Montgomery County

Democratic Socialists of America

Montgomery County DSA General Body Meeting Minutes
Zoom link:
2PM - 4:30PM December 5, 2021

I. 2:05 Q&A with Adam Cunningham
   A. Running for MD State Senate for district 39; gained experience with capitalism and this radicalized him; he reviewed the immense struggle he and his family went through in MoCo: family had really bad experience with housing and bad landlords, racially profiled; did various independent jobs to bring $ in for family; while applied for energy assistance but utilities were cut off; bad experience with public transit
   B. Running because he is tired of the politics as usual in MoCo;
   C. Running on a left leaning platform – main goal is raise awareness of community based solutions to these problems – mutual aid, direct action included; Housing for all, healthcare, universal basic income, transportation, education; Re: Housing – most renters are Black; will increase amount of public housing and make it easier for people to buy homes; Healthcare – support of single payer heathcare; Education – get rid of means-testing for free college education; expand college scholarships; make all 2-4 year colleges tuition free; push for universal basic income system during epidemic and beyond; transportation – push for public transit fare to be abolished and transportation free; increase of living wage to at least $22/hr; Police Reform – push to defund the police; limiting of speed traps; other police reform bills; Change state constitutions by taking budgetary control away from the Governor; legalization of marijuana
   D. Questions: (Susan) What has been your background regarding solid work with MoCo DSA? Answer: Always supportive of actions being put forward by DSA; (Brandy) In running against Nancy King with considerable funds and name recognition – what is your plan to match that level of power to be successful in the election? Answer: Best approach would be to engage with people directly by utilizing mutual aid organizations including Fruit Tree Initiative – able to engage with people who face food scarcity – try to be able to educate community of an alternative to King. (Brandy) What is number to win election? Answer – 50K; would be canvassing and going door to door to offer alternative; (Alex M) How did you come to support the BDS movement? Answer: It is mainly on principle; support the freedom of people from oppressive governments; (Saqib) How did you get to the figure of win of 50K needed? Answer: Based on the numbers who

are likely to come out to vote. (Frankie) Where do you find your strongest basis of support in District 39? Answer: Want to start in those areas where populations are most concerned (i.e., renters) and move out to the suburban areas. (Walker) How much $ have you raised? Answer: 3-5K; would expect to raise $50K from grassroots funding, single donations

II. 2:50 Q&A with Saqib Ali – running for House Delegate in District 15

A. Lives in Gaithersburg; Political history – Went to school in Saudi Arabia and attended UMD; got computer science degree; always paid attention to politics and am an outsider and looked at US from outside; seen American politics as very narrow; Got more involved after 9/11 and invasion of Iraq as an American Muslim; joined MoCo Green Party in 2002 and was quite involved in antiwar movement; became involved in Howard Dean campaign and become Democrat but on left edge; Became elected as first Muslim elected in MD delegation, served for 4 years, worked against bringing slot machines in MD and became detested by many other house delegates; was then defeated by Nancy King; 2 years later challenged Nancy King in election but was not able to overcome challenges in 2010;

B. Rational for running now is that the existing delegation in 2015 is very conservative and been running his campaign for 15 months; became aware that DSA was standing for and doing all things he stands for; strongest supporter of Palestinian issues – was not able to sign required pledge of not boycotting Israel as a contractor and so filed a law suit; stands for closing of schools on Muslim holidays; Now raising $ and reaching out to community; Delegate had to leave and tried to make case that he should be replacement; did not win but used this struggle to showcase what he stood for/most progressive; Issues: Raise taxes on the wealthy to pay for better schools; Get rid of exclusionary zoning for single family housing; legalizing recreational marijuana to make whole the communities devastated by war on drugs; Climate change – MD must be carbon neutral; Knows he is the not the person that Democratic party insiders want

C. (Abel) Your incumbent will only have been in office for 6 months; How do you plan on differentiating yourself from her? Answer: Do not need to target her. Will try to be one of the top three candidates. Does not pay to run a negative campaign; he is hiring a campaign manager; hopeful that he will be able to get DSA's support. (Nicole) What is your theory of change and how does your running for office fit in to that? Answer: I am not like the other candidates and am qualitatively different; speak up for issues on the edge; theory of change is that he has brought up issues others are not bring up, not trying to brown nose other politicians, suing the Governor of MD, fight hard and be willing to accept the repercussions. (Brandy) What is your win # and strategy? Answer: 5,100; will have robust mail program initiated in January and development of database; email; canvassing; phonebanks; There is ethno-cultural component and will appeal to these communities to directly support campaign. (Alex M) Why did you choose to say you are boycotting other countries (along with Israel) as part of the BDS initiative? Answer: These countries are quite detrimental to the BDS

movement. Am a human rights activist and feel it is important; he does not single out Israel as being damaging to Palestinians and other Muslims; boycotts should not be applied only to Israel. (Karishma) DSA as an organization is largest confronting capitalism – what is your definition of democratic socialism and do you identify as a socialist? Answer: A society that puts the priorities of people above priorities of capital; the means of producing should be owned by those producing; provide stronger safety net to people such as in Sweden including free education, medical, public housing, if unemployed are supported, get time off of work when sick; move the focus away from capital and business to people/workers. (Adam) How effective are mailers in a campaign? Answer: Can't speak to people individually so must use other mass strategies and it is proven to be significant in elections.

III. 3:35 Q&A with Brandy

A. Running for County Council at large candidate; Renter in Kensington for 6 years; 2nd time running, did so in 2018; a grassroots organizer and had DSAs support in that campaign; came to MoCo looking for affordable housing and have lived with several relatives in one household; aware of pressures around housing, education, transportation etc to try to stay living in county. Co-Director of consulting group to directly shape public policy in climate/environment; experience in land use, community planning, food security; Over time developed concern of MoCo policy makers; went to training on movement politics and running for office and realized she should step into that space. Won 26K votes in 2018, raised over $160K and developed immense learnings, networks and platform to work on critical community issues. The base developed in 2018 and cultivated has now provided immense support to launch present campaign. Standing for just economy, affordable housing, environmental justice, etc.

B. (Nicole) What is win number and strategy? Answer: 60K; Built solid base and can retain the voters from last election; strategy to build support in upcounty; focus on areas of east county with least engaged democrats, heavily people of color, latino population, areas often ignored. (Ingrid F) How do you think you will be able to navigate working with Council that has different priorities/interests? Answer: Always having conversations with other at large candidates and those in districts; my background has taught me about how to build agreement, build relationships, synthesize interests to build policy together. (Susan) What are your biggest challenges in campaign? Answer: Certain people feel threatened by seeing the fact I am still here and running again. It will ruffle more feathers. Need to stay focused on organizing/deep work within community; this is the way to make headway; they want us to feel our voices do not matter. (Adam) What are you running for regarding GND/environment? Asnwer: I have done this work for some time with my organization; urban agriculture and food systems expertise and passion; how to center voice of folks most strongly affected by climate change, climate refugees. (Alex M) Police exchanges between US police and Israel to promote discriminatory policing – Would you support organizing against MoCo police exchanges w Israel? Answer: Yes. Especially

the Gaithersburg police force has used these types of tactics. Evidence very clear that there is no benefit to take part in this practice. (Saqib) Regarding MD/Israel development corporation – MD has been giving $ to this. Do you think that this money should continue to come from the state for this? Answer: Given what we know about oppression by Israel this must be re-examined and redirect $ away from this along with how we are directing other development dollars that are not benefiting most people in MD. (Nicole) What is your theory of change and how does your candidacy fit into that? Answer: We need to be exercising power in many more places; we need to have many more people in power who align with our values; electoral politics is not the only way to do that. It is not about just getting me elected; must look at many other seats to win, including the County Planning Board.