

Eau Claire County Democratic Party Coffee Klatch Notes

Thursday, September 19, 2019

Present: Bob Andruszkiewicz, Margot Bouchard, Marjorie Bunce, Carol Craig (facilitator), Carolyn Dunning, Dale Gable, Judy Gatlin, Bonnie Golden, Carolyn Haar, Ann Heywood, Gloria Hochstein, Diane Jones, Linda Lodolce, Bob & Del Matthews, Kris MacCallum, Ann McKinley, Mary Mickel, Linda Norton, Jeff Prichard, Connie Russell (recorder), John Sandquist, Liz Spencer, Kathy Tuttle, Charlie Warner, Pat Williams, Robert Wojnowski, Eleanor Wolf, Vicki Young

UPCOMING EVENTS

Next Coffee Klatch -- Thursday, September 26; 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.

Solarize Eau Claire – Attend a free hour-long educational session to learn about adding solar panels to your home or business and have the opportunity to use a volume discount for solar panel installations.

- 6:30 p.m., Sept. 24; Altoona City Hall

Patty Schachtner Fundraiser – Friday, October 4; 5- 7 p.m., 200 Main Gallery, corner of Main and Graham, downtown Eau Claire. Support Patty for reelection to the legislature in Senate District 10.

JONAH's 12th Annual Celebration – Sunday, October 27, 4 – 6:30 p.m., The Oxford, 1814 N. Oxford Ave.

Tickets are \$25 in advance and \$35 at the door.

JONAH is accepting paid ads in its next yearbook. The deadline is October 1st to submit an ad.

Sierra Club Road Trip – Saturday, Sept. 28; 7 a.m.; \$10; Join the local chapter of the Sierra Club in Duluth to protest the Enbridge Pipeline. The pipeline will also come through Wisconsin.

Homeless Veterans – Thursday, November 21; 5:30 p.m., Democratic Resource Center. At this monthly party meeting, several speakers will talk about efforts to address housing challenges affecting veterans.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Citizen Input: As Eau Claire County goes into the final phases of developing the 2020 budget, the Committee on Finance and Budget seeks your opinion on the importance of county services. Take the [Eau Claire County 2020 Budget Survey](#) to let the County Board and staff know what you think the County's priorities should be.

Seeking farmers to interview – Charlie Warner is helping a beginning writer find a farmer to interview for an article. Contact Charlie if you know of a farmer who voted for Trump in 2016, but is not planning to vote for him again in 2020.

Fall Festival parade – Those who participated in the International Fall Festival downtown on September 14 said it was a great experience hearing people clap for the Dems.

Climate Change Walk-Out – A crowd is expected to participate in an international event tomorrow (Friday, Sept. 20) as local participants march from campus to downtown. This started with one young woman, Greta Thunberg and one sign a year ago. Story: [Face of Climate Change Activism](#)

RECOMMENDED VIEWING

Unbreak America -- The group viewed and discussed this video about fixing our corrupt political system.

John Oliver on Immigration -- A deep, somewhat irreverent, dive into the extremely difficult process of immigrating legally to the US, a process John Oliver is personally familiar with.

DISCUSSION

Represent Us [Unbreak America](#)

The group watched and discussed a video promoting a solution to political corruption through [Represent Us](#).

Summary of video

- About 4% of Americans have confidence in Congress.
- Even if there is 100% popular support for an issue, there is only a 30% chance Congress will act on it, the same 30% if there is zero support for an issue.
- In our current system, politicians have to spend 70% of their time raising money, and since only a small fraction of donors give over \$10,000, fundraising is aimed at wealthy donors.
- Lobbyists are writing our laws.
- A duopoly prevents viable third parties.
- Gerrymandering has resulted in only 14% of districts being competitive diminishing politicians' responsiveness to their constituents.
- The current system has failed to allow Congress to address the serious issues of child poverty, prisons, health care, clean water and air.
- How can the system be unrigged and stop legal bribery? (1) End gerrymandering, (2) use ranked-choice voting, (3) institute automatic voter registration, (4) overhaul ethics and lobbying laws, (5) fund campaigns with voter vouchers
- 90% of those polled want Congress to pass the American Anti-Corruption Act, but it's unlikely that will happen, so we must go around Congress and pass municipal and state laws. States control elections. Historically, that's how women got the vote and interracial and gay marriage were made legal.
- Sometime a key event can trigger a spurt of support for an issue.
- Support succeeds if there are right-left coalitions (36% identify as conservative, 34% as moderate, and 25% as liberal)
- Corruption must be called out!
- Build a movement by starting a local chapter of Represent Us or donate to the Common Wealth campaign.

Discussion

- The arguments in the video validate the history of the Koch brothers who were frustrated in running for federal office, so took the long strategy of financing politicians at the state level to gain influence over governors, legislatures (through [ALEC](#), the conservative bill mill), and judges. See the documentary, [Citizen Koch](#)
- The [Move to Amend](#) effort is working to reverse the Citizens United Supreme Court decision treating corporations as people, causing the flood of dark money into the political system.
- In the Wisconsin legislature, many public hearings now are only attended by Democrats and only a few Republicans because they only need a 50% attendance on the floor to pass legislation. Check out information on the [We the Irrelevant](#) website.
- How do we in Wisconsin get traction when the majority leadership come from the wealthiest counties in the state? It's really important to have Democrats running and Democrats supporting the candidates in gerrymandered districts because the maps may be redrawn in the future. Focus is needed on District 10 where Patty Schachtner is running for reelection. Also, we all need to support the Democrat who runs for Sean Duffy's vacant seat. We could turn Chippewa county blue again by supporting the Chippewa County Democratic party – we are invited to their meetings. Think about carpooling. It would be fun!
- Local elected leaders are the future candidates for state office.
- Could New Mexico's free education bill and the growing number of bills similar the carbon tax proposal be an indication of the mounting support at state levels for action at the federal level?

What the locals are saying

Town of Union issues canvassing has revealed some insights about local voters' perceptions of Trump and various issues. A few have been fervently anti-Trump, but others are lukewarm and say he's doing "OK". (There followed a brief discussion of the power of cognitive dissonance and human nature's refusal to admit a mistake.)

On immigration: they understand the need for immigrants, but don't want a totally open, unregulated border. They know the current health insurance system is broken, but are suspicious of the funding of universal/single payer health care proposals. Law enforcement and living in a safe neighborhood are high priorities. They wonder if we have the resources to continue to be the world's cop.

Get out the Vote

[National Voter Registration Day](#) is on Tuesday, September 24 and our local [Chippewa Valley Votes](#) coalition will be conducting voter registration at various locations throughout the area. There were some questions about registration procedures and Carol provided a demonstration of the [My Vote](#) website. Explore it! Try it! Voting for young people: College students who have driver's licenses from other states, but who decide to register and vote here, can obtain a voter ID card in the Blugold Office, Davies Center, to use as a photo ID. Also, the Eau Claire Area School District passed a policy last year ensuring that all seniors know how to register to vote before they graduate.

Note: in Eau Claire County, there are 25,000 people eligible to vote who have NOT registered.

County Board Update

Budget process – the process of reviewing each department's budget is underway. All are reminded to please go to the [Eau Claire County website](#) and complete the online County Budget Survey and to check out the interactive display of highway projects to see your vehicle registration fee at work.

Since Gov. Walker and legislature imposed a tax-levy limit in 2011 on county and municipal governments, Eau Claire County's budget has been crippled by slight, if any, revenue increases, coupled with significantly greater demands for services mandated by the state. A "wheel tax" was passed to help off-set capital borrowing for road and bridge maintenance. Before 2011, the old cap allowed a 3 percent increase to keep up with increased costs.

Suggestion made to have capability to provide open-ended comments.

Highway Building – It looks like the growing debt service concerns will mean that the county cannot afford to build a much-needed new highway building.

Vets Tribute funding – The board voted to fund the tribute in Altoona, since it is still in Eau Claire County. The \$450,000 over two years is contingent on the veterans foundation raising a minimum amount of other funding. The county's contribution will go toward a feature of the trail with the county's seal. There remain questions about the wisdom of using \$450,000 for a monument vs helping veterans.

Open Seat – The board will appoint a replacement for Brandon Buchanan's District 27 vacant seat. Applications are due to Nick Smiar, County Board Chair, by October 8. Chair Smiar expects to fill the vacancy by the end of October.

Unlock the Vote Resolution – The board passed this resolution at its last meeting, urging the legislature to change the law to allow those on probation to vote.

Broadband -- A Broadband special committee has been formed to garner grant funding to extend broadband in the eastern end of the county. Don Mowry is a county board member serving on the committee.