

Perry County Democrats Meeting

5/20/21

Attendees:

Jacob Zentichko	Melanie Wertz	Margueritte Colledge
Emily Burt-Hedrick	Evelyn D'Elia	Tess Burgess
Bruce Burgess	Dana Cotton	Lara Vracarich
Karen Anderson	Ann Miller	Barb Hench
Alane Balchunas	Hench (first name unknown)	

Meeting was held in the Penn State Extension Building in New Bloomfield. Seven people attended in person, seven people on Zoom link.

Tess Burgess and Bruce Burgess were welcomed to the meeting as new members. They recently relocated to New Bloomfield from Hanover.

Meeting started about 6:35 PM

The minutes of the 4/15/21 Perry County Democrats meeting were approved after a motion by Melanie, seconded by Margueritte.

Jacob noted that Jerry was not able to be there to give the treasurer's report, but nonetheless we are in good shape financially.

Jacob noted that there have been no meetings in last month of the State Democratic committee. He noted that the Rural Caucus meeting is tonight, but he, Jacob, will miss the meeting. He expects that the next meeting, the Fall meeting (they meet quarterly), will be in person.

As for the coalition of groups concerned about the US 12th district representative, Fred Keller, they are still trying to figure out when to meet. Melanie noted that she would have volunteered to help out on this coalition, but since the original plans were to meet on Saturday afternoons, she is unable, due to scheduling.

Jacob noted that the EMAIL sign up option on the Perry County Democratic Committee website has been shut down because it was being spammed, and the spam filter was not working. Jacob said he would get it fixed. The sign up form has been taken down, but people can still sign up by sending an EMAIL or on Facebook.

Old Business

Jacob introduced, for the second time, the proposal, by the “Citizens Take Action” group, to amend the US Constitution to counter the Citizens United Supreme Court decision, and to support Campaign Finance Reform. Jacob passed out copies of the proposed amendment, and also displayed it on screen for Zoom attendees. Jacob also read the amendment language.

The Citizens Take Action group has a headquarters mailing address in California. They already have several hundred endorsements for this proposed amendment.

The text of the proposal follows:

“To foster robust political debate and to protect government and the electoral process from undue influence by artificial entities and aggregations of wealth,

“Nothing in this Constitution shall prevent Congress and the States from placing limits on the contributions made to a candidate for elected office, on expenditures advocating for or against any such candidate, on a candidate’s own expenditures, and on expenditures advocating for or against any ballot initiative or referendum.

“Congress and the States shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation, including by implementing public campaign financing, and may distinguish between natural persons and corporations, unions or other legally recognized entities.

“Nothing contained in this article shall be construed to grant Congress or the States the power to abridge the freedom of the press.”

In discussion of the proposal, there was curiosity about why the final sentence only refers to Freedom of the Press, and not freedom of speech. Jacob suggested that the final language will change before this is actually passed as an amendment for ratification. Furthermore, as Melanie pointed out, this only gives Congress and the States the power to enact legislation restricting campaign financing; the amendment itself does not put any limits on campaign financing. After ratification, subsequent legislation would need to be passed by Congress, and /or the States, that specifically would limit campaign financing.

After discussion, Emily moved and Melanie gave a second, to a motion that the Committee WILL endorse this proposed amendment. The motion passed.

New Business

Next, Jacob brought up the issue of “How Do We Improve Active Membership?” Clearly we do not have enough active members to cover all the responsibilities and tasks that the committee wishes to accomplish.

Should we change meeting times? How do we expand opportunities for activism?

Dana pointed out that the Zoom option for attending meetings is very important. She also suggested that we have a way to call Democrats about upcoming events.

Lara suggested that perhaps the meeting day could be changed every other month, since some people have Thursday evening conflicts.

Jacob pointed out that the Meeting dates/times depend on the availability of a Room in which to meet.

Margueritte stated that there was a poor Democratic turnout during the Tuesday 5/18 Primary election.

Melanie expressed frustration with how the County handled the role of volunteers for vote counting on Tuesday evening 5/18. She had been assured by Bonnie (County Voter office) that all people would wear masks. We had several volunteers show up, all expecting all people to be masked. But Tuesday evening, it turned out we did not need all those volunteers, and most of the people in the room were without masks, apparently based on the new CDC guidelines for vaccinated people (which came out Monday 5/17).

Why did the County not communicate with Melanie (vice-chair of committee) or Jacob (chair of committee) the new policy on masks and the actual number of volunteers needed? Jacob said he will work on that; he thinks that the County only wants to work with the chairperson, not with the vice chairperson.

Evelyn stated a concern the committee needs to do more to get information out about the candidates that appear on the primary Democratic ballot. She did not vote for some because she did not know if they are truly registered Democrats, if they are just cross-filing (Magisterial Judge candidates and Judge candidates frequently file on both party ballots) , and if they truly hold values that she shares. She wants more information about the candidate than just information about their families. She wants to know their education and licenses, and profession. She suggested we form a Candidates committee.

It was pointed out that the League of Women Voters (LWV) does send questionnaires to all candidates who run at a state level or federal level. Also the LWV analysis of the proposed PA constitutional amendments was very good, and informative.

But what about local Perry County candidates? We do not get LWV data on those.

Alane suggested that we could send out emails about local candidates, and also put information about them on our Facebook page. We need to whip up enthusiasm about the 2022 election, and we need to provide good candidate information.

Lara suggested we do a postcard campaign. Discussion ensued in which the postcard campaign for Karen Anderson was reviewed—we had very good volunteerism to create over 3000 postcards for Karen’s candidacy.

Dana stated that we need Daily activity on the Facebook Page, in order for it to come up to the top on readers’ Timelines. She also suggested that we start making calls and sending text messages.

Melanie agreed that we need to get out information about “who do I vote for?” and “how do I write-in a candidate?” People WANT information about candidates.

Evelyn emphasized that county elections have a great deal of impact on our lives.

Also, Melanie pointed out, that there has been confusion about the roles of Poll Watchers, Vote Counters and Canvassers—all volunteers jobs for which we need Democratic volunteers at each election. She pointed out that we have 236 people on our EMAIL list. We need to explain to people the roles and responsibilities and time commitment for each of these volunteer jobs. We need someone who can research the rules and regulations, and also write in easily understood wording, a description of each of these volunteer opportunities. Margueritte noted that Poll Workers will work from 6AM to 8: 30 PM on Election days.

Discussion ensued on the issue of identifying candidates and getting information on them. Melanie pointed out that the Perry County Democratic Committee has never endorsed any candidates in primaries.

Jacob pointed out that many local candidates running as Democrats do not coordinate with or talk to the Perry County Democratic Committee.

Evelyn is willing to head up a Candidates Committee.

Dana asked what support would a Democratic candidate for a local Perry Cty office get from the PeCo Democratic Committee?

Discussion continued with respect to Candidates. Dana asked about “open appointments”. These are positions not filled by election, but where someone might be appointed to a government position, perhaps in a township or board. Jacob said that we need to keep our eyes open for such opportunities.

Several issues were discussed with respect to potential Democratic candidates. Melanie said that she met a volunteer Tuesday night at the vote-counting who had wanted to go to training in “how-to-be a candidate”. She tried to sign up for the training, but found that it costs money that she did not have. Melanie said that we should have a pot of money to sponsor people to go to candidate training. Jacob said that the problem is we may not know that person, a person who has never come to meetings or volunteered with the committee, and that they could just take the money and run. Dana replied that if they did show up at meetings and get active, then we should sponsor their training. Evelyn suggested that we could REIMBURSE them for the training afterwards. Dana added that we could ask for a commitment for volunteering for a period of time, after the training, in order to get the scholarship to attend training.

Discussion then turned to a Get Out the Vote (GOTV) event that we need to in October. Since the River Bend venue has closed, we need a new venue. Margueritte stated that the Shermans Creek Inn, on Rt. 34 in Shermansdale, is doing a fundraiser for the Friends of Spring Township Park. Jacob said that we need to locate a venue that is more accessible (central?) to all of Perry County, not just in Newport. Lara said that there is a possible venue on Cold Storage Road, a barn on the former Thebes property, so-called “Outlaw Ranch”.

It was noted that the Perry County Fair is going to be held this year in person. That is an event we need to be present in. Alane asked if we could start making assignments for Fair volunteers now, not waiting until 2 weeks before.

Melanie stated that we need to start planning for the fair—we need to obtain “giveaways”, like canvas bags, pens, etc. We also need to have volunteers to work at the fair as part of the Perry Cty Democratic committee booth. Jacob said that he will get the Volunteer opportunities for the Fair out in the next week, and he will see what decorations we need. Jacob will also contact General election candidates to get their literature to give out at the Fair.

In terms of volunteer roles in the Committee, Jacob will get together a list of what kinds of jobs need to be done. He specifically said that he would like more Admin people who can work on the website and on the Facebook page. He cannot do it all himself. We do need to be more active on FB. Tess Burgess expressed interest in helping with Facebook.

Alane asked about how the County would be spending the \$9Million dollars it will be receiving under the American Rescue Plan? How do we get involved to express interest and provide input? The Commissioners have said that they would be putting out information on that...but no one has heard anything yet. We need more people who can attend the weekly Commissioner meetings on Monday mornings at 10AM (Zoom is an option). Karen and Melanie have been attending for years, and they feel that more people should attend, because they are not being listened to anymore. Alane has been attending recently, which is helpful.

A motion for adjournment was made by Margueritte, and seconded by Melanie. Meeting adjourned at 7:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted:

Emily Burt-Hedrick