

American Solidarity Party of Minnesota
Planning Meeting
(Draft) 18 October 2016 (Draft)

The meeting minutes are considered a draft until approved by the party at the next meeting.

Executive Summary / Action Items

Mr. Zinos was elected Chair of ASP-MN.

Mr. Bruening was elected Vice Chair of ASP-MN.

Mr. Heaney was elected Secretary of ASP-MN.

Mr. Riehm was elected Treasurer of ASP-MN.

Mr. Keller noted that the national organization has been reaching out to campuses in recent months, has learned a lot about the process, and would be able to provide help to anyone in ASP-MN taking on the task.

Mr. Zinos noted his own connections to St. Thomas and put himself forward to work on the campus committee.

Mr. Erickson expressed interest in helping reach out to the University of Minnesota community, which has an interreligious group.

Ms. Zinos offered an entreaty to all present to reach into their own campus communities (since so many present have ties to schools) and try to recruit at least one new member.

Mr. Bruening and Mr. J. Heaney agreed to take the lead on the election committee.

After discussion, it was agreed that the working meetings should continue on a monthly basis.

Meanwhile, a new series of informal meetings should be held where interested non-members can mix with ASP-MN members in a low-pressure environment (while still being given opportunities to get involved if they want). A goal was set for one of these informal meetings to be held soon after the election.

Ms. Zinos gamely agreed to coordinate both kinds of meeting as social chair.

The consensus agreed that outstate ASP supporters must be kept updated by detailed meeting minutes and regular electronic communication, with the hope that isolated ASP members will be able to recruit for and launch their own chapters organically, in time.

Mr. Bruening agreed to make ASP-MN's recent location survey available to Ms. Zinos for the purposes of finding reasonable meeting locations for all members.

Ms. Walker volunteered to do some writing and/or editing, thereby making herself chair of the Press Committee by general consent.

There was some confusion about what minor party status entailed – does it provide us with ballot access? Mr. Bruening agreed to look into it further.

Mr. Podgorski expressed some interest in helping guide fundraising, but this is on hold until the Party is incorporated. Mr. Zino expressed that speedy incorporation is an urgent priority.

Mr. Podgorski also expressed a willingness to reach out to the Democrats for Life of America.

Next meeting time was set for November 15th (or that week).

Goals Identified

1. Become incorporated.
2. Create by-laws.
3. Identify constituencies and possible candidates for 2018 runs.
4. Develop a plan for becoming a minor party (if minor-party status proves desirable).
5. Schedule and hold the next working meeting and the first informal meeting.
6. Open the first campus chapter in Minnesota – somehow.

Minutes

Meeting commenced at approximately 6:35pm. No secretary had been elected at this time, so no one was watching the clock.

Present: Robert Bruening, David Riehm, Todd Podgorski (observing), Nick Zinos, Emily Zinos, Reece Podgorski, James Heaney, Jenny Klejeski, David Neira, Erin Erickson, Christopher Keller, Catherine Walker, Stephen Heaney (observing)

Introductions

All present introduced themselves and described what had led them to the American Solidarity Party.

Mr. Bruening (“Rob”) is a software developer who found the American Solidarity Party (ASP) through the Catholic blogosphere and gradually became involved.

Mr. Riehm is a PhD candidate in chemical engineering who thinks the American Solidarity Party has the potential to fill a void in our politics.

Mr. Podgorski is a sitting member of the South St. Paul City Council and recent SD52 DFL primary candidate. As a pro-life Democrat, he finds it difficult to politically fit in anywhere. He was present as an observer.

Master Podgorski is a rising high school senior who cannot yet vote, but who hopes that, when he does vote, it will be for candidates he respects.

Mr. J. Heaney is a software developer at the University of St. Thomas. Until recently a very minor Republican officer, he believes the current GOP is dying and the ASP could become a major party in this climate.

Ms. Jenny Klejeski is an alumna of Notre Dame who was drawn to the party based on its positions. She made the longest drive, a 45-minute trip down from Oak Grove.

Mr. David Neira is an employee of the Catholic Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis whose job deals with Burmese refugees.

Mr. Erin Erickson is a life-long Democrat who has, like others, grown dissatisfied with the Democrats' treatment of human life issues. He has close ties to the University of Minnesota.

Mr. Keller is, among other things, a member of the ASP national board. He expressed satisfaction with the ASP's current strong growth path.

Ms. Walker is a teacher of math and science at a homeschool co-op. She came to the ASP out of a deep dissatisfaction with our politics, hoping to create a better world for her children – or at least so she can say she tried.

Mr. Zinos is an attorney, which all agreed would be a great asset to the ASP-MN in its early days.

Ms. Zinos is a born-and-bred Democrat who reverted to Catholicism with her husband after their marriage and has felt politically homeless ever since.

Mr. S. Heaney is a professor of philosophy at the University of St. Thomas. He was born a Democrat, became a Republican after his wife was assaulted at the 1992 DNC for her pro-life convictions, and is not sure what to do next. He was present as an observer.

Officer Elections

Mr. Bruening described the position of Party Chair, noting especially the Party's near-term goal of becoming incorporated and its medium-term goal of achieving minor party status. He offered to place himself in nomination, but insisted that he was open to yielding the position to anyone who wanted it.

Mr. Zinos placed his name in nomination, noting his flexibility as a self-employed person, his enthusiasm for the Party principles, and his ability to help the Party navigate its early legal challenges. His nomination was seconded by acclamation. Mr. Bruening held the floor open to further nominations. Seeing none, Mr. J. Heaney called the question. **Mr. Zinos was elected Chair of ASP-MN** by unanimous show of hands.

Mr. Bruening described the position of Vice Chair, the principal responsibility of the Vice Chair being to support and serve as backup for the Chair. Mr. J. Heaney nominated Mr. Bruening, noting the importance of maintaining continuity in such a young organization. The floor was briefly held open for further nominations, but, seeing none, the body proceeded to a vote. **Mr. Bruening was elected Vice Chair of ASP-MN** by unanimous show of hands.

Mr. Bruening described the position of Secretary, the principal responsibility of the Secretary being to take the minutes of the meetings. Mr. Keller offered that the national party offers additional guidance on the functions and duties of the Secretary, and there was general discussion about the Secretary's responsibility to ensure the publication of the Party By-Laws (which are to be authored in the near future with the help of a friend of Mr. Bruening who was not present). Saying, "By-laws? That's basically my whole jam," Mr. J. Heaney placed himself into nomination, which Mr. Riehm seconded. Seeing no other nominations, the body proceeded to a vote. **Mr. Heaney was elected Secretary of ASP-MN** by unanimous show of hands, and immediately realized he was the only person present with neither pen nor paper (which were quickly provided).

Mr. Bruening described the position of Treasurer, which currently has no responsibilities because the Party is not incorporated and has no money even if it were incorporated. Mr. Riehm volunteered for the position, with the understanding and expectation that responsibilities will grow as the party does. Mr. Riehm offered to defer to any of the women in the room, in the interest of gender diversity within the leadership team, but all such persons graciously declined. Without opposition, **Mr. Riehm was elected Treasurer of ASP-MN** by unanimous show of hands. Mr. Podgorski noted that the various finance requirements in Minnesota will eventually require that our treasurer undergo a couple days of training.

Minor Party Status I

Proceeding with the order of business, Mr. Bruening introduced the topic of seeking minor party status. Evidently, this requires the Party to meet several requirements, including having by-laws and holding a convention (which Mr. Bruening hopes will convene in 2017). Mr. Zinos asked how the national party is incorporated and related to the state parties, and Mr. Keller replied that the national party is a 527, though the precise reasons escaped his memory. Most importantly, minor party status (according to Mr. Bruening) requires that the ASP-MN gather signatures from a number of Minnesota voters equal to 1% of the ballots cast in the most recent statewide election (whether presidential or gubernatorial) petitioning for minor party status.

There was some question as to whether this was feasible before 2018. Mr. Podgorski discussed the challenges of signature-gathering in his political experience, estimating that a door-knocker could gather ten signatures per hour, to which Mr. Keller added, "and that's a good day." Master Podgorski further added, "Assuming you don't get chased off!"

Mr. Riehm suggested that we know the broad profile of voter we are targeting and so can avoid "random" door-knocking, instead going directly to, e.g., churches, setting up booths outside after services (presumably beyond the IRS's reach) and collecting signatures from exiting congregants. Mr. Podgorski offered that this presents a fundamental strategic question the Party must answer in its planning: does ASP plan to chiefly poach people from the current parties, who are engaged with the current system, or go out to the disengaged masses, which Mr. Podgorski assured the body represents a vast number of people?

Mr. Keller, building off Mr. Riehm's idea, suggested that churches might be difficult, due to concerns about blending religion and politics, but that perhaps colleges would prove even more fertile grounds for signature-gathering and recruitment. Mr. Bruening used this as an opportunity to segue to committee discussions.

Campus Committee

There was open and productive discussion of the possibilities for a campus committee. Those present have ties to a number of different colleges and schools, among them Bethel, the University of Minnesota, St. John's, St. Mary's, and St. Thomas, as well as Notre Dame. Although the campus committee's duties were somewhat vague, **Mr. Keller noted that the national organization has been reaching out to campuses in recent months, has learned a lot about the process, and would be able to provide help to anyone in ASP-MN taking on the task.** He also noted that a Notre Dame chapter of ASP will be forming in the spring, to the great satisfaction of Mr. Riehm and Ms. Klejeski, both Notre Dame alumni.

With the table largely quiet in response to several entreaties by Mr. Bruening for volunteers to spearhead these efforts, **Mr. Zinos noted his own connections to St. Thomas and put himself forward to work on this. Mr. Erickson then expressed interest in helping reach out to the University of Minnesota community, which has an interreligious group.** Mr. Riehm introduced Mr. S. Heaney as a professor at St. Thomas (who is, coincidentally, faculty advisor for the College Republicans; Mr. Heaney suspects the St. Thomas Republicans are demoralized in light of recent events).

Although no concrete campus committee formed, Ms. Zinos offered **an entreaty to all present to reach into their own campus communities (since so many of us have ties to them) and try to recruit at least one new member,** especially students willing to start a school chapter of ASP.

Elections Committee

Discussion about the elections committee was equally energetic. The Party immediately found some division within the room on two main questions: (1) Should the Party run for big offices and ignore the small ones, or focus on the small ones while foregoing the big ones? (2) Relatedly, in the 2018 cycle, is the Party's goal to win publicity for the Party's ideas, or to win public office for the Party? Ms. Zinos and several others suggested that, because the Party is chiefly trying to gain publicity at this point, lower-level offices should be ignored. Mr. J. Heaney disagreed, contending that, in order to gain credibility, the party must win seats in its first election cycle or, according to his interpretation of American political history, the party will likely die. Mr. Keller expressed that there is a reasonable balance between these positions, and that both are worthwhile aims.

Mr. Podgorski stepped in to discuss the feasibility of electoral runs at various low-level positions. With some 67 State Senate districts and twice as many House districts, there's an electoral "sweet spot" where it's feasible for a small, well-coordinated unit to run and win seats. He said that, if he were developing a strategy for an organization like ours, he would first identify areas where the Party has its best chances to win (where demographics and Party membership are favorable), then find candidates in those areas who already hold office, like mayors and city councilpersons and county commissioners, and recruit them (especially if they are in the middle of their terms and would not suffer materially from a defeat).

Mr. Keller asked about the timeframe for election to state legislative offices, noting that the national organization had been thinking along the lines of ten-plus years for the party to take on local offices. Mr. Podgorski replied that he envisioned this within "two-to-six years."

No one stepped forward to head up the election committee, so it reverted to leadership. **Mr. Bruening and Mr. J. Heaney agreed to take the lead on the election committee**, with Mr. J. Heaney noting it as “the Party’s core responsibility right now.”

Ms. Zinos immediately stepped forward to head the social committee, taking responsibility for organizing future Party meetings. After discussion, it was generally agreed that **the working meetings should continue on a monthly basis** (or every six weeks in a pinch). Meanwhile, a new series of informal meetings should be held where interested non-members can mix with ASP-MN members in a low-pressure environment (while still being given opportunities to get involved if they want). A goal was set **one of these informal meetings to be held soon after the election**, “grabbing them while they’re still feeling very disappointed with the results,” as Ms. Zinos put it. **Ms. Zinos gamely agreed to coordinate both kinds of meeting.**

Mr. Keller suggested that further meetings be held outside the downtowns, where parking is a challenge. Ms. Zinos agreed that she would choose meeting locations based on the locations of ASP-MN members, most likely avoiding the downtowns. **Mr. Bruening agreed to make ASP-MN’s recent location survey available to her.**

Press Committee

Mr. Riehm raised the question of whether a Press Committee was desirable, helpful, or practical at this stage of the Party, particularly if the Press Secretary were expected to issue statements on hot-button issues like the shooting of Philando Castile. Mr. Keller responded that, if our state chapter were to have a press committee, it would not be geared toward jumping on hot-button issues – “I have no idea how [ASP presidential candidate] Mike [Maturen] does it” – but rather toward raising awareness of issues and the ASP’s unique positions on many of them, for example by writing newspaper op-eds articulating the Party’s ideals on important questions. **Ms. Walker volunteered to do some writing and/or editing, thereby making herself chairwoman of the Press Committee** by general consent.

Minor Party Status – II

The question was again raised whether the Party should immediately seek minor party status. What would that gain us? Would we feasibly achieve it, or would it be valuable simply by raising awareness about the Party? Signature-gathering strategies were discussed. Mr. Podgorski pointed out that next year’s Tommie/Johnnie football game will be held at Target Field, hosting some 20,000 Catholic college students and alumni – a ripe opportunity. Ms. Zinos seconded that Washington State ballot initiatives this year had similarly sought signatures outside of Seattle Seahawks games, winning large numbers of signatures from those events.

Nevertheless, there was some confusion about what minor party status entailed – does it provide us with ballot access? No one had the relevant Minnesota statutes handy (200.02 Subdivision 23 et. al.), and **Mr. Bruening agreed to look into it further.**

Organizing Against Assisted Suicide

All in the room were strongly opposed to recent attempts to legalize assisted suicide in Minnesota, and discussed how we might be able to help fight further attempts, and how our mobilization might be able to build the party.

Mr. Riehm noted that a Ms. Alli Shoemaker had asked on Facebook to help with this battle. Mr. Riehm, a childhood co-parishoner, noted her family's passion around this issue, and encouraged Mr. Bruening to keep her in the loop.

Ms. Zinos suggested that the Party could make an appearance at the hearings for the expected bill next year holding signs or wearing T-shirts that bear a pro-life message as well as the Party's identity and contact information. Mr. Keller stated that, in response to a written plan explaining the value to the entire national party, the national organization may be able to fund something like this.

The question was raised: why is the Party's symbol a pelican? Mr. Keller explained that is a traditional symbol of charity. Party colors are currently red, white, and blue, but there is a gentle attempt to move the Party nationally toward orange, which is the international color of Christian Democrat parties. ASP T-shirts are designed by the willing and sold mostly at cost.

Local ASP Chapters

Mr. Bruening revealed that everyone in the ASP-MN survey is either within the Twin Cities metropolitan area or so isolated that meeting would be impractical. The notion of forming local chapters other than the Twin Cities / statewide chapter was therefore tabled. Video conferencing was put forward as an option, but the consensus was that video conferencing is largely unhelpful, and that outstate ASP supporters must be kept updated by detailed meeting minutes (hey guys) and regular electronic communication, with the hope that isolated ASP members will be able to recruit for and launch their own chapters organically, in time.

Open Discussion

Mr. Riehm asked what our immediate goals are. Mr. J. Heaney, reviewing his notes, offered that the Party's immediate goals are:

7. Become incorporated.
8. Create by-laws.
9. Identify constituencies and possible candidates for 2018 runs.
10. Develop a plan for becoming a minor party (if minor-party status proves desirable).
11. Schedule and hold the next working meeting and the first informal meeting.
12. Open the first campus chapter in Minnesota – somehow.

Mr. Riehm added that our core goal must be recruitment, because we need much larger numbers to be effective. He argues that recruiting should not be seen as something to be taken on, but as a way to take more and more *off* our shoulders by spreading the work around.

Ms. Zinos again enjoined the members to reach out to campus communities and find ways to grow the Party among young people.

Mr. Podgorski states that the Party must make money and donations a primary concern if it is to succeed. Fundraising is very difficult but absolutely critical in today's politics. In particular, if the Party wants to be attractive to potential candidates, the Party needs to be able to give them something to

help them win their elections – namely, campaign funding. Otherwise, candidates will go with another party or go independent.

Mr. Podgorski notes that he was at a disadvantage in his fundraising battle because he was battling an affluent doctor in the primary, who had many affluent doctor friends from whom it was relatively easy to raise hundreds or thousands of dollars at a time. Without affluent people like businessmen, lawyers, doctors, and others, it will be difficult for the ASP-MN to attract money – and, without money, difficult for ASP-MN to attract candidates or votes. **Mr. Podgorski expressed some interest in helping guide fundraising, but this is on hold until the Party is incorporated. Mr. Zino expressed that speedy incorporation is an urgent priority.**

Mr. Podgorski also expressed a willingness to reach out to the Democrats for Life of America, particularly Janet Robert. Mr. J. Heaney noted, on a cursory glance, that several other members of DFLA are known to be receptive to the possibility of a new pro-life third party, including Prof. Tom Berg and Prof. Charles Camosy.

There was a suggestion made to reach out to the Catholic Worker community near Bethel, a suggestion that was received with general acclaim.

Next meeting time was set for November 15th (or that week). Mr. Bruening moved to adjourn, Mr. J. Heaney seconded, and the body adjourned until the next working meeting.