

Eau Claire County Dems Coffee Klatch Notes for 7/17/2025

Present: Jeff Smith, Carol Craig, Sharon Dillon, Jim Dunning, Paul Gibson, Bonnie Golden, Dave & Debby Gratz, Ann Heywood, Mike Lindsay, Bob Matthews, Ann McKinley, Linda Norton, Christian Phelps, Laurie Hollar, Linda Lodolce, Bill King, Maureen Slauson, Nick Smiar, Liz Spencer, Phil Swanhorst, Robert Wojnowski, Eleanor Wolf, Thao Yang, Susie Zillmer. On Zoom – Ann McKinley, Carolyn Haar, Mike O’Brien. Special guest: Dr. Tim Nordin, President, EauClaire Board of Education

Upcoming Events:

July 31- Sheriff Riewestahl will be special guest at Klatch

August 21 – Annual EC Dem Picnic – Registration is open by going to the website.

September 13 – EC Dem Thrift Sale – start saving your items!

Discussion Notes:

The following notes should not be construed to be exact quotes of specific speakers. Comments from the group are sometimes included with the representatives’ comments.

Senator Jeff Smith reported that he is working on recruiting legislative candidates. His present Senate seat, the 31st, is vulnerable, the closest in the state. Senator Jesse James could run against him since they both live in the district under the new maps. James’s seat was kept under the old maps, which are switching in the several-year redistricting process.

Smith also discussed the closure of Klein Hall, the veterans’ shelter in Chippewa Falls, following the funding cut in the recently adopted state budget. Funding was on Evers’ budget proposal, which the Republicans rejected. Why did the Republicans let this happen? Proposals to bring the veterans’ shelters back, along with many other proposed amendments were swiftly rejected. Smith thinks the Republicans simply missed it. For the two shelters in Chippewa Falls and Green Bay the needed funding is \$1.9 million. Several Democrats introduced a bill on Wednesday to save the two facilities, which without funding will close at the end of September. The legislature is out of session until September 1. Republicans have blamed Evers for not fighting harder for the funding, but it was the Republicans who were in charge. Representative Christian Phelps discussed the process on the Assembly side under Robyn Vos’ leadership. There was a lack of seriousness about all of the 25 or so Democratic amendments to the budget which they quickly tabled.

Tim Nordin, ECASD School Board President, was guest speaker. Nordin is very disappointed that the budget allotted \$0 in new general revenue funding to public education. Democrats Smith and Emerson (and others) did not hold to their pro-education campaign positions. He very much appreciated that Phelps did vote NO. He clarified that the so-called “400 year veto” that Evers used in the last round to authorize districts to increase the levy \$325/student is a Republican joke, not an increase in state funding. They could have fixed it if it is so bad. He appreciates that special education funding will provide ECASD a \$1m boost, but it does not cover increasing costs. There also is a 9% voucher increase which will cost ECASD \$500,000 and increase to \$2.5 m going to private schools. Phelps pointed out that next year the caps on the number of vouchers will come off although the parental income cap will remain. We do not know the impact of no caps. Parents sometimes pay lower tuition than the voucher they receive. The district will be back with a referendum request in 2028. The

referenda requests are always for less than the true need. We have finally achieved more FTE's (full time equivalent) than before the pandemic. Declining enrollments will be a big challenge as class sizes shift.

A Project 25 goal is to shut down public education and have families figure out how to get their children educated. Phelps reminds us we will pay for education one way or another: public schools OR homelessness, crime, lower productivity, lost potential, etc. The only lever local school districts have is asking their communities to pay more. Political campaigns are now mentioning rising electric bills; education should be top. But people see their electric bill every month and their property tax only once a year. Might there be a Constitutional challenge coming in the courts since the Wisconsin Constitution guarantees a fair and equal education for all? What is the district doing about AI? There is teacher training but so far, no comprehensive plan. How will the district respond to ICE raids? The ECASD has policy that we are committed to serving every child and we are not changing it. We have trained administrators how to resist ICE agents' attempts to enter the school and take children as we know that is traumatizing to all students. Commitment to every student has brought us out of the pandemic. We still need progress.

The Party thrift sale is September 13. Prepare your donations.

Submitted by Ann Heywood – Ann, thank you for taking such diligent notes!!!