

Four Freedoms Democratic Club
July General Membership Meeting
July 8, 2019
The Church of the Holy Trinity, Draesel Hall
7:00-9:00pm

Minutes

1. Welcome (2 min)
 - a. President Bridget Cusick called the meeting to order
 - i. Welcomed the many attendees who were here for their first meeting

2. Albany Update (25 min)
 - a. State Senator Liz Krueger – who is now the Chair of the Senate Finance Committee – gave the Club an update on the legislative agenda in Albany
 - b. This year, the Democrats are finally in the majority in the Senate, by a large enough margin that the entire caucus doesn't have to move in lock-step on every issue
 - i. We couldn't have taken back the majority without the grassroots activism
 - ii. We saw Democrats not only unseat Republican incumbents, but also Democratic incumbents in primaries
 1. As a result, we have a lot more young, progressive Democrats, who are injecting vigor into the institution
 - c. Senator Krueger distributed an [update](#) to Club members, which lists the legislature's many recent initiatives and accomplishments – for instance:
 - i. Housing reforms
 1. Increase protections for both rent regulated and market rate tenants
 2. Most far-reaching reforms in 50 years, with no sunset
 - ii. Reproductive Health Act
 1. NY now has the most comprehensive reproductive health protections of any state
 - iii. Vaccinations
 1. Bars religious exemptions for vaccinations
 - a. Every major and minor religious org in this country actually supports vaccination
 - b. We're in the middle of a measles crisis, and are in danger of losing our herd immunity
 - iv. Environmental protections
 1. Passed strongest state law on climate change (CLCPA)
 2. Banned toxic chemicals
 3. Banned offshore oil & gas drilling
 4. Plastic bag ban

- v. Transportation
 - 1. Congestion pricing, which will help fund the MTA
 - 2. Bus lane cameras, to catch and ticket cars parked in bus lanes
- vi. Worker's rights
 - 1. Equal pay bill
 - 2. Anti-harassment bill
 - 3. Farm workers rights
 - 4. Wage theft enforcement
- vii. Election reforms
 - 1. Early voting & same-day registration
 - 2. Consolidated the federal and state primaries
 - 3. Closed the LLC loophole
 - 4. Allowed re-registration for 16 and 17 year olds
- viii. Criminal justice reforms
 - 1. Bail reform
 - 2. Speeding up trials
 - 3. Discovery reform
 - 4. Civil forfeiture reform
- d. Q&A:
 - i. Ben Wetzler – on elections reforms, will Senate Democrats wait to see what the campaign finance commission recommends, or will they introduce a strong bill of their own on public financing?
 - 1. The Senate likely will not be back in session before the commission is done with its work, so we'll see what they say first
 - ii. Ilyssa Fuchs – will the marijuana legalization bill pass next session?
 - 1. Unfortunately, her marijuana legalization bill did not pass in this session, but she is not giving up and will introduce the bill again next session
 - a. Her bill would create a legal sale & tax system, which would raise revenues, combat the criminal element in the drug trade, and lessen the risk of contamination or unsafe chemicals
 - b. Her bill would allow towns to opt out of setting up a legal system for cultivation and sale, but *all* towns would be barred from arresting for possession
 - iii. Frank Wilkinson – why don't we have Trump's state tax returns yet?
 - 1. The Governor just signed a bill today that allows the 4 committees of the US Congress which have the authority to ask for his federal tax returns to also request his state tax returns

3. What Do the Rent Laws Mean? (25 min)
- a. David Hershey-Webb, a tenant attorney, gave a presentation on the recent rent laws reforms
 - b. Victories for rent-stabilized tenants in bill:
 - i. Repealed vacancy de-control and luxury de-control
 - 1. Now, every rent-stabilized apartment will remain rent-stabilized even when a tenant moves out
 - 2. This is important because, for the last several decades, landlords have been ruthless in their quest to push rent-stabilized tenants out of their apartments; now there are fewer incentives to do so
 - ii. Individual apartment improvement rules changes
 - 1. Under the old system, when a rent-stabilized tenant moved out, the landlord was able to raise the rent by at least 20% automatically, plus 1/60th the cost of any renovations
 - a. This led to landlords inflating the cost of renovations in order to raise rents substantially
 - 2. Under the new system, landlords can only raise the rent by 1/180th of the cost of any renovation, and can only do \$15k of renovations every 5 years
 - iii. Rent overcharges
 - 1. Increased the statute of limitations for overcharges from 4 to 6 years, with the ability to recover treble damages for all 6 years
 - iv. Rent control
 - 1. Reduced rent increases for rent controlled tenant substantially
 - v. Preferential rent
 - 1. If a tenant is paying a lower preferential rent (i.e., a rent below the rent stabilization limit), the landlord cannot increase the rent up to limit for the duration of the tenant's occupancy
 - a. This is to disincentive deceptive teaser rates
 - c. Victories for market-rate tenants:
 - i. Owners must now provide written notice to tenants when they intend to increase the rent by 5% or more, or when they decide not to renew the lease
 - ii. Limits the amount of late fees to either \$50 or 5%, whichever is lower
 - iii. Limits security deposits to 1 month's rent
 - 1. Security deposits must now be returned within 14 days
 - iv. Limit (but not outright ban) on the tenant blacklist
 - 1. Now a tenant has a cause of action if a landlord refuses to rent to them because of the blacklist
 - v. Prohibits owners from charging application fees, except the actual cost of background and credit checks up to \$20

- d. Despite these historic reforms, there are battles ahead:
 - i. The Department of Housing and Community Renewal (DHRC) is the agency in charge of promulgating regulations under the new law, and there is a very pro-landlord contingent inside the agency which may attempt to hinder progress
 - 1. One big issue that the DHRC will have to decide is which of the new laws will be retroactive, and which will be prospective only
 - ii. Landlords' pushback efforts
 - 1. Landlords associations are already filing lawsuits, and likely intend to take the cases as high as possible (even to the US Supreme Court), arguing that these changes are unconstitutional
- e. Q&A:
 - i. Did the law address brokers fees?
 - 1. No, but the City Council is considering limiting them to one month maximum
 - ii. What can the Club do to help these laws have the broadest, most positive impact possible?
 - 1. Make sure that everyone in the community is aware of their new rights, especially those that affect everyone (and not just rent regulated tenants)

4. Committee & Working Group Updates (25 min)

- a. Events Committee (Matt Lombardi):
 - i. The summer barbecue is coming up on August 18th at Reif's Tavern
 - 1. We will send out an email if we need volunteers to help set up, greet people, prep food, etc.
- b. Policy & Activism Committee (Kim Moscaritolo):
 - i. We have been trying out the working group model for a few months now, which has proven successful in getting more members involved
 - 1. Please reach out if you are interested in joining a working group
- c. Rule of Law Working Group (Jerry Ferguson):
 - i. Jerry presented the Group's [resolution](#) to end funding for human rights abuses at the US border
 - 1. The resolution condemns the Trump Administration's human rights abuses at the border, and calls on Democrats to demand basic humanitarian standards for detainees before voting in favor of any border enforcement measure
 - ii. The treatment of children at the border constitutes a heinous violation of the rule of law and basic moral principles

1. We should be encouraging our electeds to address this issue, and to demand that asylum rights are recognized
- iii. Right before its July 4th break, Congress passed emergency funding to address the conditions
 1. Democrats wanted minimum standards, but Republicans held the legislation hostage; unfortunately, Democrats caved rather than risk passing no funding
 - a. Nonetheless, the Trump administration and its allies have shamelessly lied, saying that Democrats voted against providing any money to fix the conditions in the detainment camps
- iv. Going forward, we should hold firm in our position: if the administration wants money for border enforcement, that money must be tied to basic moral norms, including:
 1. Not arbitrarily separating families
 2. Basic necessities (soap, water, access to medicine)
 3. Access to legal rights
- v. Discussion:
 1. Nancy – we should draft another resolution to support overall reforms of our immigration system
 2. Mike Shatzkin – the government is ignoring our asylum laws
 3. Some members raised the possibility that the use of the word “camps” in the resolution could be seen as extreme?
 - a. As a counterpoint, Jordan noted that the conditions in these camps are abhorrent (even worse, in some ways, than Guantanamo), and that one of these camps is literally on the same site as a former Japanese internment camp
 - i. As someone whose relatives died in the Holocaust, he finds this to be an apt comparison
- vi. Question called, adopted by a vote of 35 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions
- d. Transportation Working Group (Nancy Lang):
 - i. Invited people who are interested to join the group to fight for better public transportation
 - ii. Concerned that NYCTA President Andy Byford is being pushed out by Governor Cuomo
- e. Carbon Pricing Working Group (Mike Shatzkin):
 - i. A carbon tax is a politically effective way to combat climate change, as it takes money from polluters and gives it directly back to citizens
 - ii. Invites people to join working group, including anyone from the Youth Board

1. The Group will be focusing on outreach to other Clubs, NY's Congressional delegation, and Presidential campaigns
- f. Youth Board (Jason Bohner):
 - i. The Youth Board has been organizing different committees (e.g., climate change committee) to tackle discrete issues
 - ii. We want more YB members involved in the Club's committees/working groups
 - iii. Jason introduced two other leaders:
 1. Azelea has been very involved in climate change issues, and wants to mobilize members of the YB to enact policies to combat climate change
 2. Cameron has been involved in Teens Take Charge, a student-led coalition fighting for equity and integration
5. District Leader Updates (5 min)
 - a. The Club will be hosting a joint judicial forum on August 6th, which everyone (especially judicial delegates and alternates) is encouraged to attend
 - b. The biennial County Committee meeting has been pushed back due to a new state law, and will now probably occur in September or October
 - i. The new date will give us more time to discuss possible rules changes, and to build support for those changes
 - c. Fair elections work:
 - i. Ben has been working with State Senators to introduce public funding legislation that is as good or better than what the commission eventually recommends
 - d. Ben's small fundraiser at Ryan's Daughter on July 17th at 7pm
6. State Committee Updates (5 min)
 - a. State Committee Member Adam Roberts gave an update on reform efforts
 - b. The Party has been in a fight with the legislature and Board of Elections
 - i. The Party passed a rules change to make it easier for voters to change their registration in time to vote in the Democratic primaries
 1. The reform would extend the window to up to 25 days prior to the primary
 2. The current rule is so restrictive that the DNC has threatened to take away delegates from the State primary if the reform doesn't pass
 - ii. The legislature & BOE do not want the rules change, and argue that it would require a legislative act
7. Member Time (10 min)

- a. Ilyssa gave the Club an update on the disputed Queens DA race, which has come down to a fight over affidavit ballots
 - i. This extremely close elections shows that every vote counts
- b. Sheila Flaxman proposed that, given the acoustic issues in both rooms at the Church, the Club invest in a wireless microphone

8. Adjourn