

Eau Claire County Democratic Party Coffee Klatch Notes

Thursday, July 18, 2019

Present: Jeanie Aloia, Bob Andruszkiewicz, Marjorie Bunce, Carol Craig (facilitator), Carolyn Dunning, Donna Fortin, Dale Gable, Judy Gatlin, Bonnie Golden, Carolyn Haar, Nancy Hetzel, Ann Heywood, Mike Lindsay, Bob Matthews., Ann McKinley, Linda Norton, Connie Russell (recorder), John Sandquist, Phil Swanhorst, Kathy Tuttle, Pat Williams, Robert Wojnowski, Eleanor Wolf

UPCOMING EVENTS

Next Coffee Klatch -- Thursday, July 25; 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. You, too, can learn new phrases like “*that just chaps my hide*” to express frustration without using profanity.

Family Night in the Park – Saturday, August 3; 6 – 9 p.m.; Phoenix Park. Family movie will be shown at 9 pm. We need volunteers to staff the Democratic Party booth.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Water Quality Task Force This task force, created by the legislature, plans to hold 11 public hearings across the state to hear citizens’ concerns about water quality. The next two will be:

Tuesday, July 23, 1 p.m. Tomahawk, PCA Tomahawk Buedingen Training Center, W6147 State Road 86.

Wed., July 24, 12 Noon, Stevens point, Dreyfus University Center, 1015 Reserve St.; Laird Room North

One will be held nearby in Menomonie, but a date has not been set yet.

Sharing Good Videos – If you have seen a good informational or inspiring video on the internet, feel free to bring it to Coffee Klatch on Thursday mornings. There is a laptop and TV available for showing short pieces to generate discussion about current issues.

RECOMMENDED READING

[The Wisconsin Examiner](#) – A new news source for Wisconsin – a nonpartisan, nonprofit news site offering a fresh perspective on politics and policy in state government. It will offer investigative reporting and daily coverage dedicated to the public interest – to hold the powerful accountable, follow the money, and dig out the truth to cover stories and voices that often go unheard.

[Our Man in Charleston: Britain's Secret Agent in the Civil War South](#) (2016) by Christopher Dickey

[The Conservative Sensibility](#) (2019) by George Will. Will says the GOP has strayed far from its conservative roots. [Book review.](#)

["The US Recycling System is Garbage"](#) – article published in the July/August issue of Sierra Magazine about our dysfunctional recycling industry and what really happens to our mountains of waste.

DISCUSSION:

Corn Dogs, Cheese Curds, & Politics – Staffing the Dems’ Booth at the Northern Wisconsin State Fair

There was a brief review of the Dems’ table at the Chippewa Fair. The “vote for your top 3 issues” marbles-in-the-jars” activity was well-received. Many fair-goers commented that they needed more than 3 marbles.

This idea will be continued at other tabling opportunities, including the Hmong New Year. There is someone who has volunteered to translate the cards into Hmong.

Activities at the Republicans’ booth generated some discussion. According to a nearby vendor, the Trump connection to child sex trafficker, Jeffrey-Epstein, did not deter parents from taking pictures of their daughters with the life-size Trump cut-out. And, their contribution to the literary world was recited to the group. They are distributing a Dr. Seuss style children’s book – a sort of kid’s version of Ayn Rand – a tragic story of the “wannabe workers” vs the “terrible takers.” It would be fun to create a better positive, not polemic, version to counter

this very simplistic world view. Perhaps it could be about the myth of the “free market” from the point of view of all the receivers of USDA funding.

One Dem confronted a vendor selling Confederate (Save Slavery) Flags. She also called the bank whose marquee was right above the booth. According to the manager, the bank had donated to the fair so had no control over the placement of their sign. The member will be following up with Fair management.

State & National Politics

Ag research – The USDA is planning to close down agriculture research at various universities and move the jobs to Kansas City. See [article](#). Is this another route to reducing the cultivation of knowledge? Scientists, though, have “their ways” of saving and protecting their research.

Evolution of the Republican Party – the current state of the party can be traced to the long-term systematic influence of the Koch brothers and ALEC. Republican governors have been groomed to push corporate interests. Now, Trump has appointed Scott Walker, a college drop-out, to the board of the [Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars](#) in the Smithsonian Institute, a non-partisan policy forum for tackling global issues through independent research and open dialogue. And, he has a job starting in 2021 with the [Young America's Foundation](#). Also, there is a rumor that Wisconsin State Assembly Speaker Robin Vos may be up for a leadership position in the Republican bill mill [ALEC](#), (American Legislative Exchange Council).

Local News

School District – Good News: Through two DPI grants, Eau Claire will be able to hire a full-time mental health coordinator for the next two years. [L-T article](#).

Update on Veterans Tribute Trail Controversy

Last month, the Veterans Tribute Foundation officially requested that the City name the entire 16+ acre Forest Street Greenway “Veterans Tribute Park.” The North River Front Neighborhood Association and members of the Community Garden felt blindsided by this request, as they had been led to believe it would only be a Veterans Tribute Trail within the larger area and that the identity of the Community Garden would be retained. Members of those groups asked that more discussion take place to see if a more inclusive name for the park could be agreed upon with the Foundation. The County Board postponed a vote on supporting the name request and the Eau Claire City Waterways and Parks Commission substituted a recommendation that the City Council consider pausing the naming process so all interested parties could meet with the Veterans Foundation. That recommendation prompted the Vets Foundation to start exploring a “Plan B” location, so they asked the Council for a 2-week delay. The Veterans were not interested in connecting with the other community groups. They approached the Altoona City Council and have begun the process of locating a reconfigured design in an open non-commercial space in the River Prairie development. Some observations about the controversy:

- The location change has led to a lot of misinformation being disseminated. Mostly, some members of the county board and city council are being labeled as anti-veteran. A statement of support for veterans will be coming from our County Party Chair. All parties in this unfortunate communication break-down have been supportive of Veterans. But, apparently, respecting other voices has been translated to disrespect for vets.
- There was some speculation about the relationship and power balance between City staff and Council members.
- The practice of individuals addressing public bodies may not yield the best results in public policy making.
- Is this turn of events an opportunity for creating a new and better vision for the Forest Street area? Could a “place-making” exercise be applied to this plot of land that connects two bridges, along a river honoring Native American heritage? Some of the Community Garden folks are thinking of having an event in the green way. This experience has shown that few people know about the Community Gardens and what they mean to the larger community (e.g., fresh produce for the Community Table).

- The move to River Prairie may actually be a better location for the Tribute Trail, as the Foundation will not be required to fund infrastructure improvements (rest rooms, lighting, concrete trails, parking lots, electricity). Also, it will have better visibility and access off of Hwy 53, and much more parking.
- This change could raise the question of whether or not the County's capital funding contribution of \$450,000 will still be needed. Altoona is still in Eau Claire County, but the Memorandum of Understanding was specific to the City of Eau Claire, so the MOU will need to be revised and re-approved by the Board before the \$450,000 can be moved to the Foundation.

Central American Refugees

A July 14 [Letter-to-the-Editor](#) titled "Illegal immigrants too damaging" began with the line, "*I'm so sick of pastors and people of faith telling us to have respect and compassion for illegal immigrants.*" The tone and inaccuracies in the letter prompted several members of the group to pledge to write letters of response. One was published on [July 21 -- "Americans' compassion evident in cities.](#)

It seems many people are unaware of, or choose to deny, the US's role and American corporations destabilizing impact on these countries. Refugees are fleeing horrific, dangerous conditions. It is NOT illegal to seek asylum. The corruption in the regimes of Central American countries have roots in the Spaniards' top-down construction of society, unlike the English Common Law approach.

Why has Congress abdicated its job and not tackled serious immigration reform?

- It's very complicated and complex and politicians gravitate to easier short-term issues.
- Immigrants provide a vital work force for American industries. Larger dairy farms in Wisconsin, for example, need workers to do the back-breaking labor that Americans will not do. American businesses want cheap labor more than they want immigration reform and Congress knows that.

We need to keep advocating for a humane process and a reasonable structure for accepting immigrants and refugees.

Head-scratcher: Two anti-immigrant politicians, McConnell and Trump, are married to immigrants.

Suggestion: Send money to [RAICES](#), the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services.