Greens spring forward in 2019 elections

By Mike Feinstein, California

Greens are often known as “thinking globally and acting locally.” In Spring 2019, many Greens acted locally by running for municipal and county office, with almost half of them winning elections, including eight of nine incumbents. In Illinois, environmental scientist and Alderman Peter Schwartzmann (Galesburg, population 31,000) was re-elected to his third consecutive term on the City Council. In Wisconsin, Barbara Dahlgren was re-elected to the Wisconsin Conservation Congress from Milwaukee County in a two round run-off after the first round ended in a tie. The Wisconsin Conservation Congress is a statewide statutory advisory body to Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources on how to responsibly manage Wisconsin’s natural resources for present and future generations. Interviewed by Milwaukee’s National Public Radio station on election night, Dahlgren said her campaign “I really want to keep public spaces public and keep as much land open to the public as possible. The other thing that I said two years ago that I’m still in favor now is science-based techniques to figure out how to manage the land and the resources.”

With an affordable housing crisis raging across the country, three Greens were elected to three Housing Authority seats, including incumbents. Annie Champeau to the Baltimore Housing Authority in Maryland and Ed Ward Tar Lerner, to Concord Housing Authority in Massachusetts. In Missouri, Ed Williamson was elected as a write-in candidate for the Board of Trustees, Health Board, County. An Associate Professor of Education at Drury University School of Education and Child Development, Williams filed as a write-in after being approached by community members after no one filed for the seat.

Schwartzmann’s Green agenda pays dividends for the economy and environment

Peter Schwartzmann is a member of the Galesburg City Council and County Board. In his first four-year term on the Galesburg City Council—founding three of the city’s Green candidates and defeating a local favorite (retiree of the Fire Department)—in 2015, Schwartzmann had one challenger. This year he ran uncontested and all in a city where the rest of the city council seats are held by members that are generally political conservatives.

In Los Angeles, eight out of 12 Green candidates were elected. Neighborhood Council seats in Los Angeles are advisory to the City Council on issues like development, homelessness and emergency preparedness, and connect similar bodies to Advisory Neighborhood Councils in Washington, DC. and to Planning Groups in Los Angeles. Since 2003, at least 47 Greens have won Neighborhood Council seats, with many others appointed to vacancies. Offices like these are especially important entry points for Greens in local government. While city council and county supervisor districts are very large and populous.

Despite the many knock-offs of the Green New Deal (GND) now being offered by Democrats, the Green Party’s real GND is the only plan providing a solution as big as the existential crisis we face. The need for the Green Party’s full-fledged real GND is more urgent than ever, as the climate emergency grows more ominous by the day. The latest scientific reports—as well as everyday experience—make painfully clear, the accelerating crisis allows no room for half-measures.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, we’ve just had the hottest five-year period on record. Midwest farms have been underwater for months, while unprecedented monsoon flooding is displacing millions. Antarctic ice melt has accelerated fivefold in two decades. The critical Thwaites ice sheet, which holds back the flow of adjacent ice sheets into the ocean, has been discovered to contain a hole nearly the size of Manhattan, indicating risk of collapse that could raise sea level abruptly by 10 feet or more and another slow 8-foot rise. Himalayan glacier melt threatens the water supply of hundreds of millions of people by 2030, and 1.5 billion people by 2100. This is the result of a one-degree Celsius warming, yet we’re now on track for 3-5 degrees by the end of the century.

Clearly, there is no time to lose. The IPCC report from the United Nations was overly optimistic—compromised by the political interests of the US and Saudi Arabia—in stating that we have 11 years left for effective worldwide mobilization to combat climate chaos.

Unlike the Democrats’ watered-down spinoffs, the real GND contains measures needed for a response commensurate with the enormity of the problem. Only the Green Party’s GND provides an immediate ban on all new fossil fuel infrastructure, calls for the end of fossil fuel use and 100 percent renewable energy by 2030, and delivers an economic bill of rights. This includes a guaranteed living wage, job, single payer health care, affordable housing, and free college tuition. It also calls for public ownership and management of the energy sector; 50 percent cuts to the bloated military budget along with demilitarized finance to provide needed funds; and democracy reforms to overcome the current corporate stranglehold on U.S. policy.

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The U.S. Green Party began calling for a Green New Deal with Howie Hawkins’ 2010 campaign for Governor of New York. Scores of other Green candidates nationwide joined the call. This was based on a similar, earlier call by the European Greens and other allies in response to Wall Street’s global financial meltdown. In 2012 and 2016, the GND was the centerpiece of Jill Stein’s presidential campaigns, bringing the proposal for the first time to the U.S. national stage.

In 2018 the GND was embraced by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s congressional campaign, informing the proposal for the first time to the U.S. national stage. In 2019, the GND was embraced by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s congressional campaign, informing the proposal for the first time to the U.S. national stage.
committee. Congressional Democrats re-buffed the effort and effectively put the GND on the shelf. AOC subsequently introduced a weaker resolution with Senator Markey. Many of the Democratic presidential candidates have since expressed support for a GND. As more Democratic politicians and allied organizations adopt the GND branding, the details have become progressively weaker. AOC’s initial support for a 2030 target date morphed into 2050 in the joint resolution. Many Democrats just use the GND label to make the point that investing in renewable energy is a better way to create jobs than fossil fuels, while ignoring the 2030 deadline and the economic justice imperative.

Many workers are skeptical about a GND because previous promises for job creation have been unfulfilled, as the economy fails working people on a massive scale. 

Instead, the Green Party’s GND promotes an urgently needed ecosocialist transformation to prioritize people over profit. The Greens fund the GND by diverting at least 50 percent of the military budget, as well as with health care savings from the elimination of fossil fuels, a progressive carbon tax, and other taxes on the super-rich as needed. The Green Party would turn our current Offense Department into a true Defense Department, and transform the manufacture of weapons into Green production including wind turbines, solar panels and energy efficiency technology. A $250 billion military budget would still leave the US as the world’s largest military spender. Eight of the next 10 biggest military spenders are US allies. It is the poor—both at home and abroad—who are the principal victims of the climate change driven by the industrial polluter nations. As the leading historic polluter, the US has a moral obligation to redirect substantial funds to cut global warming and assist the poor in doing it.

Greens are rightly encouraged by the outsourcing of public support for a GND. Now the survival of the Earth may depend on having this policy implemented to its full scope and urgency. To do so, a Green political uprising is needed. As the Democratic establishment, with the help of corporate media, shows all the signs of ramping another corporate centrist through their presidential primary, the failure of the two-party system remains unabated. With the prospect of another Demexit and a huge block of stay-home voters again looming large, that Green political uprising may be closer than it appears.

More Democratic Choices Coming to the US

By David McCorquodale, Delaware

Developments in Maine and Pennsylvania within the past few weeks will help bring færer elections to this country. Greens were involved in bringing about both.

In Maine the voters in a 2016 referendum passed the use of Ranked Choice Voting in state elections and it was used in a general state-wide election for the first time in 2018. Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) was initially implemented in 2017 in Portland. Portland has a strong Green Party presence with several Greens having served in city council positions. Following success in Portland, a committee for Ranked Choice Voting was formed to push for statewide use. One of the leaders for RCV on the committee was Green Party member John Elder, who had previously served in the state legislature.

After initial passage of the law and a favorable ruling in court, the state legislature could not agree on how to amend the constitution to accommodate RCV and had effectively set up a situation to kill it. But the committee for RCV stepped in to gather more than 80,000 signatures opposing the legislature’s action. While RCV voting has been used in June elections, a funding issue has prevented it being implemented in presidential primaries and the general election. Legislation to fix that problem next January. This type of voting will allow Greens to run without being depicted as spoilers.

Greens also spearheaded a move to bring greater election integrity to Pennsylvania. Jill Stein took the lead in putting the state to task. She challenged the state in a lawsuit after the 2016 election, alleging that without paper ballots the results were vulnerable to tampering.

In the fall of 2018 the suit was settled when the state agreed to purchase new voting machines that would leave a verifiable paper trail by 2020. Within two years after purchase the state will begin to audit voting results. This is a major step towards election integrity, as Pennsylvania is the last state to move to obtain voting machines with verifiable paper backup ballots.

Bruce Dixon in his commentary on Black Agenda Report said about Stein’s lawsuit, “Fact is, the lawsuit contributed mightily to what is now a broad and nonpartisan groundswell against faith-based electronic voting, that includes Republican candidates for office as well as Democrats and Greens.”

Unfortunately, late insertions into the PA legislation authorizing the funding by the Republican legislature, which would eliminate straight-ticket party voting, caused the Democratic governor to veto the legislation. The governor succeeded in bond issue to help counties pay for the new voting machines. Despite delays, paper backup ballots is another step towards an electoral process that is less corrupt and more democratic.