

RaisingVoicesUSA General Meeting
September 25, 2018, 7:00 p.m.
Central Synagogue-Beth Emeth

Welcome from Cindy & Emma

What Emma did for her summer vacation!

- Originally from Glasgow & Green card holder for 15 years
- Afraid to apply for citizenship - if something went wrong, could end up being sent back and leaving her husband & children behind
- Gained citizenship over the summer and voted for the first time in the primaries

We are working toward the November elections and will be providing opportunities and resources to get involved and educated for the election

- RVUSA members have been running voter registration drives at local businesses, through unions, etc. (Ed, Marguerite, Emma, Sarah)
 - Need volunteers to help with voter registration drives - contact us to get involved

Trick or Vote:

- Started more than a decade ago on the west coast by a group of students
- Matt Singer, one of the original founders, also initiated National Voter Registration Day
- More to come at the end of the meeting

RVUSA membership will now be available for a \$25 donation:

- Membership creates opportunities for further involvement
- Teespring store launched with merchandise including shirts, posters, etc.

RVUSA website redesigned and relaunched today!

Parents: remind your college students to fill out absentee ballots if they're unable to vote locally in November - last day to register is October 12, absentee ballots must be postmarked by October 30.

- Also the last day to change your affiliation for next year's primaries

Discussion of Gerrymandering - Michael Pernick

BIO: Michael Pernick is an attorney in the litigation department at Paul Weiss, a New York City law firm. Michael has an extensive pro bono voting rights practice and has worked on cases involving gerrymandering, voter ID laws, and a variety of other election law issues.

Michael's work has been cited and relied upon by a number of courts, including the United States Supreme Court. Here on Long Island, Michael recently brought a federal lawsuit under the Voting Rights Act against the Town of Islip, to challenge the at-large elections for Islip Town Board.

Michael frequently trains and leads teams of lawyers who protect voting rights on election day. Last year, Michael led a team of lawyers in Alabama protecting voting rights with the Doug Jones campaign. In addition, Michael has trained and led teams of voter protection lawyers for elections in Ohio, North Carolina, and here on Long Island.

Earlier this year, Michael was nominated by County Executive Laura Curran and unanimously confirmed by the County Legislature for a seat on the Nassau County Board of Ethics. Michael is also a senior fellow on the Millennial Policy Initiative Commission on Democracy and Voting Rights.

Before becoming a lawyer, Michael managed political campaigns. Michael grew up in Nassau County and lives in Rockville Centre.

- Even though democrats won the majority in 2016 elections, the republican candidate won due to gerrymandering - it is impossible to make change in a democracy if the game is rigged.
 - In the current system, voters don't pick their candidates - candidates pick their voters
- History of gerrymandering:
 - Dates back to early 1800s
 - 5th Vice President & MA Governor Elbridge Gerry created a political deal to redraw districts to gain advantage for his party
 - one redrawn district looked like a salamander, so the press started referring to it as the "Gerrymander" and the name stuck
- Annual census triggers a burden for states and localities to redraw the lines of their districts so that all districts have approximately the same number of voters
 - Every state does this differently - some have commissions, some allow the state legislature to do it on their own
- When a state has a trifecta - one party controls all 3 branches of state legislature (governor, house and senate) - gerrymandering is much more likely because the party has full control of the process, especially when no commission is used.
 - Common strategies:
 - Cracking: spreading voters of a particular type among many districts in order to prevent them from having voting power in any single district
 - Packing: concentrating voters of a particular type in a few districts to lessen their power against the remaining majority of districts
- Historically this process has been somewhat isolated but has become more common after the 2010 census.
 - The republican party had a plan called "redmap", investing millions of dollars in state races leading up to 2010.
 - Democrats were focused on electing Obama to the presidency and electing federal legislators, but Republicans devoted their energy to

- creating trifectas in as many states as they could (or preventing Democrats from achieving trifectas, as happened in NY).
 - After 2010, republicans had trifectas in 22 states; democrats had only half that
 - There is much more data available than in past years, and that data is available to map makers to help predict how we will vote; better technology enables more detailed and accurate gerrymandered maps
 - In many states, Democrats win the popular vote but manipulated districts mean their actual influence in state government is drastically lower than Republicans
 - Both state and federal districts have been gerrymandered
 - How do we fix this? Two approaches:
 - Federal lawsuits
 - Malapportionment lawsuits (districts have too many or not enough voters)
 - Citing technical flaws in redistricting maps
 - Racial gerrymanders intended to discriminate against minority voters
 - Supreme court has not answered if a gerrymander can be struck down for being too partisan, so these cases are often sent back or struck down; remains to be seen if these will eventually be heard and decided and if this will be usable as an argument in future cases
 - State lawsuits - often more effective
 - Federal Supreme court cannot weigh in on state constitutional issues, so state supreme courts must address them
 - Recent case in PA did result in gerrymandered districts being struck down based on being drawn along party lines.
 - Courts can strike down unconstitutional gerrymanders, but it is up to voters to push for policies that allow for fair districting to begin with
 - The best policy is independent redistricting commissions - see CA, PA, etc.
 - Ways to establish these policies:
 - Citizen-driven ballot measures (see Arizona, Michigan, Utah, Missouri, etc.)
 - Support and elect local officials who support independent commissions
 - Keep registering and educating voters and encouraging voters to support candidates and ballot measures

Q&A:

- Q: What does the NY state constitution allow?
 - In 2014 an amendment was passed to implement a redistricting commission - NOT independent - 8 members appointed by parties and those members can appoint additional 2 members; state legislature can completely overrule district lines drawn by the commission if they don't like it
- Q: short of achieving a trifecta in a particular state - if you have control of 2 out of 3 - are you able to affect the changes needed to prevent partisan gerrymandering, or is it dependent on the full trifecta?

- If a party does not have full control, it forces compromise and opens the door for more equal solutions. If a compromise cannot be reached, decisions would go to a court-appointed monitor, but this is rare.
- Q: are there any lawsuits addressing the redistricting issues in Nassau County?
Currently very partisan despite pouring millions of dollars into addressing it
 - There have been lawsuits but they were not effective - currently no pending lawsuits in the county. Dependent on federal supreme court to decide if partisan gerrymandering is unconstitutional
- Audience comment: most gerrymandering in the last 20 years has been done by Republicans. Can easily be blamed on the fact that Republicans have majority power, but Democrats are partly to blame for not being aware and educated. In last county redistricting, Democrats did not have a rebuttal plan until too late and were swept by Republicans. Must begin working NOW to prevent further redistricting issues in the future, not 6 months before.
- Most important thing we can possibly do is be informed, inform others, and VOTE.

Getting Involved with Voter Registration and Campaigning - Emily Kilheeneey

BIO: Emily Kilheeneey currently serves as the Regional Organizer for Long Island with the New York State Democratic Party. She has previously organized for Planned Parenthood and National Organization for Women. Two years ago, she founded an organization called Democracy in Youth that aims to involve young people in their communities, register young voters, and teach young people how to be leaders in political movements. She is a graduate of Hofstra University, and studied Political Science, Journalism, and Gender Studies.

- The NYS Democratic Party is currently running a coordinated party strategy to work to get Democrats elected up and down the ballot - sharing money and resources and campaigning for democrats in all roles
- How you can get involved:
 - Voter registration
 - Deadline is october 12
 - Working to register voters across the state, focusing on college campuses with drives running across LI every day
 - High traffic areas like train stations, bus stations, shopping markets, etc.
 - When more people vote, Democrats win
 - Phone banks
 - Easy way to reach a lot of people at once
 - Running every Tuesday and Thursday for a variety of candidates
 - Tuesdays in Garden City, Thursdays in Seacliff
 - host a phone banking event in your community
 - Canvassing
 - Knocking on doors and talking to people in their homes
 - Tell people about the candidates and encourage them to vote
 - Face to face communications are more likely to get people to the polls

- Events occur across LI that you can join
- “Organizing academies”
 - Trainings for members of the community on how to phone bank, canvas, register voters, engage with people on social media, etc.
 - Ensure that people feel comfortable and confident while being active in the community
- Commit to at least one action in the next week - and if we keep getting active over the next 6 weeks we will win!

Q&A:

- Q: are there efforts to engage with high schoolers who will be 18 at the time of the election?
 - Not from the party because partisan efforts are not allowed at high schools, so members of the party cannot participate in these events
 - Rely on volunteers in the community to work with schools and encourage students to register
- Comments: local club meetings:
 - RVC Democratic Club meeting October 3 @ RVC South Central middle school at 7:30pm
 - Valley Stream Democratic Club @ Presbyterian Church on Thursday 9/27
- Q: how can we find out which colleges you’ll be registering voters?
 - Flyers are available with a schedule of events at which you can participate
- Comment: Andrew Goodwin Foundation works to register voters nationwide; active at Stony Brook and other institutions
- Q: Can you give a quick demonstration for how to handle a door-to-door canvassing?
 - Notes: generally people are polite so don’t be nervous/afraid

Emma & Cindy: RVUSA recognizes our members either running for office or working for local campaigns - if you would like to join them, reach out and let them know!

Introducing Trick or Vote

- Student-led initiative to support voting, activism and community involvement
- Goal is to raise awareness of upcoming elections and the voting process
- How do we trick or vote?
 - Instead of traditional trick or treating, you go door to door and encourage people to vote
 - Leave behind materials giving election dates, candidate information
- Website is live at <http://trickorvoteusa.org>
 - Includes a map showing all the locations where people are pledging to trick or vote
 - Get instructions for getting involved, downloadable flyers and posters, etc.
- Event on October 19th to carve pumpkins, make signs, etc.

- Reach out to people that you know in other towns/states and ask them to participate - send them a link to the website and ask them to sign up
- If you are NOT trick or treating, you can still participate by displaying a flyer on your door, carving a pumpkin, or passing out cards to people who visit you
- Halloween is almost exactly one week before election day - this is a time when people are more likely to be home, open their doors and engage with their neighbors

Audience comments:

- Long Island Retired Alliance holding a forum in Hauppauge on Friday October 26 from 11am-1pm
 - Candidates running for congressional districts have been invited; unsure who will attend but will provide an opportunity to speak to and ask questions of the candidates
- Note that canvassing and phone banking run by parties are going to be targeted to potential voters who will support party candidates and issues
- Note that we need to pay attention to those already in office, particularly need to pay attention to Nassau County legislation
 - Need people to be visible and involved in local issues
 - Next legislature meeting tomorrow - Old Country Road

Closing:

A quote from Ta-Nehisi Coates "Being a citizen does not stop at the ballot box." Keep engaging and getting involved!

Next Meeting: Friday, October 19, 7:00 p.m. at United Church of Rockville Centre