**Greater Red Bank Women’s Initiative**

**General Meeting Minutes 4.3.17**

**Guest speakers:**

**Nagwa Awad**, Women’s Democratic Caucus Leadership group.  Nagwa, a wife, mother of 5, social and political activist, business woman, and habitual volunteer, educated the Initiative about life as a Muslim woman in America.

**Camilla Diaz,** Monmouth County Democrats. Camilla gave an overview of the political landscape for Democrats in the upcoming 2017 and 2018 elections. The DNC chair and co-chair chose 2 places to visit in New Jersey, and Monmouth County was one of them. They have heard about our energy and successes. The Democratic party needs the energy to continue through local elections, and need volunteers for voter registration, phone banking, canvassing, vote by mail, caucus participation, and more.

**Committee Reports:**

 **Political Outreach:**

**Recommendations for future action:**

1. Invite declared political candidates to address the group at future meetings.
2. Mobilize GRBWI participants to get out the vote for progressive candidates.

GRBWI should work to elect local, state, and national representatives who are dedicated to

* Increasing access to high quality, affordable health care for all Americans
* Protecting reproductive rights including access to birth control, legal abortion, and insurance coverage for maternity care.
* Common Sense Gun Control
* Income Equality
* Immigration Reform
* Tax Reform
* Campaign Finance Reform
* Fully-funded, high-quality public education and affordable college tuition
* Protecting the Environment and addressing Climate Change
* Investment in infrastructure and economic development that benefits all Americans
* Protecting the Voting and Civil Rights of all Americans
* Criminal Justice Reform
* Consumer Protections that include Banking and Finance Regulation
* Protecting Social Security and Medicare
* End Gerrymandering

**For further discussion:**

Is it possible for the GRBWI to remain non-partisan?

What are the pros and cons of becoming a PAC?

Fundraising and Fiscal Accountability for GRBWI expenses.

 **Immigration**

Immigration is one real national “emergency” issue which also especially affects our local communities, and we need to get as many people involved as possible. Over 40 members across various groups, from GRB Women’s Initiative to Bayshore Indivisible to Indivisible NJ 4th District to ACLU’s People Power to Action Together Monmouth County have so far attended our committee meetings or other local events. We have also been working with larger statewide or national organizations who focus on or deal with the issue. There are some broad categories of things we have been working on in small subgroups.

***1.      Local Community Outreach***: Organizing/attending Know Your Rights events for the immigrant community, where legal or trusted non-for-profit organizations give presentations. These events, which are happening regularly, often at churches, help to get acquainted not only with the immigrant community  but to link up with other community activists and to educate ourselves. We are concentrating efforts in towns in the county where there are the most immigrants.

A few of us attended a general KYR event for the community at a RB church over a month ago. A few others attended a more recent one on Mar 26th, where the presenter this time gave a special presentation for us, explaining in more depth the harsh history of immigration laws in the country, which of course have gotten worse; the very harsh criminal justice system for immigrants (minor incidents 20 years ago could land you in trouble today); and why there is virtually no route to legalization for those who are undocumented.

A few also attended a “Train the Trainers” event hosted by the NJAIJ. One key message: Anyone can learn to be a trainer, you don't need to have a legal background to be able to help these communities become more aware of their rights.

There is a new pro bono legal advice hotline where you leave a VM for an attorney to call you back: 732-572-9100 ext 8782. There is also a new ACLU mobile justice app specific for NJ that you can use to record what is going on and which communicates with ACLU

***2. Police and Policy***

We have been in touch with touch with several local police depts. Each has let us know that they are following the NJ Attorney General’s 2007 Directive. These are not all in accordance with ACLU model behavior. ACLU has encouraged us to discuss with police how to fill in the gaps where the Directive provides no guidance.

NJAIJ had a recent webinar with reps from ACLU, Make the Road NJ, NJ Policy Perspective and others about what constitutes ideal Fair and Welcoming City Policy. This has been recorded (including slides) and there are also associated documents. A key message is the while the Feds can still do their job without local cooperation, they have limited resources and so local municipalities do have power to stop a huge ramp-up of their enforcement, and they have the right not to dedicate their resources to immigration enforcement which is a federal responsibility. Red Bank is one city which could soon become a “welcoming city” if the recent resolution passes.

We have learned that Monmouth County has enrolled in the harsh 287(g) program, which means that the jail has immigration officials within it. Only about 1% of counties across the country have this type of close cooperation. According to ACLU studies have consistently shown that 287(g) agreements routinely result in the deportation of people who have committed minor offenses (traffic violations, etc), strain relations between immigrant communities and the police, and can be grossly mistake-prone.  We are trying to get more info on the county’s program.

***3.      Education***: Immigration is an enormously complex, hot-button issue, where myths are widespread and promoted for political reasons. Rosemary provided us with a good example of a Trump supporting friend approaching her with “stats” on the benefits that “illegal aliens” get. The stats were from an anti-immigration organization and cited education as the main benefit.

 Common questions include “Why didn’t they come here legally?” and “Why don’t they become legal?” We have found DHS stats which show that only a small percentage of people, less than 20%, are able to become permanent residents without having family members here already, and there is no route for those not considered “highly skilled.” Additionally, the harsh 1996 Immigration law removed almost all routes for legalization of those who are undocumented, even if they’ve been here for decades or have American citizen children or spouses.

While the human angle (eg breaking up families) has often been emphasized, and is critical, less attention has been paid to the economic benefits of immigration – including its need due to an aging population, population decline in many towns and cities across the country, and worker shortages across various industries. We have collected articles on these issues and how deportation would affect our state economy. The National Academies 2015 report provides good background and is a commonly cited reference.

**Climate Change**

Discussed Chris Smith’s efforts to project a positive image on environmental issues when in reality his record is very mixed.

Discussed apps and ways to contact Members of Congress and officials like Scott Pruitt.  Groups like Sierra Club and League of Conservation Voters keep people informed on upcoming votes.

Continued discussion of whether Carbon Fee and Dividend is satisfactory as a solution to climate change.  More research needed on this

Decided people will continue to visit established groups like Sierra Club and MCCC and will report back about their actions next time.

Talked about executive orders:  what can and can’t the executive branch really do?  Vox.com is a good source for analyzing this.

Discussed the so-called HONEST Act: this would prevent the EPA from proposing or finalizing a covered action until it has been definitively shown that it is the best available science, which in fact is such a vast requirement that it prevents any action at all.  This is a disaster to fight against, along with REINS act that passed the House…

Tweeting is a good political tool , we need volunteers to use it!

Environmental Voting Project, run by 2 people based in Boston, has done research on the voting habits of people interested in the environment, and found that many do not vote.  They have started work to change that, and report very positive results.  This can become a priority in our local and state elections as well as at the federal level.

Agreed to meet the 3rd Wednesday of every month, at 7:30.  We’ve become rather large, 21 people, and will need a new meeting place.  Any suggestions are welcome.

**Recommended actions:**

1. Every day, Mike Fischer sends an email about a specific issue, to call Smith et al about.  Some of these are environmental issues, others are not, but we can call about them all!

2. We all know about the Science March and the Climate March coming up, join them!
3. Join the Sierra Club [(http://www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org/)/ )and other such groups that have been fighting this battle for years.

4. Check out the Environmental Voter Project (<http://www.environmentalvoter.org/>) -- it unites our voting and climate efforts!

5. Join the Sun. April 9, Resist Strategy and Action Call, 8 p.m. ET: <https://act.moveon.org/survey/readytoresist8>

6. Get inspired by articles like this one from the Boston Globe:  <http://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2017/03/30/trump-retreats-citizens-step-climate/E8uzET2G3W1rGmDud4ZOqJ/story.html>

**Education/Civics**

Our committee determined that providing info re: upcoming primary elections would be timely, beneficial, and educational.

We plan to gather info re: primary candidates and have that info posted on the website.
We are planning to have info gathered and ready next week.

Also…one of the things we discussed is the possibility of a civics related educational event w speaker(s) etc.

**Racism**

On March 20th the committee met and decided that they are going to be a resource. Working on having a meet and greet on a specific article.

Rich Devlin, committee member, gave a synopsis of the film “13th” and how it has impacted him.

Some members plan to attend a screening of FROM SELMA TO STONEWALL:  Are We There Yet? The screening will be followed by a Q&A with Special Guests Rev. Dr. Tommie Lee Watkins, Jr., an openly gay Episcopal priest in Alabama who was interviewed for SELMA, and Rev. Gilbert Caldwell, Executive Producer of SELMA and a lifelong activist in the Civil Rights Movement from the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer to the Million-Man March of 1996 as well as a retired United Methodist minister.

This event is taking place on Tuesday, April 4th at Trinity Church, 503 Asbury Avenue, Asbury Park from 6:30pm-8:30pm.

The committee currently has seven members and will meet again on Monday, April 10th.

 **Communications**

294 members of Facebook group

408 email list subscribers

1200 website monthly audience

The group who voted online unanimously approved our mission statement, which is now official:

The Greater Red Bank Women’s Initiative is a nonprofit, volunteer organization committed to defending progressive values and policy through grassroots community building, civic involvement, and political action. We support a healthy environment and a free and just society for all people regardless of race, religion, country of origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or cognitive ability, age, or income.

**Actions:**

We very much need more active committee members. If people are looking for things to do and ways to get involved, we are definitely a committee to join. We’re proud of the resources we’ve built, but are running ourselves ragged and could definitely use more hands. Please join us at our next committee meeting on April 14 at 7:30 if you’re interested in helping.

**Letters to the Editor:**

When deciding on actions to recommend for the full group this month, our committee decided we wanted to educate everyone about the importance of writing letters to the editor.

We have placed a link to a great Wiki called How to Write Letters to the Editor on our resources page on the website in the Information section. We also added a new section under News Sources for Local Newspapers, which not only lists and links to local papers, it provides links to the email address or form for submitting letters to the editor for each news source. We encourage as many of you as possible to submit letters to the editors on the topics and issues closest to your heart as we move forward. It is clearly time well spent.