at \$5,000 to each DRC county and \$10,000 to each of the 15 more populated counties for staffing, offices, website development, newsletters, database management or other infrastructure needs as determined by county chairs and their committees. It was amended to "respect and honor" the state party chair's existing grant program, which provided \$200,000 to committees this year, despite the strong urging of DRC Chair Judith Hunter and others for a more reliable funding stream. The fourth resolution called for giving county chairs a vote at state committee meetings. It was tabled. The fifth called for adoption and funding of the Democratic Civic Network and County Manager, a software system designed explicitly for the NYS Democratic Committee that combines a database of members with an internal social media platform for party use. The resolution was amended to provide no funding for the system and merely recommend that county chairs investigate it.

While these resolutions mostly failed, we did get more attention to the needs of rural counties than we've seen in the past. Many downstate state committee members attended the DRC caucus meeting and expressed support for Chair Hunter's appeal that the party invest more in the rural counties.

THE DEMOCRATIC RURAL CONFERENCE OF NEW YORK STATE

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Treasurer's Report – Frank Puglisi

REPORT IS AS OF 9/23/2023

STATE ACCOUNT-

BALANCE AS OF JULY 29, 2023, \$29,526.77

- 150.11 – NEON August

29,376.66

- 150.11 – NEON September

29,226.55

- 21,150.00 – Allocation Checks to Counties

8,076.55

+ 250.00 – Donation (Refunded Below)

8,326.55

- 250.00 – Donation Refunded

8,076.55

+ 250.00 – Donation

8,326.55

+ 1.92 – Donation (reoccurring)

8,326.55

+ 19.20 – Donation (reoccurring)

8,345.75 Bank Balance as of September 23, 2023

FEDERAL PAC –

BANK BALANCE AS OF July 29, 2023, \$10,056.00

NO ACTIVITY

\$10,056.00 (BANK BALANCE AS OF September 23, 2023)

Conference Committee – Jane Dodds

The 2024 DRC Conference will be held at the Crowne Plaza Albany (Desmond) on April 26 and 27. Registration will open in February.

THE DEMOCRATIC RURAL CONFERENCE OF NEW YORK STATE

Nominating Committee – Phil Jones

At the annual conference in April, the membership will be filling (as of now) the four Regional Vice Chair positions and five Director At-Large positions. The term of office for these board positions is 2 years. To be a candidate, you must be from a DRC County that has paid their 2024 DRC dues and be a County Chair or State Committee member.

Individuals wishing to run for any of these positions are encouraged to express their interest to Phil Jones, Chair of the Nominating Committee, by email at paj12147@gmail.com **by NO LATER than Midnight April 20 , 2024** in order to appear on the virtual ballot. Write in candidates will be accommodated on the ballot.

More information and details regarding the election will be forthcoming in the next few months. See map at this link:

<https://drcny.app.neoncrm.com/neon/resource/drcny/files/State%20Map%20as%20of%20January%202024.pdf>

to review who are members of the Board, when their terms expire, and the geographic composition of the Board.

Political Committee – Tim Perfetti

A group of board members will attend this year's legislative Advocacy Days in Albany. Issues will include election reform, in particular legislation to require minimum BOE staffing and eliminate part time commissioners, and legislation to enact the resolution passed at the May State Committee meeting (see above) concerning party designation of candidates as an alternative to petitioning. We will support A253, a bill sponsored by William Magnarelli of Syracuse, that would allow county committees to designate candidates for county offices by County Committee vote, just as the State Committee can. Any candidate receiving 25% of the Committee vote would be on the primary ballot; candidates could also petition for ballot access as they do now.

We will also be opposing the sale of wine in grocery stores (which is bad for small liquor stores and wineries) and, as always, pressing for improved rural broadband access, which is still spotty in many of our counties.

Communications and Outreach – Bill Thickstun

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.

THE DEMOCRATIC RURAL CONFERENCE OF NEW YORK STATE

DRC voting 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 me (315-527-1291, wthickstun@gmail.com).

DRC Board Services

The DRC has licenses for Zoom and Facebook ads that we can share with county committees. If you're interested, please contact Judith Hunter.

Officers and members of the DRC Board of Directors would be happy to speak about the DRC at your county events. Please contact Judith Hunter 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.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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