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Dorchester Reporter

Dorchester Democrats rally to keep Georgia 'blue'

By Taylor Brokesh, Reporter Correspondent

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*Dorchester supporters of Justice for Southwest Georgia gathered for a group picture at Florian Hall on Monday, May 6.
Taylor Brokesh photo*

To an outside observer, the event held at Florian Hall on Monday night (May 6) might seem a bit peculiar. Why were so many current and former politicians and prominent Democrats in Dorchester mingling with a delegation from rural, southwest Georgia? What could the two groups possibly have in common?

The answer: plenty.

The gathering, dubbed “DotGeorgia” by organizers, was part fundraiser and part-celebration of a four year-long alliance between the Boston neighborhood and their southern allies who run Justice for Southwest Georgia (JSWGA). The partisan group was born out of the 2020 election, when all eyes turned to Georgia as the presidential race – and contests for two Senate seats – came down to the wire.

President Biden ended up winning Georgia by a margin of 11,000 votes, and both Senate runoff races went to Democrats as well, Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff.

At Monday's event, Bobby Jenkins, the mayor of Cuthbert, Ga., told the story of how the JSWGA group came to be. A community organizer acquaintance from upstate New York, Thomas Brown, had reached out to him, saying he knew some volunteers interested in canvassing in Georgia, which led them to Kitty Cox of Newton, a data expert who had been volunteering with the Georgia State Democratic Party during election season. She in turn got in touch with her old neighbor in Dorchester Ed Cook, the Ward 15 Democratic Committee co-chair, and told him about Brown's quest. He signed on as a recruiter in his Boston neighborhood and the "DotGeorgia" initiative gathered steam from there.

The self-funded coalition frequently canvasses in Georgia's rural Randolph County, where Cuthbert is located, and the surrounding counties of Quitman and Stewart. They held vaccine clinics in the early parts of the pandemic to smooth out the process of signing up for a shot, said Joyce Barlow, a registered nurse, three-time candidate for state representative, and a member of the Georgia delegation.

"And we must have liked Zooming so much, we just kept doing it," Jenkins said.

On Monday, the blues and jazz vocalist Gordon Michaels performed "Stand by Me," by Ben E. King, "Georgia on My Mind" and "Lean on Me by Bill Withers" encouraging the audience to join in. Boston's poet laureate, Porsha Olayiwola, a Dorchester resident, read her poem "A Whole Nation," which she said she had written after the Jan. 6 storming of the Capitol.

Former Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick spoke at the Florian Hall event on Monday evening. Taylor Brokesh photo

A host of politicians, current and former, showed up to give their support. Ex-Gov. Deval Patrick served as emcee, and City Councillors John FitzGerald and Brian Worrell, state Reps. Dan Hunt, and Chris Worrell, among others, attended the event, as did former state Sen. Linda Dorcena Forry (co-publisher of The Reporter).

"Democracy, if it means anything, has got to mean something to everybody, and has got to respond to everybody," said Patrick. "But that doesn't happen just by wagging your finger."

He cited a statistic noting that about one-third of registered voters don't turn out to presidential elections, "not just because it's inconvenient, but because they don't think their vote matters." He added: "And the folks that persuade them that their vote matters, I am persuaded, are not the dazzling candidates, or just the well-organized campaigns, but it's the neighbor who goes next door."

Ed Cook organized the rally but was unable to attend due to illness. He caught up with the Reporter later to explain why he believes the work of JSWGA is significant to Massachusetts voters.

"A lot of people in Massachusetts wonder if their vote matters because Massachusetts will be blue, with or without my vote, so to speak," Cook said. "But the work that Justice for Southwest Georgia is doing could keep an entire state blue. And for people who are Democrats, or people who just fear the reelection of Trump, this is a vehicle to have a direct impact that will make a real difference in the election."



Ward 15 Democratic co-chair Karen Charles said the fundraiser was livestreamed make sure people back in Georgia understood the keen interest that exists in Boston to support their work. While exact totals hadn't been calculated yet, the team putting on the event estimated they'd raised over \$20,000 for the Georgia campaign coffers.

“Southwest Georgia,” Charles said, “do you see how much Dorchester loves you?”

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