

Tuscola County Democratic Party Newsletter

July, 2023

Volume 2, Issue 7

Our Goals

- Ensure honest and transparent government.
- Restore and protect our environment.
- Support strong economic growth and opportunity.
- Strengthen voter access and turnout.
- Promote affordable education and health care for all.

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Notice of Our July Meeting

The regular monthly meeting of the Tuscola County Democratic Party will be held on **Thursday, July 20th, 2023**. The meeting will be held at the Brentwood, 178 Park Drive, Caro, MI. Social hour will begin at 5:30 p.m. and the meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m.

We hope you will join us.

Highlights of Our June Meeting

Chair Deb Parker called the meeting to order on June 15 at 6:30 p.m. Seventeen members and one guest were in attendance. Vice-Chair Alex Kirsch gave us a rundown of current events. Vicki Leland gave us an update on efforts by certain Tuscola County residents to recall members of the Caro Area Library Board. Sharene McCloy and Sharon Schwab showed us the new Tuscola Dems T-shirts and other items being offered for sale, and they announced plans for Tuscola Dems' participation in upcoming festivals and fairs. Mona DeQuis gave a presentation on recruiting new members and we scheduled a phone banking session in September. The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Mayville Sunflower Festival



Tuscola Dems will have a float in the Grand Parade of the Mayville Sunflower Festival on Friday, July 21, beginning at 6 p.m. We hope you will wave and cheer as we pass by.

We will also be staffing a booth on Saturday, July 22, beginning at 9 a.m. We hope you will stop by and say hello.

Tuscola County Fair



Tuscola Dems will have a booth at the Tuscola County Fair again this year. We will be telling folks about the wonderful things Democrats are doing and how important it is to vote for Democratic candidates, and of course we will be serving our famous Democratic popcorn!

The Fair runs from Sunday, July 23, to Saturday, July 29. On each day, we will be staffing our booth in two shifts — 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. If you are available to work any of those shifts, please call Deb Parker at (989) 673-6569 and she will sign you up.

We will also be looking for help setting up the booth on Sunday, July 23, starting at 10 a.m. and taking down the booth either on the evening of Saturday, July 29, or the morning of Sunday, July 30. Please let Deb Parker know if you can help.

Cass City Freedom Festival

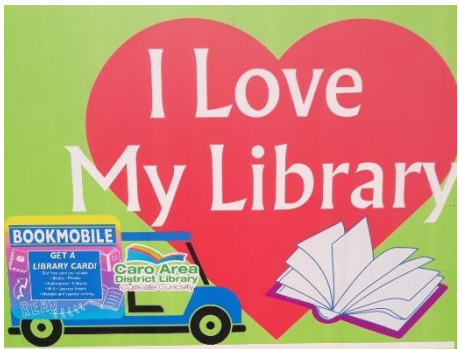
Tuscola Dems were at the Cass City Freedom Festival on July 1. Here's Sharene McCloy at our booth in the park.



And here's Sharon and Gary Schwab getting our float ready for the parade.



Book Banning



Book banning has a long history. It's a tactic usually associated with authoritarian regimes, such as Nazi Germany or Apartheid South Africa, but in the United States, there have been attempts to ban books for decades, with notable flare-ups in the McCarthy era and the early 1980s. At various times in the last century, certain groups and individuals have demanded the removal of books they find objectionable from library shelves, with titles like John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and Maya Angelou's *Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* being two well-known examples.

The book banners are at it again. Groups pushing for book bans have sprung up rapidly, particularly since 2021. These groups range from local Facebook groups to the national organization, *Moms for Liberty*, that now has over 200 chapters. The book banning campaign is in part driven by politics. In Texas, for example, Republican state representative Matt Krause sent a letter and a list of 850 books to school districts, asking them to investigate and report on which of the titles they held in libraries or classrooms. Political pressure of this sort in Texas, South Carolina, Wisconsin, Georgia, and elsewhere has been tied to hundreds of book bans. These efforts are increasingly focused on an evolving array of subjects — including U.S. history, race, and diversity, social emotional learning, LGBTQ+ identities, and sex education. Florida Governor DeSantis supported state laws aimed, at least in part, at limiting access to

some reading materials in public schools. Books targeted for removal have dealt primarily with L.G.B.T.Q. and social justice themes. Other states, including Georgia and Kentucky, have followed suit with laws that could make it easier to lodge complaints about specific books and influence library or education boards. The most contested books range from recent publications that discuss gender identity and sexuality, such as "Gender Queer," to classics dealing with racial and sexual violence that have been taught in American schools for years, such as "The Bluest Eye," by Toni Morrison. Many of these books have been targeted at school board meetings, with librarians and school staff caught in the crossfire, trying to defend their selections and themselves to angry parents convinced that public school educators are grooming schoolchildren and teenagers by carrying these titles and implementing LGBTQ-friendly policies in schools. Many librarians have found themselves targeted by groups seeking to pull materials from shelves. Some have been "chased out" of their jobs.

Book banners are active right here in Tuscola County. In January, a patron asked the Caro Area District Library to remove a graphic novel titled *Gender Queer: A Memoir* from its shelves. Library Director Erin Schmandt denied the request, so the patron appealed her decision to the seven-member library board. At their meeting on March 13, the board members heard heated arguments from the public both for and against removing the book and then voted unanimously to keep the book on its shelves.

On May 15, Stephanie Spencer filed recall petitions with the Tuscola County Election Commission against two library board members, Stacy Crutchfield and Jordyn Nordstrom. (Under Michigan law, these two are the only library board members now serving who are subject to recall.) On May 31, the three-member Commission — Probate Judge Nancy Thane, County Clerk Jodi Fetting, and County Treasurer Ashley Bennett — held a hearing to determine if the language on the recall petitions was clear and factual. They voted 2 to 1 that it was not.

On June 5, Spencer submitted new recall petitions against the same two library board members, and this time it was for "failing to relocate two books from the Juvenile Collection and one book from the Young Adult Collection to the Adult Collection." In her petitions, Spencer didn't specify which three books she wanted relocated, but two of them are *It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex and Sexual Health* and *Sex is a Funny Word*. Both are educational books meant to help parents describe puberty, sex, and other changing bodily functions to children, and both are located in the children's section of the library. The third book is *Let's talk about It*, an educational book for teenagers located in the young adult section of the library. On June 22, the Election Commission voted 2 to 1 to approve the language of Spencer's new petitions.

On June 30, the two recalled library board members — Stacy Crutchfield and Jordyn Nordstrom — appealed the recall petitions against them in Tuscola County Circuit Court. Judge Amy Gearhart has 40 days to render an opinion, and signature gathering on the petitions will stop until she does. If the appeal is upheld, the petition is void. If the appeal is denied, the petitioners must then collect at least 1,193 valid signatures from registered voters.

If the County Clerk verifies the signatures as valid, the two recalled library board members will be placed on the next election ballot along with anyone else who wishes to run against them.

It costs each of the recalled library board members (not the library) about \$2,500 in lawyer and filing fees to file an appeal. Mary Ruthko has set up an "Election Recall Defense Fund" on their behalf. Already the fund has received 113 donations for a total of \$5,315, which will be used to pay their filing and lawyer fees with any unused funds donated to the library to help cover on-going legal expenses. The library has already spent over \$7,000 in legal fees related to this matter and anticipates further legal expense as book banning activity goes forward. If the appeal of the library board members fails and they go on the ballot, the library (not the petitioners) must pay the cost of the election, estimated to be about \$6,000. If you wish to contribute to the Election Recall Defense Fund, please go to <https://gofund.me/39d72ac5> .

There's some good news coming in from other states. On June 12, Illinois Governor Pritzker signed a bill that will prohibit book bans in that state's public schools and libraries. The law, which takes effect next year, directs public libraries in the state to adopt policies that prohibit them from removing books because of "partisan or doctrinal disapproval."

A similar anti-book ban bill is making its way through the New Jersey Legislature. If passed into law, it would cut state funding to public and school libraries that ban books or restrict access to them.

The battle over book removals is unfolding in court as well. Last month, Penguin Random House, a publisher, and PEN America, a free-speech organization, sued a public school district in Escambia County, Florida, accusing it of violating the First Amendment by removing titles over "their disagreement with the ideas expressed in those books."

Also last month, a group of librarians, bookstores and publishers sued to prevent a new law from taking effect in Arkansas. The suit argued that the new law, which requires any material that might be "harmful" to minors to be shelved in a separate, "adults only" area, is unconstitutional and could send booksellers and librarians to prison.

On June 20, A group of students and the authors of a children's book, *And Tango Makes Three*, sued the Lake County, Florida, school district and the state's board of education, saying that restricting access to the book in school libraries is unconstitutional. The book is about a penguin family with two fathers. The suit argues that it was targeted on ideological grounds to comply with a new state law, known by its opponents as "Don't Say Gay," that bars instruction on gender identity and sexual orientation.

Judge Imposes Sanctions on Republicans

On June 12, Wayne County Circuit Court Judge Timothy Kenny imposed \$58,459 in sanctions on three Republicans — Kristina Karamo, Daniel Hartman, and Alexandria Taylor — who filed a lawsuit last year that claimed, without evidence, there was wrongdoing in Detroit's election procedures. Judge Kenny described the lawsuit as "rife with speculation, an absence of facts,

and a lack of understanding of Michigan election statutes and Detroit absentee ballot procedures,” and ordered the plaintiffs to pay Detroit City Clerk Janice Winfrey's legal bills.

In February, Kristina Karamo was elected Chair of the Michigan Republican Party. Last November, she ran for Michigan Secretary of State and lost to Jocelyn Benson by fourteen percentage points. Daniel Hartman is an attorney for the Michigan Republican Party. Alexandria Taylor recently launched a campaign to fill the U.S. Senate seat vacated by Debbie Stabenow.

County Jail Proposal



Tuscola County needs a new jail and doesn't have the money to pay for it. Last November, County Commissioners placed a proposal on the ballot to borrow money for the new jail and voters turned it down. On April 27 of this year, they decided to try again, passing a resolution calling for a special election on August 8 to vote again on the proposal, which reads as follows:

NEW COUNTY JAIL AND SHERIFF'S FACILITY BOND PROPOSITION

Shall the County of Tuscola, State of Michigan, borrow the principal sum not to exceed Forty-Four Million Dollars (\$44,000,000), and issue its unlimited tax general obligation bonds, in one or more series, payable in not to exceed thirty (30) years, to pay the cost of constructing, furnishing and equipping a new Tuscola County Jail and Sheriff's Facility, including parking, landscaping, access roadways and other appurtenances? If approved, the estimated millage to be levied the first year is 0.9800 mills (\$0.98 per \$1,000 of taxable value) and the estimated simple average annual millage rate required to retire the bonds is 0.9521 mills (\$0.95 per \$1,000 of taxable value).

If voters approve the proposal, bonds would be sold to investors to raise money to build the new jail, and the amount of the bonds, plus interest, would be paid off over the next 30 years through a 0.98-mill property-tax levy on county property owners. As an example, if you own property with a taxable value of \$80,000, you will be paying an additional \$78 in property taxes each year for the next 30 years. Ouch!

This proposal is based on studies of the Tuscola County jail by two outside groups — the National Sheriff's Association (in 2018) and the architectural firm, Bryce and Associates (in 2020). Their reports are available for review at <https://www.tuscolacounty.org/>. To read the 40-page assessment by NSA, scroll down under the heading "County Top News" and click on "National Sheriff's Association Jail Assessment." To view the 49-slide PowerPoint presentation by Bryce and Associates, scroll down under the heading, "County Top News" and click on "Tuscola County Jail Feasibility Study."

In brief, these two studies reached the following conclusions:

1. What's wrong with the current jail? It was built in 1965, and now it is much too small, with two closet-sized rooms for attorney–client meetings and a single multipurpose room used for rehabilitation meetings, recreation time, and the jail library. In addition, there are only two holding cells where prisoners must stay for 48 hours upon arrest. If a woman is in one of the holding cells, all the recently arrested men are confined to the other holding cell. The jail complies with less than half of the national minimum jail standards. It was “grandfathered” in with Michigan Department of Corrections standards, but the county is still vulnerable to lawsuits for violation of current standards. Storage space for inmate property, housing supplies, and other equipment is inadequate. Space for storage of inmate records and for food and laundry services within the secure envelope of the facility is inadequate. Space for professional visits and conference rooms for attorney/client privileged meetings prior to court appearances and places to review discovery or other material for court is inadequate. Inmate work release housing is outside the secure envelope of the facility.
2. Couldn't we just fix up the current jail? No. All systems — electrical, plumbing, heating, air conditioning — are well beyond their useful life. Compliance with state standards is minimal. The jail has been expanded twice in the past. The previous expansion added a wing on the end, a long distance from the control room. Trying to fix up the old jail would require a complete shutdown of the facility for extended periods of time and cost almost as much as a new jail.
3. Couldn't we use the old prison on Chambers Road? No. When the state closed the old prison years ago, county commissioners checked it out and decided it would be too costly to renovate for a jail. No one wants that property due to the hazardous materials (asbestos) found there. The Chambers Road prison is located outside of town, and the Michigan Constitution says the county sheriff's office must be located in the county seat, which means we would need a sheriff's office in Caro in addition to a jail on Chambers Road. We would also need a holding facility near the courthouse, and we would need more staff to transport inmates daily from jail to courthouse for court appearances.
4. What's the best option? Build a new jail and sheriff's office in the parking lot next to the current facility. The Bryce and Associates study suggested a 120-bed facility, which could be expanded, if needed, in the future at minimal cost. In addition, there would be ten short-term beds (currently there are only two). Construction of the new facility would take approximately 4 years. The current jail would be kept in operation until the new facility is completed. The old jail would then be torn down (except for the building that contains heating and cooling equipment for the courthouse), and the site turned into a parking lot for the new jail. The existing tunnel connecting the jail to the courthouse would remain in use.

Make
Tuscola County
a better place
to live.



*Paid for with regulated funds
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P.O. Box 605, Caro, MI 48723*

Elect Democrats