

Meeting Minutes for Joint Meeting of
Staunton, Augusta County and Waynesboro Democratic Committees
May 8, 2018
Staunton City Council Chambers

CALL TO ORDER: The joint meeting was called to order by Beth Daisey, Staunton chair; Frank Nolen, Augusta County chair; and Robert Horowitz standing in for Sandie Hall, Waynesboro chair at 7:03 PM. An agenda was distributed.

Present: From Staunton – Beth Daisey, chair; Josh Howard, vice chair; Ken Venable, treasurer; and Nancy Pyle, secretary. **From Augusta County** – Frank Nolan, chair; John Kowal, secretary; Diane Kowal, vice chair for communications; and Barbara Brothers, vice chair for outreach. **From Waynesboro** – Robert Horowitz, representing Sandie Hall, chair; and Amanda Silar, secretary. Also present was Michelle Watkins, Rockbridge County Democratic Committee Chair and Annette Hyde, Democratic candidate for the 24th Virginia State Senate District. Joint meeting attendance estimated about 40 folks.

Introduction of Committee Attendees by Chairs: Members of the three committees stood and were recognized with a number of first time attendees introduced including Susan Reeves, Betsy Pinkston, Mary Miller and Pat Elliott, past chair of the Staunton Democratic Committee, who has recently moved back to the area.

Motion to correct or accept April 2018 Joint Minutes: Josh Howard made a motion that the minutes be accepted and Sarah Miller seconded. Motion carried.

1st Guest Speaker: Robert Horowitz introduced our first guest speaker Michelle Edwards from WinVA as well known to the SAW community. A life-long Virginian, Michelle lives in Staunton with her husband and two children. She has done volunteer work at the Augusta Regional Jail and has been a foster parent. Previously she worked for an organization supporting small businesses. Michelle introduced herself as the 20th District Democratic candidate last year and thanked everyone for their hard work and support during her campaign. Stating that much excitement has been generated in the Democratic community that contributed to the overall state wide successes for the Democratic Party. Michelle then proceeded to educate us on WinVA.

- The Mission and Vision of WinVA: We want all Virginians to be represented by leaders who listen to them and champion their interests.
- WinVA is a PAC dedicated to recruiting democratic candidates for all elections state wide. The current goal is to ensure there is a democratic candidate for every state delegate and state senate seat for 2019 and beyond.
- WinVA's intent is to build on the successes in 2017 where democrats gained 15 Seats in the House of Delegates bringing that legislative body one seat short of Democratic control.
- WinVA's plan is to work closely with local Democratic Committees and the many grassroots organizations across the commonwealth to identify, solicit and train quality candidates.
- WinVA believes that running candidates everywhere in all districts builds the type of excitement everywhere that brings Dem voters out for all candidates.
- Tom Periello is executive director and led WinVA in helping train candidates during the 2017 election cycle including moving into new electronic technologies to more efficiently and effectively engage voters, particularly young voters. WinVA brings additional money, networking and campaign support opportunities across the state.

- To this end, Michelle asked that we all reach out to potential candidates, solicit people to run for office and contact her. Further, she asked that we consider forming a Candidate Recruiting Subcommittee to formalize this process.

There were no questions from the floor.

Frank Nolen took a minute to recognize and welcome Michelle Watkins, Chair of the Rockbridge County Democratic Committee.

2nd Guest Speakers: Frank Nolen introduced Bruce Sinclair, DPVA (Democratic Party of Virginia), Coordinated Campaign Director and Ian McNally, DPVA, Coordinated Campaign Regional Field Director commenting that it was good to see a couple of young Democrats involved.

- Bruce introduced himself as a transplant from South Carolina and currently living in Alexandria, VA. He will be working out of the Richmond office with responsibilities covering the entire state.
- Ian is from a rural county in Michigan with experience with the Hillary Clinton campaign. He first came to Virginia to work for the Northam campaign and decided to come back this year in support of Tim Kaine. He will be working out of Charlottesville with regional responsibilities.

Bruce began by presenting his role in the DPVA plan for the 2018 campaign season:

- Bruce will lead the field work and GOTV arm of the Kaine campaign as the top of the ticket. Sen. Kaine has given Bruce five main objectives:
 - Get Sen Kaine reelected
 - Concentrate on getting the four Incumbent Democratic Representatives to Congress reelected
 - Support every single Democratic candidate in every other congressional district. (Note: Virginia has 11 Congressional Districts)
 - Support every single Democratic candidate running in any local election.
 - When the campaigns are over, give all data gathered during this campaign cycle to the local Dem committees to use during the 2019 campaigns for State Delegate and State Senate elections.
- Bruce then discussed the “digital organization” initiative that will bring democrats together regardless of where they live. Using digital tools to encourage neighbors to get their neighbors more involved.
- Four target groups have been identified for special attention to boost democratic voter turn-out this year:
 - Presidential year voters – voters that very consistently only vote when a president is on the ballot. Locally, the number of these voters have been identified as: Augusta County – 933, Staunton – 1035, and Waynesboro – 818.
 - First time off-year voters – Locally, the number of these voters have been identified as: Augusta County – 576, Staunton – 742, Waynesboro – 522.
 - Consistent but persuadable voters – voters that vote in every election but are not tied to a particular party. Locally, the number of these voters have been identified as: Augusta County – 736, Staunton – 346, Waynesboro – 232.
 - Newly Registered voters.

Ian began by presenting his role on the DPVA plan for the 2018 campaign season:

- Ian will lead and coordinate the ground game for our region. This to include phone banking, canvassing, and voter registration.
- Training on these activities will be provided.

- June 1st is the target date for beginning activities in earnest in concert with the local organizations and developing strong local relationships.
- Ultimate goal is to have another blue wave across Virginia continuing what was started in 2017.

The floor was then open to questions:

- Question for Ian: What is your territory? Answer: Parts of the 5th, 6th & 7th Congressional Districts
- Question for Bruce: What will you do differently from the coordinated campaign last year? Answer: The party has made good progress gaining ground in the urban and suburban areas as demonstrated by 2017 results but this year will concentrate more in the rural areas. Bruce further stated that they are working to improve the phone bank and canvassing lists and promised that rural, deep red areas will not be abandoned. In addition, we will concentrate on qualitative rather than quantitative metrics and provide comprehensive training for staff and volunteers. Lastly, we will listen to local leadership and run plans by them first before implementation.
- Question for Bruce: Last year there were many problems with the coordinated campaign in that it was not that coordinated. Another audience member interjected that there was a high level of disrespect shown towards the local campaigns and volunteers. Answer: Bruce stated that the team we are putting together will be better trained. He offered that if there are any problems to call him personally and he will see to the matter.
- Question for Bruce & Ian: From our past experience, it was obvious the DPVA does not believe the 6th District is winnable. Would like to hear more from the DPVA about helping us win. Answer: Ian said he knows how we feel having come from a rural area of Michigan that is also bright red. He made a firm promise that DPVA would not pull resources and back out of any area. As the top of the ticket is already established with Sen. Kaine, work has already begun everywhere in Virginia including rural areas. Answer: Bruce assured us that there will be multiple field offices in our area and that they are here to “play to win”. Here and across the entire State. Audience Member Response: I hope we can work together to rebuild that trust.
- Question for Bruce: Two years ago started canvassing and initially had a good turnout of volunteers. The turnout quickly fell off due to the horrible VAN lists received from DPVA. I appealed for help but got nowhere – felt left out by DPVA. Last year tried again but ended up relying on local talent for VAN lists. It’s going to be hard for us to trust what you say. The only bright spot was that we have developed many good people locally because we didn’t have support from above. Answer: Bruce promised that he and Ian will work every day to help us. He also congratulated Waynesboro’s efforts as the city is becoming bluer.
- Question for Ian & Bruce: How do you plan to get young people involved? Answer: Ian stated they intend to build on and expand last year’s use of electronic communication that appeals to young people. He talked about “voter circles” that send individualized emails and texts. The plan is to use electronic communication on a much larger scale this election cycle. Answer: Bruce interjected that electronic messaging is proven to increase voter turn-out. Also, the “voter circles” will be used in conjunction with the phone banking efforts. Comment from the Audience: Young people are getting more involved as witnessed by the establishment of a polling place on the JMU campus.

This part of the meeting ended noting that there was Tim Kaine campaign material available to pick up before we leave.

Frank Nolen took another brief moment to recognize our new (repeat) father, Jamie Woytasik – Congratulations!

SUBCOMMITTEES: Beth Daisey then introduced our next section of the program concerning Subcommittees. The plan is to do things a little different this year by bringing volunteers from the three committees to work together wherever it is needed. Every subcommittee will include members from each of the three committees. Both Bruce and Ian agreed that this type of cross Democratic Committee coordination and cooperation is an excellent idea. As our main focus this year, besides Sen. Kaine's reelection, is the 6th Congressional District, this is a good year to try this out as the 6th District encompasses all three committees. Beth then handed out "Volunteer Forms" asking for help as we move forward in the election cycle.

Voter Registration: Diane Kowal described some of the activities of the Voter Registration Subcommittee

- A main focus is a presence at various community events
 - Volunteers are asked to work in two hour shifts
 - Volunteers are encouraged to get certified which takes about 30 minutes on line
 - "Cheat sheets" have been developed to help learn the process and answer questions
 - Table & Chair set-up is provided
 - Interaction with the public is on a non-partisan basis trying to avoid political conversations while conducting voter registration – except encouraging people to vote and gathering contact information for those voters that may require transportation to get a voter ID (Note: photo ID required in Virginia to vote) or transportation to the polls.
- Community events this year where we will be having a presence include the 4th of July Celebration, Juneteenth, Staunton Jams and the African American Festival
- This year a new initiative has started – visiting area high schools to register students. (Note: Anyone turning 18 by the next scheduled general election can register while still 17.)
- Also the plan this year is to work with the canvassing subcommittee to offer voter registration door-to-door
- Need Volunteers

Comment from the floor: Young people should be approached to volunteer referencing the excellent group from RE Lee that volunteered last year.

Democratic HQ Office Staffing: Robert Horowitz (standing in for Marney Gibbs) discussed staffing the Waynesboro and Staunton headquarters.

- The Waynesboro Committee is trying to keep their HQ open currently and is interestingly located two doors down from the Waynesboro Republican Committee office. The Waynesboro office is a large space and is available to the other two committees as needed.
- As the general election approaches, both the Waynesboro and Staunton offices staffing hours will be increasing.
- In response to a question from the floor: the Waynesboro HQ is located at 901K, Willow Oak Plaza, Waynesboro, VA 22980; the Staunton HQ is located at 2507 N. Augusta Street, Staunton, VA 24401.
- Need Volunteers

Phone Banking: Barbara Lee spoke about the Phone Banking Subcommittee. She introduced herself as well trained and experienced in this activity having worked on many campaigns and described the work as serious business that requires people to show up and do their job.

- Phone Banking will start as soon as the slate is set following the June primary and will cover the entire slate.
- Focus will be on low income neighborhoods.

- Last year there were an average 12 volunteers at each session with 10 dedicated individuals that made every phone bank.
- No volunteers needed as her regular crew is available and will be used.

Door to Door Canvassing: Robert Horowitz described canvassing as talking to people in support of your candidate and that you have on average about three minutes to make your point. Scripts are provided for guidance.

- Canvassing will be conducted in three stages
 - July-August: Initial visit to ask what someone thinks about a candidate and/or issues and solicit voter registration.
 - Sept-Mid Oct: Seek volunteers and active supporters.
 - Last 2-3 weeks before election is GOTV
- Good information gathering and data entry into the VAN will allow focus during GOTV
- The key to good canvassing is training, training, training
 - Role playing
 - Knowledge of the candidates, the opposition and the issues
 - Learn to listen and then talk to people about what they want to hear
- There is an obligation to canvass as it is to be a proven tool to increase turn out. Canvassing followed by a phone call is even more powerful. Canvassing is not as scary as people think. In fact, most people like it after trying it.
- Need volunteers

Upcoming Special Events: Beth Daisey began by stating that there is currently a core group across the three Democratic Committees involved in this subcommittee but that more volunteers are needed. She then reviewed upcoming events:

- 6th District Democratic Candidate forum scheduled for June 2nd. Chris Graham of the Augusta Free Press will be the moderator
- There will be a Primary election night party on June 12th at the Best Western in Waynesboro. This event will include a silent auction of a few very “select” items for fund raising.
- At the 4th of July celebration in Staunton, the three Democratic Committees will have a booth and participate in the parade.
- We will also have a booth at the Augusta County Fair at the end of July.

Beth then reemphasized the need for volunteers.

Michelle Edwards brought up again the suggestion for a Candidate Recruitment Subcommittee and said she would find out where other Dem committees already have one working. All agree this is a good idea and the chairs of the three SAW committees will work on organizing.

Robert Horowitz offered that we need to get into the routine that the day after an election, work needs to start on the next campaign.

It was noted that Sandie Hall, Chair of the Waynesboro Democratic Committee, has a long standing previous commitment on the 2nd Tuesday of every month which prevents her from attending and presiding with us during our Joint SAW Democratic Committee meetings.

The meeting ended with a round of applause recognizing Ken Venable’s election to the Staunton School Board.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:29 PM at which time the Staunton and Augusta County Democratic Committees retired to their respective business meetings.

Respectfully submitted,

John Kowal, ACDC secretary