

**MINUTES: Agriculture and Rural Caucus (ARC), September 13, 2008, Tulalip, Washington Meeting**

**Call to Order:** Jackie Bradley, Acting Chair, 8:15 am

**Pledge of Allegiance:** Led by George Fearing

**Reports:**

**Treasurer/Secretary:** The Treasurer's report and minutes for January Vancouver ARC meeting were contained in the material packet distributed to attendees.

**Speakers (in order of presentations):**

**George Fearing, 4<sup>th</sup> CD Candidate**

Commenced remarks stating he is proud to be the Democrat 4<sup>th</sup> CD candidate, and as such, the candidate for Central Washington and for growers throughout Washington State. He feels that growers and farmers in Washington State should be/natural Democrats since it was Democrat Presidents and Congresses that created programs benefiting farmers/growers, projects such as our dams, irrigation systems and reclamation areas. He is working hard to explain to our growers why they should be voting Blue.

He learned from his parents to listen, observe and then work to remove obstacles and promote healing. His father was a minister of the church, his mother a nurse. He feels his work as a concerned attorney continues the family tradition of healing. For instance, he has assisted growers denied crop insurance by the Federal government obtain payment, assisted growers be reimbursed when purchasing defective seed, aided growers harmed by pesticides, and obtained payment for hay farmers whose clients reneged on their contractual obligations.

Fearing strongly feels US needs to get rid of its dependence on oil....and that Washington State should be the alternative energy capital of the world...with its abundant wind, sun/solar, nuclear, water and geothermal resources. He has a twelve step proposal to get US off of oil, and will seek to continue the outstanding tradition of former Congressional Representatives from Central Washington, Rep. Mike McCormack (1870's) and Rep. Jay Inslee who promoted safe clean nuclear energy and the Apollo project, respectively. Fearing will seek to be placed on the Energy Committee of the US House of Representatives, unlike the current Republican incumbent, who has rarely, if ever, supported any alternative energy project, who is for all purposes in the pocket of the oil industry...and rather than serving on the Energy Committee spends his time on, of all places, the House Ethics Committee.

Rep. Hastings solution to our energy problem is to drill, to drill everywhere, following lock-step to the bidding of Exxon-Mobile, Chevron and other oil oligopolies. He supports oil profiteers (think current price of gas in Washington State), and has joined with them to sacrifice Americans in the "lust for lube-Iraq oil", including sacrificing of young soldiers in the two Iraq wars. Hastings has voted against raising fuel efficiency standards for automobiles, against alternate energy legislation, against forcing oil companies to drill on their existing oil leases.

Having grown up in a family of five with modest means, Fearing knows how to "scrimp and save", and believes it is **patriotic to conserve**, patriotic to conserve resources, knows what it is

like to live life as a regular guy. His campaign is for the ordinary, regular citizens of Central Washington. He will vote for their interests, not against those interests...which is how Hastings votes. Not only is Hastings not a member of the Congressional Energy Committee, he is not even a member of the House Agriculture Committee., despite representing a district heavily reliant on agriculture.

Hastings has voted against the sales tax deduction for Washington residents, did not support legislation to assist local law enforcement officers and medical facilities contend with the growing rural meth epidemic, did not support cleanup of Hanford, voted against SCHIP program, voted against Medicare D programs allowing U.S. Government to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies to lower our drug bills, voted for the bill permitting off-shoring of asparagus production from Washington to Peru, voted for trade agreements hurting our growers. When it comes to trade, noted Fearing, it is time to Trade Doc for Fearing !!

He then turned to the issue of Safe Food. We need to secure our borders against unsafe food, and not allow nations such as China to ship contaminated wheat gluten that recently killed off over 50,000 US pets. Luckily no humans died. In addition, we should be concerned with how food imports are grown and shipped. The Fair Play/Fair Trade ethic comes into play. We should not allow US growers to face competition from foreign growers like those in China who use slave labor, or like those in Peru who employ workers with unlivable low wages and unsafe working conditions. We need to explore lessening of over-rigorous and sometimes outdated Federal and state regulations that hamper our growers' efforts to compete globally. For instance, overbearing standards for boxing of fruit that add considerable expense to the cost of Washington grown apples.

On the Farm Bill, there is an urgent need to separate out the Bill's programs that are social programs, from those that are grower programs, and to stop blaming growers for escalating costs of programs like Food Stamps. At same time, it is critical to educate the public on programs like the CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) which pays growers to not plant crops. The CRP program is not simply a "give away" freebie for growers. It requires growers to let the idle acreage be devoted to restoration of native grasses, for growers to plant their land with native plant seeds, and to fence off and protect this grass land. This in turn helps restore water quality, promote greater wildlife activity, etc, which in turn promotes for the greater community well being.

In conclusion, Fearing feels we can, we will win back the Congressional Seat in Central Washington. He seeks ARC's assistance, its endorsement, financial support. Remember, Central Washington is Democratic Territory. Democrats constructed the Dams and the Hanford Project. 2008 is the Year of Change and the Year of Healing.

### **Dwight Pelz, Chair, Washington State Democrat Central Committee**

He expressed his support for George Fearing, who he classifies as a "true patriot", one who has put his life on the line to run for Congress. Feels Fearing is running an active and strong campaign, taking advantage of "vote builder". Also noted that Democrats are running good candidates in other rural areas of Central and Eastern Washington. States that Democrats need to take control of our future by voting Democrat, by voting based on real issues such as the economy and health care (not frivolous "lip stick/moose hunting" concerns), and that we need to take our democracy back and not be divided by fear.

### **Debbie Serait, 28<sup>th</sup> LD Senate Candidate**

She noted she is running for elective office in an urban district. While a former State Committeewoman and LD Chair, she has little rural and agricultural experience. However, she recognizes importance of agriculture as an economic industry, as well as importance of rural values to the State of Washington. She appreciates and respects the efforts of ARC within the WSDCC. She made clear she is a "listener", and solicited ARC's input and counsel on agricultural and rural issues so that she can better represent all the citizens of Washington in the State Legislature.

### **Eileen Macoll, Vice Chair, Washington State Democrat Central Committee**

Focused her remarks on the first meeting of the Rural Caucus of the Democrat National Committee (DNC), which took place at the Denver National Convention. Formerly the Rural Working Group, the Rural Caucus now has formal status within DNC. While the Caucus has yet to get "respect" by DNC as a whole, there is now a realization within DNC (in large part due to influence and belief of DNC Chair Howard Dean) that the rural vote is needed to win elections, particularly the 2008 election and DNC's efforts to recapture the rural "red" states in America's heartland. There is a developing consensus that DNC needs to respond to what amounts to a "cultural war" with the Republicans....not by denigrating attacks such as those on Sarah Palin (i.e., making fun of her rural roots in Idaho and her attendance at Idaho's Land Grant University) which backfire and cost Democrat candidates vote. Rather there is a need to focus on positive message of Obama's agriculture and rural positions/experience..... and to structure his campaign to fit rural culture, that is, to organize at the grassroots/local level (top down does not work).

This effort includes getting involved in community projects, particularly those that cross party lines such as assisting libraries, cleaning of roads, improvement of parks, as well as taking advantage of local "hot button" issues such as supporting the police in their Guild's labor dispute in Pullman, Washington.

Also, a critical need to recruit candidates for local city and county offices, as well as to raise and provide resources and support for these candidates....including training and education of these candidates on how to run a campaign. There is also a need to educate a "metro centric" WSDCC party-leadership that rural and local races count and are important; that we need to make sure a Democrat candidate runs for every State Representative and Senate seat in rural Washington.....and not repeat this year's sad state of affairs with no Democrat candidates for several seats in the 7<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> LDs.

### **Chris Endresen, State Director for Senator Maria Cantwell**

Briefly noted her background on the City Council of Poulsbo and as a Kitsap County Commissioner, noting she is "singing the same hymn" as Vice Chair Macoll's remarks. Then proceeded to explain Senator Maria Cantwell's recent record and activities relating to agriculture and rural communities, taking advantage of her sitting on the US Senate's Energy and Natural Resources Committee, as well as other Senate committees dealing with finance, commerce and tribal concerns. Recent Cantwell accomplishments include:

- o campaigning for Senator Obama in rural North Dakota this week

- o input to the Farm Bill, helping (1)to get recognition (financial parity) for "specialty crops" such as the over 250 varieties of apples and cherries in Washington State, (2) to get reimbursement

for Washington State asparagus growers for loss due to importation of and off-shoring of asparagus production to Peru, (3) to get millions of dollars worth of fresh fruit into school systems throughout USA, and (4) to save specialty crop bloc grant program.

- o work on Trade Adjustment Assistance Program's Disaster Relief provisions to provide financial relief to Washington growers of peaches, cherries and apples harmed by adverse weather conditions

- o work to get Food Stamp Program indexed to inflation for the first time

- o pushed for expanded funding for alternative energy programs such as bio-mass and bio energy

- o promoted expansion of funding of availability of IT to rural areas, particularly broad band connections

- o pushed for first steps to reform the Commodity Payment Program (payments not to grow)

- o worked on providing funding for the Odessa Aquifer project

- o held hearings on snow pack and potential impact on water resources for both Washington and USA

- o assisted US Coast Guard to upgrade its cutter fleet (the Guard is responsible for safety and navigation on the Columbia River)

- o worked on Medicare reform

- o leader in Senate to get the sales tax deduction for Washington State residents, and pushing for extension of deduction for 2008 tax year

- o investigating exorbitant increases in oil/gas prices and why US government regulatory agencies not regulating these increases.

Ms. Endresen also noted that Senator Cantwell places great importance on constituent services, particularly those relating to assisting residents of Washington State who have issues/ concerns with Federal Government agencies and programs. Senator Cantwell maintains six offices throughout Washington, including one in Tri-Cities and one in Spokane, to provide both constituent assistance, but equally as important, to outreach to the local communities, to keep up to date on issues and concerns of residents of Washington State.

**Amanda Nelson, Chair, Young Democrats of America's Rural Caucus & Chair, Washington Young Democrats of America**

Reported on progress of national Young Democrats of America's Rural Caucus (established 2-1/2 years ago), including (1) determining how, and recruiting of, and encouraging young Democrats to run for office in rural areas, (2) developing of a best practices manual for conducting election campaigns for both candidates and campaign workers, and (3) successfully getting an agricultural plank into the national Young Democrats of America's Platform.

***Issues Discussed:***

**Protect the Vote:** Attendees discussed issues raised in Ludwig's memorandum (included in material packet, and with these minutes, in the appendix immediately following *Adjournment* below) relating to efforts necessary to maintain integrity of the vote counting process and to protect the vote (PROTV) for Democrat candidates in Counties, LD's and cities with mail ballot elections. Need to keep in mind that PROTV is no less important, perhaps more important, than GOTV, Get Out the Vote.

**Adjournment :** 9:35 a.m.

**Appendix:**

*Below are edited excerpts from an email exchange with Chris Cooledge of Gov. Gregoire's staff January 24 2008*

Larry: Thanks for participating in the Stevens County leadership conference call this morning with the Governor. You mentioned problems with the voting process in your area and I was hoping you could expand a little more on that in an email. I am going to talk to our voting strategist about this and see if we can make headway. Let me know if you have questions. Chris ([ccooledge@chrisgregoire.com](mailto:ccooledge@chrisgregoire.com))

Chris: it's not just a problem in my area...it's all the areas in the state that have gone to vote by mail. Instead of having election observers for about 3 or 4 different days as was the case when voting at polling stations, we now need to have a team of 10-to-30 people for each county or LD (depending on size of LD or county). These observers need to be available for five weeks full-time, 8 am to 5 pm, beginning two to three days after the ballots are mailed out, through to when the vote totals are certified. (For this year, from about October 20 through November 25)

Also observers need to be at the Auditor's office when the ballots come back from the printer and are entered into the computer; and to be at the Auditor's when the ballot packages are assembled for mailout to registered voters, and then to go with the Auditor's staff to post office to make sure the ballot packets are mailed out.

Then, two or three days after the ballots are mailed out, observers are needed to accompany Auditor's staff each day to the post office to pick up the ballots, then accompany/follow the staff to the vote counting center, making sure all received ballots are brought into the center.

There at the vote counting center, ballots are coming in every day....requiring observers be present to watch the whole process of opening, logging in, signature verification, sorting, batching, putting/scanning into the computer, securing of ballots for storage, and so forth....i.e., an all day long process. Thus more than one observer is usually required to monitor all the aforementioned processing steps on any one day.

Further, on those days when the Election or Canvassing Boards meet, we have to make sure there are observers present, usually at least two (the concept of "safety in numbers").....sometimes these meetings can go past regular working hours. It is absolutely critical that observers be present at these meetings, as this is the only time in the entire process that changes can be made to the actual ballot itself, or ballots be rejected and not counted.

In other words, bottom line, we need to get out there and PROTV---protect the vote, not just GOTV---get out the vote. I worked in enough elections back east (Washington DC ) to know that votes can get "lost" or stolen or manipulated if the observers are not present or not paying attention. In addition during my experience as Lead Democrat Observer for Stevens County in the 2004 Gregoire count, recount, and re-recount, I saw, first hand, Republican attempts to "steal" votes from Gregoire. We ended up with a net loss of one vote..but if we had not been there to challenge the "goings-on", at least 2-to-3 more would

have been lost. If we don't PROTV all that GOTV effort will be in large part in vain...what's the point in getting out 1,000 more votes when we will lose 2,000 in the vote counting process?

Hopefully county and LD organizations will organize observer teams of 10-to-30 (or more in larger jurisdictions such as Spokane).....and then encourage the observers to take the observer training offered by Auditors' offices. If observers miss the training, experienced Democrat observers can teach the new observers the rules and process. Perhaps the Governor's office could assist/encourage county/LD organizations to provide those 10-to-30 observers, thus helping to ensure every vote cast for Gregoire is indeed included in the certified vote totals. Larry

**Post Meeting Follow-ups:**

[1] Following the ARC meeting, WSDCC Secretary Luis Moscoso introduced ARC Secretary Larry Ludwig to WSDCC **Hispanic Latino Democratic Caucus Chair, Carlos Jimenez**. They plan on working for cooperation between and coordination of both Caucuses activities, and for increased communications and information exchanges between Caucus leadership.

[2] Since the Tulalip ARC meeting, the ARC Executive Committee voted unanimously for ARC's **endorsement of the candidacy of George Fearing for Congress** in the 4<sup>th</sup> Congressional District.