

Minutes of the December 16, 2020 SDTC Meeting and Holiday Party

The December 2020 meeting of the Sudbury Democratic Town Committee was called to order on Zoom by Tania Vitvitsky, Chair, at 7:35 pm on December 16, 2020. Also in attendance were Carmine Gentile, Vice-Chair; Sue Rushfirth, Treasurer; Peg Espinola, Secretary; Nuha Muntasser, Outreach Coordinator; and members Linda Hensch-Gentile, Lisa Kouchakdjian, Eva Fridman, Andrew Bettinelli, Carl Offner, Hank Sorrett, Henry Noer, John McQueen, Marilyn Riepe, Frank Riepe, Ann Barysh, John Riordan, and Gary Bean. Jen Roberts was unable to attend but forwarded the upcoming agenda of the Select Board in advance of the meeting.

The minutes of the November 18, 2020 meeting, which had been sent out with the agenda, were approved. Tania reported that there had been no correspondence to the Committee except from the Ossoff and Warnock campaigns. We have to submit additional paperwork because we gave more than \$1000 to federal campaigns overall. This will fall upon our treasurer, Sue Rushfirth.

It was noted that **we need an SDTC annual report**, covering our elections of officers, our speakers, and the ways in which we were politically active over the course of the calendar year. It was pointed out that people don't know who we are and what we do. Peg Espinola agreed that this would fall under her job description. Henry Noer offered to help, as he was secretary during the earlier part of the year.

Tania explained that **the Executive Committee has been meeting the Sunday before our regular monthly meetings** to set up the agenda.

Sue Rushfirth gave the treasurer's report. We have \$1974.99 in our account; however, there are some checks outstanding for the Georgia campaigns, leaving \$1204.99 as the actual sum we have to work with. Most of us have paid our dues for the coming year, as we agreed to do at our last meeting. Tania suggested we start a war chest for the state gubernatorial campaign two years from now. Ann Barysh raised the issue of how we can harness the energy that has been engendered by our recent efforts in this election year.

Tania suggested we plan a **celebration on Inauguration Day, January 20**, in conjunction with the ad hoc committee that organizes the Sudbury Protest Group's Friday demonstrations. Among the themes suggested, in addition to acknowledging the Biden-Harris win and the defeat of President Trump, were the following: Unfinished Business (Carl); Hopes and Dreams (Peg); Civil Discourse; Get the Kids Out of Cages. American flags and a Biden-Harris banner will be involved. Tania suggested 10 a.m. as a reasonable compromise between rush hour and the inauguration itself, which we may wish to watch.

The Black Lives Matter statement: Peg put together a final draft of our BLM statement, incorporating editorial suggestions from all the major participants in its creation as well as other members of the SDTC. The BLM subcommittee headed by Nuha had a chance to vet it. The statement has been sent to Colin Warwick for placement on our website. The next step will be to make a list of how, when, and to whom to disseminate the statement.

Legislative report by Carmine Gentile: Carmine described **Governor Baker's four significant changes to the Police Reform Bill** previously agreed upon by the House and Senate. The House Speaker and the Senate President have been conferring with him. There are not enough votes in the House to override a gubernatorial veto of the bill--only 91 or 92 as opposed to the necessary 106. Carmine stated that "we really need to come to an agreement with him. It will happen next week." **Further information:** Speaker DeLeo will step down in a couple of weeks to begin a job at Northeastern University. Carmine had "ideas" about who the next speaker would be but would not say more, other than that "they are all very well qualified."

Carmine went on to describe his meeting with the Act On Mass transparency project, which Tania also attended. He described it as a "good meeting" with more than two dozen constituents--he hosted it and insisted it be open only to his own constituents. He explained the reasons why he is unwilling, as are most representatives, to sign a pledge which Act on Mass had circulated. At the meeting with constituents, the aforesaid pledge was not focused on. Act on Mass had held a previous "training session" with participants to discuss changes to the House rules in

the session starting in January 2021. These would include: (1) having 72 hours to look at a bill before voting on it; (2) making committee votes and testimony public; and (3) decreasing the number of representatives needed to call for a roll call vote from sixteen to eight. Carmine supports #1 and #2 but not the third measure which he believes would likely "paralyze" House formal sessions because eight conservative Republicans (or other outlier group of 8 from either party) could force unlimited roll calls on matters having no widespread support and bring meaningful work and debate to a halt. He did point out that what the founders of this group have done--a group from a Somerville district with median voting age of 33 or 34, much younger than most if not all other House districts in the state--could provide a template for others to advocate for their causes, the essence being to get a team together to organize activists in other districts. Act on Mass reached out to community activists in other towns, including Indivisible and Democratic town committee members, to advance their proposals with their respective State Representatives. In response to the question, "Why does everything the progressives want die in committee?" Carmine explained to them that the progressives are a minority in the MA legislature. So the effort should be to get progressive Democrats elected. This matters more than the rules, "which we suspend all the time."

John Riordan pointed out that even when a strong majority supports a measure it doesn't always get onto the floor for a vote. He used Safe Communities as an example. "It's a one-man show." Carmine wasn't sure that that particular bill was so assured, as members had been polled to determine whether there was majority support to pass it. But he didn't debate the power of the Speaker.

Henry Noer was particularly concerned about efforts to eliminate "food-shaming" in the schools, whereby children were denied lunch if their parents were in arrears with the fee. Carmine agreed there needed to be a law or regulation to prevent this from happening.

There was further discussion about the fine line that some legislators feel they must walk between their own progressive values and political realities in the Legislature and in their districts.

Tania made a report on her attendance at a 3rd MAD (Third Middlesex Area Democrats) meeting. The 3rd MAD consists of eight towns, plus the city of Waltham, which lie in State Senator Mike Barrett's district. John Riordan was chair of the 3rd MAD for four or five years. 3rd MAD is getting a new chair, Robert Logan, who is former chair of the Waltham City Democratic Committee. Mike Barrett reported at the meeting regarding planning for Phase One of the COVID 19 vaccination program. Healthcare workers, patients in long-term care facilities, police and firefighters, home care workers and those in congregate care facilities such as correctional institutions would get the vaccine first. He discussed the probable override of the governor's veto of the Roe Act as it was presented to Baker by the Legislature, and the probable failure to override a veto of the Legislature's compromise police reform bill. Barrett pointed out that only twenty percent of legislators identify as progressives. He is particularly concerned about legislation being considered by the Conference Committee on Climate of which he is a member. Tania suggested that "at some point we might want to invite Mike Barrett to speak to us." She will continue to attend 3rd MAD meetings.

Ann Barysh raised the question as to whether we should identify and reach out to a progressive caucus. Carmine replied that there has been a progressive caucus in the House for decades, under various names. They met this morning and will meet as much as three times a week for the rest of the year. Usually, they meet once a week. Hank Sorrett countered that we should vote before we adopt a purely progressive approach. John pointed out that there is a Progressive Democrats of America and a Progressive Democrats of MA which are different from one another. Carl went to a meeting of one of them and wasn't that impressed. Henry Noer weighed in on the issue stating that "the fight isn't over--it's important to urge Democrats to speak out." He urged us to call legislators on the issues that matter to us. Gary made the point that "there is only one pro-Democratic party in this country, and I'm registered for it--I'd rather do a pull than a push!"

On this note the meeting was adjourned, at 8:30 pm, and the holiday party began.

Peg Espinola, secretary