

**Democratic Club of Willow Valley
General Meeting
May 27, 2025**

Attendance: 78

President Jen Porter opened the meeting at 1p.m. and introduced speaker Chris Baxter, CEO and President of SpotlightPA.

Mr. Baxter: The Future of News and Our Democracy

Mr. Baxter began with background of the decline of journalism for the past 20 years. As the internet has grown, nonpartisan, bipartisan and in-depth journalism has declined while many newspapers have ceased to exist. As a result, voters lack information needed to call for accountability of elected officials, especially in state and local offices. The role of SpotlightPA, established in September 2019, has been to restore impartial, unbiased journalism guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment, the right to gather information and to report it to the public.

- SpotlightPA is nonpartisan and nonprofit, contains no opinions such as op-eds or letters to the editor.
- Among issues SpotlightPA covers are elections and voting, criminal justice, news from Harrisburg, PA's health system, and education.
- The organization shares, without cost, its information with over 125 communities in Pennsylvania, resulting in more community connections.
- Spotlight has over 50,000 subscribers and 32 full-time employees.
- Since its existence, there have been 36 policy changes, 14 new pieces of legislation, and 8 legal victories as a result of its reporting.

Mr. Baxter opened the floor to Q&A. Questions involved funding, employment opportunities, along with specific issues such as homelessness and housing costs.

Business Meeting

Treasury: Current balance is unchanged: \$2,522.22 with \$3,432 set aside for Scholarship, leaving a negative balance of \$908.78. This balance will be remedied by membership enrollment.

Scholarships: Two recipients have been selected for the L-SHS 2025 Scholarship of \$1,000 each: Mason Heiserman and Truman Horst. Mason will attend Thaddeus Stevens and Truman either Messiah University or Grove City College.

Advocacy: Jerry Henige presented three key issues for PA

- **The 2025 budget** with key spending issues of workforce development, health care, public safety, economic development, infrastructure and public transportation, energy, and revenue sources.
- **Education funding proposal:**
 - increases in Basic Education Funding (\$75M) and Adequacy Supplement for underfunded schools (\$526M)
 - \$40M to Special Education
 - base cyber charter school tuition rate of \$8K per student
 - funding for school safety, mental health grants and student teacher stipend

- State Senator Scott Martin is a key player in this area.
- **Housing Action Plan:**
 - 20% of homeowners and almost 50% of renters are “housing cost burdened” due to a lack of affordable housing.
 - A draft plan for Governor Shapiro’s September 12, 2024, Executive Order directing development of Housing Action Plans to address housing costs is due September 12, 2025.
- Advocacy Co-Chair Barbara Bonanno collected the contacts to legislators, totaling 175 for April.
- On June 14, No Kings Day rally will take place in Lancaster, information to follow.
- A sign-up sheet for writers for Letters to the Editor was available.

Website: (www.demswvc.com) Ross Fairweather demonstrated the new website and explained the steps to sign up for membership, new and renewing. Since our calendar year runs January 1 through December 31st, the June membership is for the fiscal year. We will have our 2026 membership drive in the first quarter next year.

Primary Election Results: Jerry Henige reported that all Democratic candidates sailed through on May 20.

Brandon Neuman – PA Superior Court
 Stella Tsai – PA Commonwealth Court
 Sarah Cook and Kirk Williard – L-S School Board
 Tracy Arnold – West Lampeter Supervisor
 Elaine Austin (Lakes) and Susan Highfield (Locust) – Inspector of Elections

Both Lakes and Locust precincts had high turnout, Lakes with 46%, Locust 39%. County average was 21%. President Porter presented a slide with the names of those who volunteered to work at the polls on May 20 and thanked them for their dedication.

Upcoming Events

Understanding Our Democracy series: two June events. Both take place in the Cultural Center Education Room at **1:30-3:00 p.m.**

- **Monday, June 9**, topic the Reconciliation Bill that recently passed the U.S. House
- **Thursday, June 12**, Lancaster County Quaker Meeting House will share their advocacy efforts with our elected officials.

Next General Meeting:

Tuesday, June 24, 1 p.m. Cultural Center Education Room with Speaker PA Representative Izzy Smith-Wade-El.

Lucy Painter
 Secretary