

Perry County Democratic Committee Meeting Minutes
January 21, 2021

Attendees:

Jacob Zentichko	Cindy Naylor
Steve Naylor	Barb Hensch
Alane Balchunas	Karen Anderson
Melanie Wertz	Emily Burt-Hedrick
Susan Washinger	Ann Miller

Guest: Judge Maria McLaughlin (candidate for PA Supreme Court)

Meeting held on Zoom.

Initial part of meeting was a “meet and greet” with Judge Maria McLaughlin, who is a Democratic candidate for the PA Supreme Court. She talked about the court sessions being held on Zoom at least through March, possibly through May this year. The work of the courts has not stopped for the pandemic.

Judge McLaughlin spent 19 years in the Philadelphia DA’s office. She fought for kids in the Civil Unity. She worked with the ACLU for any case in which a defendant could be jailed for lack of payment of child support.

She is now on the Court of Common Pleas in Philadelphia, and has been there for 6 years. This includes both Family court and Criminal court. She is proud that none of her rulings have ever been overturned on appeal.

The Primary election will be May 18.

Steve Naylor suggested to Judge McLaughlin that she connect with Wade Fowler and Jim Ryan at the Perry County Times to get her message out.

Judge McLaughlin visited for about 20 minutes, then had to leave to attend other Zoom meetings.

November 2020 minutes were approved by the group. Melanie moved to approve, and Karen seconded, and approval was unanimous.

Jacob stated that Jerry Philpott has reported that the committee has \$2491.60 in its bank account.

Jacob is working to participate with the PA State Democratic committee, but it is hard to do that right now using Zoom. Jacob and Elaine Doran are both voting members of the PA Dems State Committee. The South Central Caucus is a subdivision which we can also participate in for bringing matters before the state committee. Jacob is also reaching out to the State Rural Caucus, whose goal is to bridge the gap between rural and urban Democrats.

Jacob spoke about his desire to establish a “secular” Democratic caucus, a voice for non-religious Democrats in PA. He said that there will be a kick-off meeting of interested members in February. This caucus will not initially be recognized by the State Committee.

There was quite a bit of discussion about this, since several members were unclear about what this means. Jacob responded that the non-religious population is the fastest growing demographic group. He said that many candidates are expected to be religious—Karen Anderson was repeatedly asked about her religious affiliation while running for office. We need to attract candidates for office who may not be affiliated with a religious group. There was concern expressed that this might give Republicans the ammunition to say that Democrats are “godless”. Karen talked about her experiences when running for state representative; she was attacked for her religion (raised Catholic, now atheist). Karen also said that she has resigned from the Farm Bureau because of their policies against LGBTQ individuals and abortion rights. Karen agrees that there needs to be a place for non-religious people, as well as religious, to get support for running for office. We do not want “religious tests” for candidates. But it would be helpful to have guidance for candidates on how to deal with religious issues. Jacob stated that there is a stigma attached to non-religious or non-Protestant candidates. How can candidates who are from minority, non-Protestant religions, or who are non-religious, successfully navigate such “religious test” issues?

Steve Naylor said that he served 16 years in the South Central PA caucus. We must be solid as a party, respecting all religions, and respecting those who are atheists or agnostics.

Steve Naylor said that that he intends to terminate his position with the Farmer PAC committee. That is because most of the money goes to Republicans, and all of the PA Republican Congresspeople voted for and support Trump's lies about the election results. He is undecided about whether or not to continue in his position as Director on the Perry County Farm Bureau.

Melanie was concerned that Elaine Doral has been our rep on the South Central PA Caucus. She may not be able to Zoom. Is she still interested in being part of that caucus? Jacob said that when we can again meet IN PERSON, we can then review the South Central Caucus positions.

Regarding local elections. Petitions for candidates to be on the ballot will become available next month. The "Contest Every Race" group helps people run for office, and helps recruit them.

We hope that by the end of this year we will again be able to do fund-raising events. We need to think about new venues, since River View closed as a result of the pandemic closures.

Discussion of Commissioner meetings followed. Melanie calls into the Commissioner meetings weekly (held on Zoom or similar platform). Big issue is the Budget. There is a tax increase of 1.25 mil coming. The County deficit has gone up over \$1M in a single year. Melanie has asked the Commissioners what cuts were made to reduce the deficit.

Bill Bunt, the solicitor, has told the Commissioners not to answer questions. But Melanie and Karen Anderson will keep attending meetings, and asking questions. They encourage more people to attend these meetings on Monday mornings. Steve Naylor said that the tax increase should not have been necessary. There was money set aside for HVAC and vehicles that could have been used to fill the budget gap. Melanie said that she asked about that, but got no answer. Steve said that there is money in reserve, but they do not want to use it; they want their "slush fund".

Melanie and Karen have also asked the Commissioners about the Vaccine Rollout in Perry County. Who is in charge? Where will the vaccine centers be? All they have been told is to refer to the PA Department of Health website.

Ann Miller said that per the Dept of Health website, the local County Emergency management agency is delegated the responsibility to get the vaccines out. In Perry County that is a person by the name of Foltz, who is the head of the Perry County 911/Emergency Mgt agency.

Melanie stated the conflicts of interest on the part of the Commissioners continue. Brenda Watson has conflicts of interest with respect to the Perry County Economic Development Authority.

Further discussion ensued about the availability of vaccines and how long waiting lists are becoming.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:48 PM.