

# Eau Claire County Democratic Party Coffee Klatch Notes

Thursday, October 31, 2019

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Present: Marjorie Bunce, Carlyn Conway, Carol Craig (facilitator), Carolyn Dunning, Donna Fortin, Judy Gatlin, Bonnie Golden, Deb & Dave Gratz, Ann Heywood, Rollie Hicks, Sally Lee, Mike Lindsay, Linda Lodolce, Bob Matthews, Kris MacCallum, Ann McKinley, Mary Mickel, Linda Norton, Mike O'Brien, Pat & Dave Reinardy, Connie Russell (recorder), Liz Spencer, Darla Sorenson, Margetta Souder, Phil Swanhorst, Kathy Tuttle, Groucho Marx (a.k.a. Charlie Warner), Jerry Wilkie, Pat Williams, Robert Wojnowski, Eleanor Wolf

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Next Coffee Klatch** -- Thursday, November 7; 10 a.m. – 12 Noon; Resource Center, 440 Broadway St.

Come join a lively conversation about current events – share opinions, experiences, resources with a progressive-minded community. Come when you can, leave when you must. The coffee will be on and the treats will be out. Encourage your friends, neighbors, and others to join us for respectful conversation leading to constructive action.

**Guest for November 7:** Susan Wolfram, Chair of JONAH's Housing Task Force, will be talking about housing insecurity in the Chippewa Valley.

**Wind Farm Info Session** –Tuesday, November 5, 7 p.m., Clear Creek Town Hall, S12455 N. Raven Rd., Strum.

A large wind farm has been proposed in Eau Claire County, south of Cleghorn in the Clear Creek township. Although this would advance a form of clean energy, a number of residents are opposed to it.

**Documentary: "Decoding the Driftless:" A Film of Science, Exploration, and Adventure.** Wednesday, November 6; 7 p.m.; River Prairie Center, 1488 Front Porch Place, Altoona. Sponsored by the Sierra Club of the Chippewa Valley. Free and open to the public. (Wisconsin has one of only two driftless areas in the world.)

**ACLU Program – Reproductive Freedom: Protecting Women's Right to Choose** -- Thursday, November 7; 7 p.m.; Unitarian Universalist Congregation Church, 421 South Farwell St. A panel will present information about legal and legislative efforts, financial assistance for women seeking safe and legal abortions, and an explanation of issues impacting reproductive health. Discussion will follow. Free and open to the public.

**Hmong New Year** – Saturday, November 9 & Sunday November 10; 8 – 5 p.m.; Eau Claire Indoor Sports Center, 3456 Craig Road. The EC County Dems will again have a table at the event. Sign up at the Resource Center if you are interested in helping. It's a fun event!!

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Support AB 168/SB 246** -- Call your representative to express support for this bill that allow a voter who is unable to state their name and address aloud because of a disability to be able to present an acceptable ID to the election official. Either the official or another person selected by the voter (a trained "voter buddy") would then state the voter's name and address to comply with the election law. A disability rights attorney will be conducting training early next year for those interested in being a voter buddy. AB168 passed the Assembly, but the Senate still needs to pass SB 246.

**Workers Needed for 2020 Census** – To get an accurate count, the government needs a lot of workers willing to be persistent in finding all residents. Check out the Census [website](#).

## DISCUSSION

### **County Board Update**

**Budget woes** -- Unfunded and underfunded mandates have greatly stressed Human Services Departments throughout Wisconsin and Eau Claire County is no exception. Out-of-home child placements have driven up costs beyond the budget limits, causing overages that negatively affect the rest of the county's budget. DHS staff is taking a long-term "Families First" approach and has used a consortium model to bring mental/behavior health treatments in-house. Regardless of cost, the County can't ignore the needs of children and people needing mental health treatment, since there are limited resources available in the area. However, going millions of dollars "in the red" for three years has prompted the County Finance & Budget Committee to call for

a budget amendment requiring all position hires in DHS be approved by three committees: DHS, F&B, and HR, with recourse through the full county board. The committee vote was 4 – 1 to forward this amendment to the full board, which will vote on it at the next meeting on November 5.

Election – It is anticipated that there will be at least two open seats on the board next year. Candidates must be residents of the district for which they are running. Be willing to support new candidates as well incumbents. All 29 seats are up for election in April. Stay tuned.

### **K-12 Funding**

Inadequate funding is also a continuing problem for the school district. Wisconsin's reputation as a state for good quality K-12 education has been gradually eroded by the legislature. It goes back to 1993 when the Qualified Economic Offer imposed in 1993 which gave school boards the option of unilaterally limited pay and benefits for K-12 teachers as long as the combined increase was not more than 3.8 percent. Revenue limits were also implemented in 1993-94, which has hurt the Eau Claire district significantly more than other similar-sized districts. Even after the Blue Ribbon Commission's findings, there wasn't much gained in the state budget. A balanced district budget is resulting in classes of 30 students. Will a district have to declare bankruptcy to "wake up" policymakers? In a state where property taxes fund education, rural districts are suffering as well. And with funding being siphoned off to private schools through the voucher program, it calls into question whether the current financing of public education is constitutional under Article X of the Wisconsin Constitution guaranteeing students the fundamental right to an equal opportunity for a sound basic education. There seems to generally be a lack of understanding about the complexity of funding formulas and even less about the impact of the so-called "Parental Choice" program, which has been expanded under Republican control. Districts in northern Wisconsin with fewer voucher schools don't think the program affects them, but they don't take into account that the funds moved to private schools decreases the entire amount left for public schools throughout the state. Unfortunately, a bill to make the amounts more transparent to property taxpayers did not get passed.

According to [Nation's Report Card](#), Wisconsin continues to have the widest achievement gap between black and white students of any state.

### **Poverty & Income Inequality**

Many of the challenges facing counties and school districts in Wisconsin are related to the levels of poverty and low income for individuals and families. A [recent report](#) shows Eau Claire and southern Chippewa Counties have the second and third highest poverty rates in the state, after Milwaukee county.

#### Why?

- [Studies](#) have also shown that Wisconsin is near the bottom in spending per capita on public health, which is another factor in ability to work and students' school performance.
- [Infant mortality rates](#) -Black babies in Wisconsin are nearly three times more likely to die than white babies, according to the national Centers for Disease Control. And, the rate at which babies die before age one is the highest in the country for black babies.
- Higher levels of poverty in the Milwaukee can be traced back to "[redlining](#)" which resulted in one of the most segregated cities in the nation. Omaha, Nebraska, long a Republican stronghold, now ranks as the most segregated city in the US. But, this has been a problem for a very long time in our "progressive" state.
- Socio-economic class of families, regardless of race and ethnicity, is tied to school success, especially in taking tests.
- The "[School to Prison Pipeline](#)" contributes to broken families, low income, etc.
- The pervasive attitude that people don't want to pay for taking care of other people's kids suppresses seeking positive solutions.
- The touted low unemployment rate hides the fact that many who are unemployed or unemployable are not counted because they are not actively seeking employment or have given up. People can't hold a job due to a variety of factors, e.g., mental health issues, disabilities, low pay doesn't cover costs of going to work, a criminal record, no transportation or no permanent housing.

- “People don’t know what they don’t know” – It’s difficult to get people to take advantage of education and training opportunities. And when they do, they have a hard time completing a course or degree without a sufficient support system.
- Hospitals are discharging mothers much sooner now after giving birth, which no longer allows time for parents to have a chance to learn some basic skills in taking care of babies.

#### Solutions?

- 4-K education for ALL kids. Stop cutting funding for Head Start programs. Good pre-school education is a strong predictor of success in grade school.
- Affordable, quality child-care.
- Spend less on prisons and more on education.
- Find more ways to support parents and provide parenting instruction and training. It was discussed whether or not it would be a good idea to make such training mandatory for aid. But, many opportunities do exist in the area through community organizations and local agencies.
- Incorporate into Family Leave policies time off to take parenting classes.
- Invest in furthering the belief that one of the purposes of K-12 education is to prepare students to be productive community participants.
- Catholic Charities has been a front-line ally in the fight against poverty.

#### **On the Road to Impeachment**

Rules of the Road -- It was just announced that the US House of Representatives voted 232 – 196, mostly along party lines with two Democrats voting against, to approve a resolution establishing the procedures for the impeachment inquiry’s next phase. This lays out the framework for public hearings and eventual proceedings in the Judiciary Committee, which would craft any potential articles of impeachment.

The resolution specifically directs five House committees to continue investigating whether Trump used his office to try to coerce the Ukrainian government to investigate former VP Joe Biden, a top-tier 2020 Democratic presidential candidate. Unlike normal committee hearings, Schiff and ranking member Devin Nunes or their designated staff can conduct multiple rounds of 90-minutes questioning, alternating sides every 45 minutes. After they have concluded their questioning the hearing returns to a traditional formal in which all committee members get five minutes of questioning each, alternating between the parties. Republicans will get the power they’ve been requesting to subpoena witnesses for testimony or documents, but only if Schiff concurs or, if he objects, the committee votes to override his decision.

View Nancy Pelosi’s [interview](#) on The Late Show with Stephen Colbert.

Ron Johnson & the Ukraine scandal -- Our Senator Ron Johnson’s knowledge of key events could make him a person of interest to House Impeachment investigators, as well as complicate his role as a juror in a trial by the Senate, if one occurs. Testimony from two witnesses in the impeachment probe place Johnson at episodes that will be critical in assessing whether Trump was withholding nearly \$400 million in Congressionally appropriated military aid to Ukraine in exchange for political favors. See [Washington Post article](#).

Public Opinion – Is this a wise action for Democrats if there’s no chance the Senate would impeach? Ask those who are against impeachment, “How would you feel if your son was being investigated by an enemy, foreign country?” Maybe Republicans can be swayed in the direction of impeachment, given Trump’s action in Syria and the perceived “calm” of VP Pence, who might appeal to Republicans tired of the circus.

Some polls have reported that 76% of college students favor impeachment.

The owner of Penzey’s Spices is raising money to take out [Pro-Impeachment ads](#) on FaceBook. (See [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel article](#))

#### **Voter Registration & Elections**

Efforts are underway by both parties to get people registered to vote. Remember: voter-turn-out percentages only reflect the number of registered voters. Only about half of citizens eligible to vote are actually registered. In Eau Claire County, there are 25,000 people eligible to vote who have NOT registered.

Chippewa Valley Votes is planning to have tables at various locations in the region on the first Tuesday of the month. They welcome all to come and help with this important service.

Question: What is the DNC doing at a national level to get out Democratic voters?

Election observers will be needed next year. The League of Women Voters has done training in the past. This may be a way to help maintain election integrity in the May 12<sup>th</sup> special election in the 7<sup>th</sup> Congressional District vacated by Sean Duffy.

Several members reported receiving a lot of calls, surveys, and solicitations from the Republican party. A contact with a Republican representative might be the reason they are on the lists. No good deed goes unpunished.