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Levy County DEC starts rolling toward reestablishment; *DNC leader -- start the resistance*



Alma R. Gonzalez, Esq., a member of the Democratic National Committee, and Brandon Peters, Esq., a former Democratic candidate for Congress, welcome people to the first of two sessions held Saturday (Dec. 1) to reestablish the Levy County Democratic Executive Committee (DEC).

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © Dec. 2, 2018 at 10:48 p.m.

LEVY COUNTY -- Two sessions Saturday (Dec. 1) showed the potential for the reestablishment of the Levy County Democratic Executive Committee (DEC).



Franklin Schuler, former mayor of Bronson, is among the Democrats at one of the meetings on Saturday.

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In the foreground is Ministerial Faith Alliance Inc. Pastor Johnnie Jones III, the last active Levy County DEC chairman. Sitting in the background is Jim Robertson, who with his wife Ann Robertson allowed people to use their home for the first two meetings to kickoff the effort to restart the Levy County DEC.



Dushyant Gosai, one of three candidates in the Democratic primary for United States House of Representatives, Florida District 3, is seen here. He was among the many Democrats giving their time Saturday to help Levy County have a DEC again.

Hosted by Brandon and Stacey Peters at the home of Ann and Jim Robertson (Stacey Peters' mother and father) in the Williston area, the event attracted Levy County Democrats who are interested in dedicating their resources to revive the Democratic Party leadership organization that faded from existence in Levy County in 2012.

Brandon Peters is a recent Democratic candidate who sought to unseat U.S. Rep. Neal Dunn

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(R-District 2, Fla.).

Bob Rackleff (D-Tallahassee) won the Democratic primary for the United States House of Representatives, Florida District 2, race that was decided on Aug. 28.

Dunn won reelected to the United States House of Representatives on Nov. 6, when he defeated Rackleff.

The morning session included several significant Democrats from the area, including former Bronson Mayor Franklin Schuler, who also was a candidate in the Democratic primary, where Peters and Rackleff ran. A health issue cut Schuler's bid short, even before the primary.

Ministerial Faith Alliance Inc. Pastor Johnnie Jones III, who was the last Levy County DEC chairman in 2012, was present. Now living in Alachua County, Pastor Jones said he enjoys serving the church in Williston, where his heart is, but the physical address where he lives precludes him from voting in Levy County or from being a member of this county's DEC.

Also present for the first session to reestablish the Levy County DEC on Saturday was Dushyant Gosai, one of three candidates in the Democratic primary for United States House of Representatives, Florida District 3.

Gosai, Tom Wells and Yvonne Hayes Hinson were in a three-way race in that Democratic primary for Congress on Aug. 28.

Heading into the general election, was incumbent U.S. Rep. Ted Yoho (R-Gainesville), who was first elected in 2012.

Yoho won reelection on Nov. 6 in the race against Hinson. That final vote ended where Yoho obtained 58.1 percent of the vote and Hinson had 41.9 percent.

As he opened the first session to restart the Levy County DEC, Peters said he believes Democrats need to unite. Whether individuals consider themselves to be more inclined toward working on the campaigns for Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders or as a "Beto Democrat," all Democrats must see a vision for the nation that is in contrast with the stark reality of today.

Robert Francis "Beto" O'Rourke is an American politician and businessman serving in the United States House of Representative for the 16th congressional district of Texas since 2013. In 2018, O'Rourke was the nominee of the Democratic Party in a United States Senate race, running against Republican incumbent Sen. Ted Cruz (R). O'Rourke was defeated by Cruz by 2.6 percentage points on Nov. 6.

Peters thanked all of the attendees for taking the time and using their other resources to attend the first pre-organizational meeting to reestablish the Levy County Democratic Executive Committee. He mentioned his appreciation for the grace and kindness shown by his father-in-law and mother-in-law who provided their home as a first point to restart the Levy County DEC.

Peters shared with listeners that it is vital to have a local DEC for candidates who are Democrats. Congressional District 2, which includes 19 counties, Peters said, is the poorest and most rural district in Florida.

Nine of those 19 counties – including Levy County – do not have their own DEC, he said. In that Aug. 28 Democratic primary, Peters won 15 of the 19 counties, but it was not enough to overwhelm the Leon County Democrats who pushed Rackleff to win that race.

"In counties where there is a DEC," Peters said, "you stand a much better chance of organizing your own campaign and making your case to the people, because there is the fabric of an organism on which you can hang the details of your race, your opinions and your beliefs.

"And so, in this strange era of history in which we currently live, we thought that reestablishing the Democratic Executive Committee, the arm of the Florida Democratic Party, in Levy County, is particularly important as we look ahead to the future," Peters said.

Some Democrats may not be content to only complain about the current state of the politics in the nation on Facebook or Twitter, Peters said.

Instead, Peters explained, Democrats in Levy County are here to organize in the very serious business of helping bring to fruition a different vision for the United States of America – in contrast with what has come to be in the past couple of years.

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Peters said he invited interested Democrats to reestablish the Levy County DEC, and although he is not going to chair the committee, he and his wife (“his better half”) Stacey Peters will work on the sidelines of support.

The new bylaws are not yet written for the group. There are plenty of openings for leadership in the Levy County DEC, nonetheless. With 13 precincts, there can be 26 people serving as precinct captains. That would be one male and one female in each voting precinct of the county.

The minimal number of officers would be four – chair, vice chair, secretary and treasurer.

ALMA R. GONZALEZ, Esq.

Alma R. Gonzalez, Esq., of Tampa was the keynote speaker in Levy County on Saturday. Gonzalez is one of nine members of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) from Florida. In addition to the nine Florida DNC members, the Florida officers of the DNC are Chair Terry Rizzo, Vice Chair Judy Mount, Secretary Casmore A. Shaw and Treasurer Francesca Menes.

Gonzalez shared her background as well as what individuals would need to do for the Levy County DEC to thrive again.

She opened her presentation by thanking the many people who chose to give of their time on Saturday to work toward the reestablishment of the Levy County DEC. She especially thanked the Peters and Robertsons for hosting the event.

The keynote speaker shared insight about herself with the crowd, because she wanted them to know who was speaking with them.

Gonzalez was born in Sturgeon Bay, Wisc. Her parents were migrant farmworkers, where her father worked on a Christmas tree farm and her mother worked on a mink ranch (or farm).

When she was 3 years old, the family moved to where her grandparents lived on the southern tip of Texas, about a half-hour trip north of the border with Mexico. She graduated high school in that Texas town, which is a “sundown town.”

A “sundown town” is a place where people who are not white, Gonzalez explained, “... when the sun goes down, you better be on your side of town. And if you’re not on your side of town, you’re subject to arrest.”

As recently as 2006, there were small Texas municipalities that were infamous for racism, as noted by a national TV network that used the phrase “sundown town.” And these places existed in other states in addition to Texas.

Gonzalez mentioned that she had lived in a place where segregation existed even after “Brown versus Board of Education.”

In the 1954 case of Brown versus (Topeka, Kansas) Board of Education, the majority of the United States Supreme Court Justices ruled that the Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896) case where the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled previously that “separate but equal” was an accepted practice, was not fair.

Plessy v. Ferguson was a landmark decision of the U.S. Supreme Court. It upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation laws for public facilities as long as the segregated facilities were equal in quality – a doctrine that came to be known as “separate but equal.”

That 1896 case legitimized state laws reestablishing racial segregation, which had been passed in the American South after the end of the Reconstruction Era (1865–1877).

In Brown v. Board of Education, the start of school integration began.

Gonzalez’s high school graduating class in 1976 in Texas was the first to be integrated there, she said. This reflects how reticent that part of the United States was in regard to integration, she said.

To have an equal opportunity in this country, Gonzalez said her parents knew, required a good education. Her parents “fought with a passion to educate themselves, and to educate their children,” Gonzalez said.

Her parents as migrant farm workers did not have easy access to a quality education, she said. Her mother crossed the river from Mexico to the United States as an immigrant. Her mother

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became a United States citizen when her mother was 21 years old, Gonzalez said.

Her mother crossed the river with her family with only the clothes on their backs. Her mother had no shoes, slept in the dirt, up until Gonzalez's maternal grandmother became a maid at a Texas ranch, and they lived in a small cottage on the property.

The woman who owned the house taught her mother English. Gonzalez spoke only Spanish until she was 7 years old.

Gonzalez said she feels blessed by God to have been awarded a scholarship to attend the University of Wisconsin at Madison. She earned her undergraduate degree, her master's degree and completed her first year of law school at UW in Madison.

She completed her second year of law school at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. She completed her third year of law school at Florida State University in Tallahassee. She lived in Tallahassee for 35 years.

Gonzalez is the only Hispanic female elected to the DNC in Florida. Gonzalez is the only Hispanic female ever elected as the treasurer for the DNC in Florida.

"That tells you how far we have come," she said, "and how much farther we have to go."

Gonzalez is now in her third term on the DNC.

She reminded people of her age group that during the Vietnam War (Nov. 1, 1955-April 30, 1975), there was a time when 18-year-old American men could be drafted and they could die for American freedom, but it was not until June 22, 1970, when President Richard Nixon signed an extension of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 when the voting age became 18 in all federal, state and local elections.

Her cousins were among the young Americans petitioning to give 18-year-olds the right to vote. As an 8-year-old, she said, she would join them when they knocked on doors and told people "We will be responsible voters. We promise."

Gonzalez also reminded listeners that during part of the Vietnam War, at the end of his news program, broadcast journalist Walter Cronkite would run the names of American soldiers killed in action in Vietnam.

Gonzalez said now is the time for Democrats to stand up.

"It's not enough to be angry," she said. "It's not enough to be disappointed. My mother used to say, 'Feel the feeling and move on.'"

She said the people must take action and do something. Seeing the turnout in Levy County on Saturday, Gonzalez said, was inspirational to her, because the people see they don't have a DEC and they see that they need this organization.

The whole DNC is led by DNC Chair Tom Perez. He is the son of immigrants from the Dominican Republic. He grew up in Buffalo, N.Y., where he learned the values of a union town: hard work, integrity, service and perseverance.

Gonzalez said that Perez told the Florida delegates that no longer is the Democratic Party only going to focus on urban counties, but it will equally involve rural counties.

"We will leave no Zip Code behind," she said.

The core of America, she said, is rural America. As part of her duties when she worked in the Florida Association of Counties, Gonzalez visited all 67 counties.

Small counties are the most productive of things that Florida has to offer the world, Gonzalez said, not just the rest of the state or to the other states—but to the entire planet.

Gonzalez said she drove two and a half hours to share this message with the people of Levy County. She grew up in rural Wisconsin and rural Texas, she said, so she has no fear of driving on an unpaved country road – such as the one leading to the Robertsons' house.

"I'm impressed that you guys have street signs," she said. "Where I grew up, it was like you go to the oak tree – not that oak tree, but the one with the mesquite by it. That's the one where you turn left."

Perez also told the other DNC leaders like Gonzalez that local issues matter. The national platform is important, however the local issues are critical elements of Democrats where they

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live. Issues related to local education, the local environment and the local economy are important to address.

The DNC also shared a message of increased action.

RESIST

“He (Perez) said ‘We have to resist. We must be resistant,’” Gonzalez told the Levy County Democrats. “We are so wonderful as Democrats, particularly those of use who grew up in a pragmatic community. Okay. You can’t be super partisan, because you sit in a church next to a person who is all the way farther to the right than you. And I don’t mean just on the pew.”

Pragmatic means “dealing with things sensibly and realistically in a way that is based on practical rather than theoretical considerations.”

For instance, a pragmatic approach to politics could mean that rather than risking hurting a person’s feeling, an individual may not express his or her actual opinion about certain matters.

Conducting business with people of a different party affiliation and living in neighborhoods where they have a different party affiliation is something Democrats do.

Perez told the DNC leaders that Democrats must resist the temptation to always be nice, Gonzalez said.

“It doesn’t mean we have to be mean,” she explained. “It means we have to resist the temptation to always bite our tongues, and being so pragmatic that we don’t tell people the truth.”

For instance, she continued, people must share the truth that “hatred is imbuing itself into our vernacular.” Division and racism are alive and well in America, she said.

“If we don’t stand up and say, ‘I don’t believe in that! I don’t agree with that!’,” Gonzalez said, continuing, “If millions of women don’t descend on Washington, D.C. and march on our Capitol and say ‘This is my body, and I will decide what I will do with it! I may be in consultation with my doctor or my pastor, but that’s up to me.’

“If we don’t do that,” she said, “then we are doing a disservice to our country – what being an American means is that people of a like mind come together and decide what our vision is and what we’re going to do.”

Gonzalez reminded listeners that the United States of America was founded on this proposition.

Perez said what will Democrats do when people ask them “What are you going to do about someone who is feeding my child hate every day?”

This is a moment in America, she said, where the people are very divided.

She said the people of the country are in the middle of a type of civil war, where the people are not dying on the battlefields.

“But when 10,000 votes separate the winner and loser in a United States Senate race {Rick Scott (R) over Bill Nelson (D)}; 30,000 votes separate the winner and the loser in a gubernatorial race (Ron DeSantis (R) over that Andrew Gillum(D)}... When 5,000 votes separate the winner and the loser in the race for our agricultural commissioner {Nikki Fried (D) over Matt Caldwell (R)}, we have to face the facts folks. We are in the middle of a civil war.”

Gonzalez said Democrats must have the courage to stand up and say “I am a Democrat and this is what I believe – That this country is better than the voice that is being heard around the world.”

She said the people of Levy County can create a DEC so that they will have a voice that will be heard.

Gonzalez reminds Democrats that the most powerful voice is love. She said don’t succumb to hatred, anger and fear.

She also provided some initial advice about starting to seek candidates who are Democrats to run for offices in 2020.