

Meeting Minutes for Joint Meeting of
Staunton, Augusta County and Waynesboro Democratic Committees
January 8, 2019
Staunton City Council Chambers

CALL TO ORDER: The joint meeting was called to order by Frank Nolen, Augusta County chair; Nancy Pyle, Staunton secretary representing Beth Daisey Staunton chair; and Jennifer Lewis, Waynesboro vice chair and acting chair at 7:02 PM.

Present: From Staunton – Ken Venable, treasurer; Nancy Pyle, Secretary. **From Augusta County** – Frank Nolen, chair; Linda Revis, vice chair; John Kowal, secretary; Phyllis Rosen, treasurer. **From Waynesboro** – Jennifer Lewis, vice chair and acting chair. Also present were Jennifer Kitchen, Democratic candidate for the 25th State Delegate District and Annette Hyde, Democratic candidate for the 24th State Senate District. Joint meeting attendance estimated about 40 folks.

Frank Nolen began the meeting by announcing that Sandi Hall, Waynesboro chair, has resigned and that Jennifer Lewis as vice chair of Waynesboro is acting chair until a permanent replacement for Sandi is elected. He then welcomed our candidate guests: Jennifer Kitchen and Annette Hyde and also Abby Brand, chair of the SAW Young Democrats. All present were asked to introduce themselves and their affiliation.

Jennifer Lewis reporting on the status of WDC indicated that they plan to:

- Elect a new chair during their next business meeting
- Keep the HQ office in Waynesboro open year round as much as possible
- Reinstitute the monthly socials to be held the 4th Tues of each month at E&J's in Waynesboro

GERRYMANDERING

Frank Nolen introduced the evening's program by announcing the very recent development that the US Supreme Court has refused to delay the redistricting of 11 Delegate Districts in Virginia for the 2019 election as required by a lower court ruling. The delay was requested by Virginia republicans as they appeal the lower court ruling claiming that the redistricting mandated by the lower court was unconstitutional. If they take up the appeal on the question of constitutionality, an opinion would be expected in the March-April timeframe. There is some question as to whether the Virginia republicans have standing in this matter. If the lower courts redistricting plan is implemented, it is expected that approximately 20 of the 100 State Delegate Districts could be impacted. Although this redistricting for the 2019 election probably won't affect us in the valley, it could very well change the makeup of the House of Delegates to a Democratic majority.

Looking beyond the 2019 election and to a permanent fix to the problem of gerrymandering in Virginia, Frank introduced Tom Long to discuss efforts towards a Constitutional Amendment that would dictate how redistricting would be conducted in the future. Tom began by describing how the process works now. Currently, redistricting is done by the legislature itself and so the party that happens to be in power gets to choose their voters. To demonstrate the cynical nature of this scheme, Tom cited a recent quote from Dickie Bell when asked about gerrymandering: "To the victor belongs the spoils."

Tom pointed out that gerrymandering is not new. The term came into being in the early 1800s and is named after Eldridge Gerry, then Governor of Massachusetts who signed a redistricting bill that as one

newspaper put it, created districts resembling a salamander. Predating this episode and although not called gerrymandering at the time, Patrick Henry is known to have at least in one instance, draw a district in Virginia to specifically pit Federalist James Madison against Anti-Federalist James Monroe.

Tom went on to state that Virginia is one of the most gerrymandered states in the country ranking 5th worst. Following the Republican controlled redistricting in 2011, and by the 2013 elections, 36 of the 100 Delegates elected had no real opponent to contend with.

Citing that we are at a critical junction, if we can't get a State Constitution Amendment we will either be stuck with the current process or one based on simple law that can be changed in the future at the whim of the ruling party at the time. To this end State Senators Hanger and Locke have introduced SJ274 to start the process towards a Constitutional Amendment. To become an amendment in time to be used in the 2021 redistricting, this bill must pass the legislature this year, pass the legislature again in 2020 worded exactly as worded in the 2019 bill, and then be accepted by the voters of Virginia in the November, 2020 election. To accomplish this, the organization OneVirginia2021 assembled a group of political and academic experts to come up with wording for this amendment. The proposed amendment sets forth a method to create a Citizens Redistricting Commission that will draw the districts for State Delegate, State Senate and US House of Representatives as follows:

- Start with the four top leaders in the General Assembly – the Speaker and Minority Leader of the House, and the Majority and Minority Leader of the Senate.
- Each of the four General Assembly Leaders selects one retired Virginia Circuit Court judge for the Selection Committee. These four judges select a fifth judge creating a five member Selection Committee
- The selection Committee creates an application process and puts the word out to registered voters to apply to serve on the Citizens Redistricting Commission.
- From the list of applications, the Selection Committee chooses 22 candidates for consideration – 5 Democrats, 5 Republicans, and 12 independents.
- Each General Assembly Leader then strikes 3 candidates – one from the opposing party and two independents. This establishes the Citizens Redistricting Commission as 3 Republicans, 3 Democrats, and 4 Independents – a total of 10 members.
- The proposed amendment mandates that the Commission draws districts that:
 - Follow local boundaries
 - Don't favor any party
 - Have equal population
 - Are compact and contiguous
 - Respect Minority Voting Choice
- In addition:
 - All redistricting committee meetings (and data) will be open to the public
 - A new map of districts must receive 7 of the 10 commissioner's votes to be adopted
 - Of those 7 votes, at least one must come from a Democrat and at least one from a Republican.

A number of statements were made:

- Tom encouraged everyone to contact their Senator/Delegate in support of this bill
- Estimated 20 other states have implemented some sort of non-partisan redistricting plan but not sure one quite like this.

- Our Republican Delegates in 2011 did not look out for the best interest of Augusta County citizens by dividing us across three districts diluting our county votes
- Steve Landes for one is against this plan stating that it takes away the will of the voters by reducing the influence of their elected officials and putting decisions into the hands of an appointed commission that has no accountability to the voters. To the contrary, this plan would take the decisions out of the hands of the people wanting to ensure reelection regardless of the best interest of all the voters.
- 78% of Virginia Voters support a Constitutional Amendment to Create a Redistricting Committee
- Gerrymandering has been done by both parties over time so this plan would result in fair redistricting regardless of which party happens to be in power at a particular time.

In closing, an unanswered concern was raised concerning definitively identifying independents given that Virginia does not register voters by party affiliation and the Commission will comprise more independents than either Democrats or Republicans. Identifying independents will rely on the vetting procedures used by the five retired judges conducting to the appointment process.

CANDIDATE REMARKS

Annette Hyde – Frank Nolen then introduced Annette Hyde, Democratic candidate for the 24th Senate District for a few brief remarks. Annette introduced herself as a wife with two adult sons and is a resident of Madison County. She stated her main issues as:

- Internet Access for all citizens
- Healthcare is a right not a privilege
- All Virginia children deserve a quality public school education regardless of where they live or family circumstance
- We need to support education for those wishing to enter the trades as a shortage is developing
- Community College should be free and more money needs to be allocated to our public universities to reduce the cost of a college education

Annette concluded stating the need for money and volunteers as the year progresses.

Jenni Kitchen – Frank then introduced Jenni Kitchen, Democratic candidate for the 25th Delegate District for a few brief remarks. Jenni began by asking all who live in the 25th District to please sign her petition to be included on the primary election ballot, at which time Frank interjected that it has not been decided whether there will be a primary or a caucus in that nominating committees have not been formed as yet indicating that gathering signatures may be premature. Jenni responded that since there is already one other candidate that has declared intent to run in the 25th District, she wanted to be prepared. Jenni then commented that in addition to supporting the issues raised by Annette, she wanted to add infrastructure – specifically I-81. To fund the necessary I-81 improvements, she stated that she supports raising fuel and sales tax in the I-81 corridor rather than charging tolls on the trucking industry as tolls would simply drive the trucks onto secondary roads like Route 11.

Frank then indicated that we have two other declared candidates not present: Christian Worth running in the 24th Delegate District and Lauren Thompson running in the 25th Delegate District (as is Jenni Kitchen).

6TH DISTRICT COMMITTEE

Robert Horowitz stated that the 6th District Committee is planning their first meeting of the new year on January 26th or 27th. Frank Nolen than stated that Jen Little, Augusta/Highland County Representative to the 6th District Committee has resigned and asked if anyone was interested or could recommend someone. At this point Phyllis Rosen stated her interest. A motion was made by Jennifer Lewis nominating Phyllis and seconded by Jenni Kitchen. Phyllis accepted the nomination. Motion carried unanimously. Robert indicated that the committee itself has the final say over members and although not from our area, the committee has turned down people in the past. Frank took the action item of notifying the chair of the 6th District Committee as to Phyllis's nomination. Applause of gratitude to Phyllis for "stepping up"

WOMEN'S MARCH

Phyllis Rosen reminded everyone that Jennifer Lewis will be speaking at the Women's March in Roanoke on January 19th. The march will begin at 10AM and all those that cannot make it to Washington, DC that day are encouraged to attend.

Meeting adjourned at 8:05PM at which time the Staunton and Augusta County Democratic Committees retired to their respective business meetings.

Respectfully submitted,

John Kowal, ACDC secretary