

Perry County Democratic Committee Meeting Minutes
February 18, 2021

Attendees:

Jacob Zentichko	Melanie Wertz
Karen Anderson	Jerry Philpott
Kelley Griswold	Alane Balchunas
Susan Washinger	Dana Cotton
Barb Hench	Michelle Jones
Kirk Hench	Mary Colledge
Emily Burt-Hedrick	

Guests:

Codi Steigerwald
Jill Beck
Jody Rebarchak

Meeting held on Zoom.

Jacob opened the meeting for business about 6:35 PM. He initially asked that we have a moment of silence for those we have lost recently—Mark Whitmoyer and Bill Doran (husband of Elaine Doran).

Jacob mentioned that a late clarification of the January 2021 minutes was sent out; the minutes were approved by unanimous consent.

Jerry said that our Committee bank account balance was now \$2492.62. We have recouped what we spent on the election. Asking for donations for political signs was helpful.

Melanie extended Thank You messages to the new folks who helped out with the last election. Welcome to the committee!!

Next Jacob invited two candidates for the next election to speak to us.

Candidate Introductions:

First was Jill Beck, who is running for Superior Court Judge:

Ms. Beck is from Allegheny County. She explained that there are two intermediate appellate courts in PA. One is the Superior Court, which handles criminal, civil and family appeals. The other is the Commonwealth Court. Below them is the “Court of Common Pleas”, which is the county-level trial courts.

Ms. Beck has worked for years advocating for children. She also worked as a trial lawyer, advocate, before the Superior Court. And she also worked as an attorney for the Superior Court. She is now part of a litigation team on a law firm, but is also running for Judge of Superior Court. She does a lot of pro-bono work, including issues of housing security, domestic violence, voter protection, criminal (first amendment/speech/demonstration) issues, and 4th amendment protection from illegal search and seizure. She is very concerned about representing the most vulnerable. She has received a “highly recommended” rating from the Allegheny County Bar Association.

Her website is www.JillBeck.com, and on twitter is <@JillBeck>

There was some discussion of PA House Bill 38, which was introduced by the Republican legislators in response to the PA Supreme Court throwing out the gerrymandered districts in time for the 2018 election.

Next was Codi Steigerwald, who is running to be the Magisterial District Judge (MDJ) for the district 41-3-03, in Perry County. There are 3 MDJ districts in Perry County. The third district includes Marysville, Duncannon, Wheatfield Twp, New Buffalo Twp, Penn Twp, Rye Twp. At the present time, only MDJ Frownfelter is working, and she is covering all 3 districts.

Mr. Steigerwald has just been certified by the PA Supreme Court, which is a prerequisite for holding the office. He in the past served as a Probate Judge in the Charlotte, NC area. He is a military veteran and he has clerked for a Federal Judge in North Carolina. In law school he represented domestic violence and child abuse victims, thus getting real world experience.

Mr. Steigerwald explained that the MDJ position is a powerful position, in that it is the gatekeeper to all trial courts. Any bail or traffic issues come before the MDJ;

civil suits, with dollar value up to \$12K come to the MDJ, and the MDJ gives search warrants and arrest warrants.

Mr. Steigerwald wants to create better communication between the MDJs, between the MDJs and the DA's office, with the borough councils and with the township governing boards. He feels it is important to talk to citizens and truly understand what is going on. He is on the board of the New Bloomfield Library, and he wrote a grant application for them for CARES act funding.

Updates:

Following Candidate introductions, Jacob gave an update on his activities. He has joined the Agriculture committee of the PA Democrats Rural Caucus. He participated in a planning meeting in which they discussed educating candidates and helping candidates with their campaigns. The Rural caucus, and its committees are important for influencing the platform of the State Party. One thing that is needed is to bridge the gap between urban and rural Democrats. Jacob needs input from our Farming members, so he can understand what is important to them. Please let him know, please provide your input to him.

Melanie suggested that one issue might be with local Farmers Markets in Perry County. Many are struggling now due to COVID. We need to identify where these farm markets are, and get the word about them out to the county, so that we can all support local food production.

Jerry pointed out that the Republicans "own" the rural vote; we need to chip away at that.

Jacob pointed out that Governor Wolf has been pushing for agriculture.

Dana Cotton introduced herself, and explained that she is a new member of the Perry County Planning Commission, since October 2020. One issues that they are looking at is Storm water management. Storm water ends up running into our streams and rivers, and any management plan will affect farmers. She asked "how can we help both farmers and help preserve our waterways?".

Karen Anderson said that we need Dana as a line of communication; Dana said she is happy to do that. Dana works for an environmental consulting company. However, the Planning Commission is NOT an enforcement agency. But the Planning commission has a role in planning for land use, including subdivisions. Enforcement of environmental issues falls to the Conservation District in the

county, and to PA Dept of Environmental Protection (DEP). Unfortunately, the Perry County conservation service has not been helpful for complaints, and has referred complainants to DEP. DEP has referred the complaint back to the county conservation district. Melanie pointed out that some county conservation services are proactive, some do nothing.

Jody Rebarchak introduced herself as a Democrat, but not a Perry Countian. She talked about how the Lebanon County Conservation District has been proactive and helpful. She suggested that Dana might want to open a dialog with the Perry County Conservation District.

Elections

Jacob stated that yesterday (2/17), the nominating petitions came out for the upcoming primary election. How will we circulate nominating petitions in the time of COVID?

Jacob said that he will post the lists of Perry County OPEN offices (school boards, borough councils, etc) and provide to all.

Barb Hench asked about the DA position, since current DA Andy Bender is running for Judge. Jerry Philpott said that if Andy Bender is elected as judge, then he will take office in January 2022, and someone will be appointed to fill out his term in the DA office until his term is up. No one knows of any Democratic lawyers in the county who are willing to run for the position. Jerry said that any lawyer will likely cross-file—in both Democratic and Republican primaries. The DA position is a county position; the judge seats cover both Juniata and Perry Counties.

The Sheriff is currently running unopposed.

Nominating petitions are due to the County Voter Office (Bonnie) by 4PM on March 9.

Several suggestions were made with respect to petition signing:

- a. Melanie volunteered to set up a table in her garage, where people could come sign.
- b. Jody Rebarchak suggested a drive-through petition signing.

- c. Codi Steigerwald has said that he plans to walk his petition around. He pointed out that he has had both his COVID vaccines, and he is always masked in public. Codi needs 100 Democratic and 100 Republican signatures to be on the ballots in the Primary (he is cross-filing). He has had more luck with getting Republican signatures, since he has been liaising with the VFW. But he needs help with the Democratic signatures.
 - i. Jody Rebarchak suggested that Codi post on this Facebook page (which has 495 likes), and provide information about how people can contact Codi in order to sign his petition. Codi agreed that made sense. His Facebook page is <Codi-Steigerwald-for-Magisterial-District Judge-02516868551598>.
 - ii. Melanie suggested sending an email to the PeCo Dems email list with Codi's contact information and candidacy information, so that people can contact Codi about signing the petition.
 - iii. Codi is willing to go Door-to-door, with facemask and appropriate social distancing, in order to get the signatures.

The 3rd Magisterial District, in which Codi is running for MDJ, is the most populous Perry County District. Only people who live in that district can sign the petition.

Melanie pointed out that the yearly Mail-in Ballot applications were sent out to those that had signed up for them. She said that she never received hers, although her husband did. She called into the voter registration office about that, and apparently there is some confusion. If one applied for the mail-in ballot originally using the State website, one may not get an application. Bonnie told Melanie that all the applications were sent out last week. If you did not get yours, please call Bonnie.

Note: Emily did get her application, and thinks she DID sign up for mail-in ballot on the State Website. So the process is clearly not working well in all cases!

Other Discussions:

a. Sanctuary County and Prison

Melanie talked about the recent article in the Newspapers about the County and Prison wanting to get of a “Sanctuary County” list. As a result, Melanie went to a Prison Board meeting, via Zoom. Andy Bender, the DA, is the chair of the Prison Board. Melanie gave her opinion that the proposed policy is a violation of 4th Amendment rights. Does the Prison Board require Federal arrest warrants for prisoners to be turned over to ICE? If not, then the County has left us open for lawsuits for warrantless arrests by ICE. Melanie said that Andy Bender rudely refused to answer the question. Also, the group that has called Perry County a Sanctuary County, the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS), has been designated by the Southern Poverty Law Center as a Hate Group.

Alane asked who would an MDJ interact with ICE trying to take a prisoner?

Dana Cotton asked about Demographic information on the Prison population. She has found that data on all other PA counties on the internet, but there is nothing for Perry County. It was suggested that she do a Right-To-Know request to the County to get that information.

b. “Picture Perry “ Surveys

Dana said that Perry County Planning commission is working on a Comprehensive plan, and has surveys out on the web for input. Into that comprehensive plan. The website for the surveys is:

<<https://www.tcrpc-pa.org/picture-perry>>

c. Resumption of In-Person PeCoDems meetings.

Jacob asked about a time-frame to resume In-Person Democratic committee meetings. The county Virus numbers are coming down, and vaccinations have started. Even after we resume in-person meetings, he plans to make Zoom

participation available. Barb Hensch asked if we could set up in-person meetings in the County Courthouse, in the court room, with masks required, where social distancing can be practiced. Jerry Philpott suggested maybe August. Jacob concurred that mid-summer may be a reasonable target to resume in-person meetings.

Meeting was adjourned about 7:48 PM.

Respectfully submitted:

Emily Burt-Hedrick
Secretary.