



Chenango Green Voice

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A Progressive Publication For Members & Friends
Of The Chenango County Green Party

Winter 2006

An Interview With Cobleskill Mayor Mike Sellers

Mike Sellers was elected Mayor of Cobleskill in November. His campaign approach can be sampled at the campaign's website at www.sellersformayor.org

Voice: Congratulations Mr. Mayor. The Green Party has admired your campaign for its ability to offer concrete, small-town solutions for the economic and social problems that plague our society: the destruction of downtown economies by chain stores, the decline of family farms, the alienation of our youth, and more. Why did you choose to run for a village office, rather than say, for Assembly?

Mike Sellers: I'm not a politician and I did not run for office simply for the sake of running for office. I ran for Mayor of the Village of Cobleskill because I saw there was a need for leadership in my hometown, for new ideas, and for a progressive and sustainable future for the Village. I

also thought I had the responsibility to run to get representation for the youth of Cobleskill on the Village Board. Over 50% of the Village's population is under the age of 25 and until this past election there was no one under the age on 45 on the board.

I also feel that it is in local, non-partisan elections that Greens and independents have the best chance for electoral victories and that this is the venue where we should concentrate at this time.

Voice: Your victory came from a plurality of votes, 46% I think. Would a two-way race have had a different outcome?

Mike Sellers: It is impossible to know what would have happened in a two-way race as the dynamics of the elec-

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The Green Party of New York State Committee News

New York State Green Party Has Best Showing Ever; Party Confident of Recapturing Full Party Status in 2006 Gubernatorial Elections

The Green Party had its best electoral showing ever in New York State this year, including electing its 5th and 6th current office holders. Nationwide, Green Party candidates won at least 35 races in 2005.

The Greens ran Mayoral candidates in four of the state's largest cities, with civil rights advocate Dr. Alice Green polling a stunning 25% of the vote in the City of Albany, easily surpassing the Republican vote total. "The results in Albany highlight that voters are increasingly responding to the Green Party message," stated Peter LaVenia, Chair of the Albany County Green Party. "For Alice Green to receive 25% of the vote in a citywide election, and David Lussier to achieve 30% of the vote in a 4-way council race, both finishing second ahead of the Republicans, means that we can expect further successes here next year in our quest to regain ballot status as a party."

While the state party successfully sued in federal court for the right of voters to enroll as Greens, their candidates are forced to comply with the more-difficult ballot-access rules for independent candidates. But, the strong showing in the 2005 elections bodes well for the party, which must

poll at least 50,000 votes for its gubernatorial candidate in '06, in order to regain its official party status.

Mary Jo Long, who polled more than 50,000 votes for the Greens three years ago in her race for Attorney General, was elected to the Afton Town Board. She joins four other elected Green officials in Ulster and Monroe Counties.

SUNY student Mike Sellers was elected Mayor of Cobleskill with 46% of the vote. Sellers handily defeated both the current mayor and another candidate. Sellers will be the second Green Mayor in New York State joining New Paltz Mayor Jason West.

In New York City, peace and labor activist Gloria Mattera (Co-Chair of the Green Party of New York State) qualified for \$200,000 in matching funds in her race for Brooklyn Borough President, and polled nearly 18,000 votes (7%). Green City Council candidate Robyn Sklar also qualified for public campaign funds in NYC and pulled 13% of the vote. "Once again, voters nationwide have demonstrated their enthusiasm for Green Party candidates

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Chenango Green Voice

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The Chenango Green Voice is a quarterly newsletter of the Chenango County Green Party. Its purpose is to connect politically progressive people and keep them abreast of news, views and events not featured in the conventional media. It is dedicated to building a party of participants: please be encouraged to submit articles, letters, or information for our calendar.

If you prefer to receive mail from the Green Party electronically, please notify us by email at:

mail@chenangogreens.org

All emails will be kept strictly confidential. We won't ever share them in any way.

We meet every 2nd Wednesday of the month, 7 pm at 27 West Main Street, Norwich, room 101, a conference room on the first floor of the Chenango Council of the Arts suite. You are invited to come, listen and talk about current local, state, national and international issues. There is no obligation. We welcome your presence.

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"Operation Iraqi Freedom" Re-framed

By Christine Brunner

There is only one "exit strategy" for Iraq: LEAVE, and leave NOW. All occupying troops need to retreat to their bases and stand down, preparing for redeployment ala Rep. John Murtha's actual House Joint Res. 73.

To save face and assure "victory", the President, who took us to war on his own, could just simply declare "success" because the Iraqi people are now free from Saddam's oppressive rule. Furthermore, they can now start running their own country, having elected a representative parliament on December 15th. What more could he want?

The Administration and the American people need to understand that the "war on terror" will never be "won" in Iraq; the lumping together of the insurgents—nationalists resisting our occupation—with terrorists is a blatant spin to justify continuing the war and to bolster troop morale, just as preemptively attacking Iraq in retaliation for 9-11 was a fortuitous excuse to enact a pre-planned agenda of the neocons.

It is widely suspected that our presence in Iraq is causing more harm than promoting good: that the Iraqi people themselves overwhelmingly want us to leave. And it appears now, finally, that it is a given that we will—the question is when—no one, save Murtha, risks setting a departure date. Even Sherwood Boehlert has recently published a copycat so-called "exit strategy for success in Iraq"; Senator Clinton had dispatched approximately the same in a recent letter to her constituents as well—our legislators seem to have caught on to the concerns of their constituents, inasmuch as they are up for re-election.

The anti-war movement means to make the war the signature issue of the 2006 elections.

Green Party of New York State Committee News...continued

who make issues of social and economic justice the highlight of their platforms," stated Mattera. "In the aftermath of Katrina and the continued occupation of Iraq, the Green Party offers people an opportunity to support candidates who will be a catalyst for change."

In other races statewide, Darin Robbins polled over 25% for Corning Alderman in Steuben County. David Linton polled 17% of the vote for Onondaga County Legislature with Cosmo Fanizzi polling 13%. Chris Hilderbrant polled over 15% of the vote in his run for Monroe County Legislature. Will Maksuta polled over 13% of the vote running for New Paltz Town Clerk in Ulster County.

Green Party candidates picked up an increasing number of endorsements from other groups, including local Labor Councils, Empire Pride Agenda, National Organization for Women, Sierra Club, and newspapers.

The next GPNYS State Committee meeting is January 21, 2006. The meeting will run from approximately 9am to 6pm. All enrolled Greens are welcome to observe. There is a non-SC member speakout time for enrolled Greens before the agenda is taken up at 9:30 am. The meeting will take place at First Congregational Church, Fellowship Hall, 30 Main St., Binghamton, NY. The church is on the northwest corner of Front and Main St.

Our gratitude to the Broome County Green Party for handling the arrangements for this meeting.

What Do You Know About Genetically Modified Foods?

By Mary Jo Long

In Chenango County, where agriculture has been and still is a major part of our economy, consumer awareness of genetically engineered or genetically modified (GM) foods is low. (See sidebox for description) GM foods have been in U.S. markets for 9 years. Although the free market is supposed to be based on consumers making informed choices, 58% of Americans do not even know about genetically engineered foods. More than 1/2 of all Americans believe they have never eaten genetically engineered food, even though cereals, soda, nacho chips, vegetable oils, and most processed foods contain genetically engineered ingredients. Consumers are clearly misinformed.

This is in contrast to Europe, where more consumers are knowledgeable about genetic engineering and reject GM foods. These countries have bans or moratoriums on planting genetically engineered seeds and/or require labeling. In our country, gigantic food and agribusiness corporations like Kraft (part of Phillip Morris), Monsanto, and Archer Daniels Midland have successfully opposed mandatory labeling in this country (even though they do it in England and other countries which require it). So, although we may know how much sodium and cholesterol is in our food, we don't get to know that it is genetically engineered.

Organic foods exclude genetically engineered ingredients, as well as bans artificial growth hormones, chemical pesticides and herbicides. Organic food is the fastest grow-

ing part of agriculture in recent years. But even "organic" food may have been shipped from China, Chile or California. Our present food delivery system has certain irrationalities. For example, most of a tomato is water, yet we are using evermore expensive gasoline to truck or fly water, in the form of tomatoes, great distances to our grocery stores. Wal-Mart and other large chain grocery stores want food that will withstand shipping long distances and have a long shelf life since they import food from all over the world. The fact that tomatoes and strawberries, e.g., don't taste like tomatoes and strawberries anymore is our loss. They also have less nutritional value.

It would be good for Chenango County to develop its local and organic food production and marketing capacities. We have a farmers' market in Norwich in the summer. If consumers demanded that local grocery stores carry local produce and that our schools use more local produce, there would be more markets for local farmers and they could sell their products year-round. We have a few organic food producers in Chenango County already. Dave and Sue Evans' Dairy in Norwich has been a good example of a local organic producer. They sell their milk in a few health food stores but also have an on-farm store that sells not only their produce but also the produce of other local farmers. Their milk is not ultra-pasteurized or homogenized, and the taste is soooo much better. While

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Overview of Genetically Modified Foods

Historically, humans have bred food crops and animals to improve the yield, taste, health and hardiness of our food sources. This traditional breeding can only take place between closely related species. Genetic engineering now allows us to shatter the species boundaries. One of the most common forms of genetic engineering is to put bacterial, viral, artificial or other plant genes into plants, thus moving DNA between unrelated organisms. This trans-species engineering has also been done with animals.

The products of genetic engineering are patented. This enable private corporations and individuals to own living organisms, such as crops, for the first time. Ironically, genetic engineering has been passed over by government regulatory agencies which held that they are not appreciably different than natural foods – yet they are unique enough to be patented.

The GM technology was rushed to market in the US before the science was worked out. This happened because of (1) rigged research and bribes, (2) the suppression of scientists' work that contradicted biotechnology industry claims, (3) cover-ups, (4) and regulatory agencies stacked with industry representatives. (See Scientists Open Letter on the Hazards of Genetically Engineered Foods & Crops, www.organicconsumers.org/ge/openletter122105)

Key assumptions, upon which safety claims were made by biotech corporations, have been overturned. Also, adverse findings suggest that GM foods are unsafe. The genes inserted into GM food not only survive digestion, but transfer into body organs and circulation. Transgenes have been found in the blood, liver, spleen and kidneys. DNA can travel via the placenta into the unborn. The

only human clinical trial showed that transgenes from soy transfer into intestinal bacteria.

Claims that no one has gotten hurt from GM foods are misleading since no one monitors human health impacts. A British study showed that soy allergies increased 50% when GM soybeans were imported into England. Also a GM food supplement (L-tryptophan) killed about 100 Americans and caused 5,000 to 10,000 to fall sick. We, in the US, are the guinea pigs for GM food since it permeates our grocery shelves. The agbiotech corporations refuse to take responsibility for any ill effects of their products and insurance companies have refused to insure against contamination from cross-pollination of genetically engineered seeds and other anticipated negative effects of GM foods.

Pharma Crops

by John Van Lierde

Visitors to the Midwest marvel at the vast expanse of corn and soybean fields stretching to the horizon. Each year, these two crops are grown on more than one hundred million acres across the country, mostly in the Midwest.

Most visitors don't realize that some of these corn and soybean plants have been genetically engineered to produce drugs, vaccines, and industrial chemicals. These crops — called pharmaceutical and industrial crops, or "pharma crops" — look just like any other crops used for consumer food products and animal feed. Yet, unlike commodity crops, pharma crops produce hormones, enzymes, diagnostic compounds, plastics, and other substances that might harm consumers and animals if inadvertently ingested.

Since most of the processed foods on grocery shelves contain corn or soybeans in some form, how can pharma corn and soybean be kept separate from the grain used by food processors? Can drugs and industrial chemicals find their way into the U.S. food supply?

Though the end products were never intended to be eaten, pharma crop producers regularly use food crops as theft biological factory. Unless pharma crops and food crops are kept apart, potentially harmful substances can easily move into the food system due to the flow of pollen from plant to plant and seed mixing that can occur during planting or harvest. The common practice of planting

pharma crops in areas such as the Midwest, where food varieties of the same crops are grown, increases the likelihood of contamination.

Two near-contamination incidents in 2002 persuaded food processors and retailers to join the call for regulatory action. The FDA responded by proposing new, but voluntary, guidelines for the industry, and the USDA tightened restrictions on pharma crop field tests. These were steps in the right direction, but neither agency has gone far enough to protect our food supply.

The U.S. government should set a standard of complete protection. A policy allowing "safe" levels of pharma substances in food would force consumers to accept a certain amount of drugs and industrial chemicals in their food, and the industry could produce thousands of such substances. A regulatory system for determining what constitutes a safe level of pharma compounds would waste valuable time and resources. Risk assessment science is not sufficiently robust to screen out harmful chemicals. Even "safe" levels may turn out to be dangerous.

Contamination of the food system may have already occurred and may continue to occur. In light of the potential health and economic consequences of contamination, the USDA needs to halt the outdoor production of genetically engineered pharma crops immediately, until a system can be put in place to protect the U.S. food supply and food industry.

Genetically Modified Foods...continued from previous page

Chenango County farms have mainly grown grass and corn to feed cows, we can also grow carrots, onions, potatoes, squash and more. When we grow more of our food locally, then we save fuel, reduce the middle man's cut of the profits and help circulate money locally. Most grocery store food comes from large scale agriculture such as confined animal feedlots and mega farms. Farming on a scale appropriate to our resources and land encourages stewardship of the land. If we also developed a reputation of having organic produce, dairy and meat, this would help our economy and help Chenangoans to have healthier lives.

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Just an idea...

George Bush has started an ill-timed and disastrous war under false pretenses by lying to the American people and to the Congress; he has run a budget surplus into a severe deficit; he has consistently and unconscionably favored the wealthy and corporations over the rights and needs of the population; he has destroyed trust and confidence in, and good will toward, the United States around the globe; he has ignored global warming, to the world's detriment; he has wantonly broken our treaty obligations; he has condoned torture of prisoners; he has attempted to create a theocracy in the United States; he has appointed incompetent cronies to positions of vital national importance.

Now, would someone please give him the Monica treatment so we can impeach him? ☺

Interview With Cobleskill Mayor Mike Sellers...continued from page 1

tion would have been entirely different. The great thing about this three-way race was that it brought so many people out to vote who otherwise would have not bothered. Typically, Cobleskill Village elections draw less than 400 voters to the polls (out of approximately 2000 registered voters). November's election brought out over 1000 voters, which comes close to Presidential election year turn-out. It was unprecedented and reaffirmed in me the belief in the need for more choices in elections and institution of Instant Runoff Voting.

Voice: What sorts of people joined your campaign? How did you reach out to these various constituencies?

Mike Sellers: As I began the campaign, my only strong support came from my friends and family and a few local small business owners. As I got my name and message out and went door-to-door meeting the Village voters, I found I had support from across the community. Not only progressive young people, but their conservative parents. Not only transient college students, but long-time residents. In small-town elections, gaining support is more about building relationships than it is about political beliefs or policy proposals. I built these relationships over the course of my life, growing up in Cobleskill.

Voice: I understand you won all three electoral districts in the village. Does that reflect an across-the-board support for your positions? Or did you depend heavily on student votes?

Mike Sellers: The district which I received the highest number of votes was my home district where my neighbors and the people I grew up with live. I did also win the other districts, including the district which covers the college but not by as high a margin. I am still working on an analysis of the vote results to determine how much of my support actually came from students.

Voice: When you take office, will you have allies on the Village Board, or are they more conservative and likely to keep progressive programs from being launched?

Mike Sellers: I took office on December 5th and since then have had a good working relationship with all the other Village Trustees. For instance, our board recently voted unanimously to rescind a decision by the previous board to provide water and sewer service to a potential big-box development outside the Village limits. I was successfully able to convince the more conservative members of the Village Board that providing services to developments outside Village limits was unfair to Village taxpayers, because these new developments would not be paying into the Vil-

lage tax base. Framing ideas in a fiscally conservative context (i.e. 'looking out for the taxpayers') is one way I believe I will be able to launch progressive programs in Cobleskill.

Voice: The Republican administrations in mid-state New York are supported by big business interests that keep them in office with favorable press, by making speaking venues available, and with continuing funding. How can you keep your voters involved in the work you want to undertake? Isn't there an attitude of "well, we elected a good guy: he'll fix everything"

Mike Sellers: For one thing, I plan to continue to use the internet as a tool for reaching the public and keeping them informed and involved. My campaign website was a key to spreading my message before the election. I hope to launch a new website soon (perhaps a blog) to keep local residents informed about what the Village of Cobleskill is working on, what I'm working on, what's going on at other levels of government and how they can get involved and have their voices heard. I am also working to have Village Board meetings broadcast on the local Public Access Television channel to keep residents informed.

Voice: Tell us: of all the projects your campaign promoted, which is the one that is closest to your own heart?

Mike Sellers: I want to change the local culture which currently demonizes young people. The biggest message of my campaign was that youth are not our biggest problem, they are our biggest asset. I have many ideas for how we can revitalize our local youth center; reorganize our youth commission; get children, young adults and college students more involved in Village affairs; and provide healthy and empowering activities for them in the local area. This will be one of several long-term, multi-part projects for me. But, it was the major theme of my campaign and is the issue closest to my heart.

Voice: One problem the Green Party has had, to some extent, is in creating local organizations as a result of even relatively successful campaigns. Do you feel there is a progressive core of people in Cobleskill who have been brought together by your campaign, and that will inspire races for Assembly, State Senate, or Congressional challenges in your area?

Mike Sellers: At this point, I have not given any serious thought to state and federal level elections. However, I do believe that there is a great possibility of local Greens and progressives running for School board, Town Board, and other local level elections in the Cobleskill area. I believe the local level has an incredible amount of potential for Green victories which can help the party grow to the point where it can seriously contend for higher level offices.

Voice: The Green Party of New York State will be holding its State Committee meeting in Binghamton on January 21. Will you grace us with your presence?

Mike Sellers: I definitely plan to be there. Hope to see you then.



A Bloodless Revolution!

By Chris Brunner

What would it take to change things; to renovate this country's democratic values? The national Clean Money/Clean Elections movement identifies the key to restoring democracy as stopping the corrupting influence of money in politics, thus restoring public participation and confidence in the political process.

In general, clean money/clean elections legislates a voluntary program for full public "no strings attached" funding for qualifying state and/or local candidates, circumventing the typical daunting imperative that one needs to have/get mega-bucks to run for office.

Most citizens don't know about clean elections—it's another issue not covered well by mainstream media—but, since 1996, six states have passed such laws. On December

1st, 2005, Connecticut became the 7th, joining Arizona, Maine, North Carolina, New Mexico, Vermont and New Jersey. People are working to pass comprehensive publicly financed elections in more than 30 states, according to Public Campaign, another nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to sweeping election reform that aims to reduce the role of big special interest money in American politics.

Here in New York, both the Senate and Assembly have similar laws already written which are currently bottled up in committee. They are identical and, if enacted, would specifically provide full and equal public funding for all qualified candidates who refuse private money, including their own. To be eligible, certain requirements need to be met to demonstrate adequate constituent support such as collecting a certain number of token (usually \$5.00) contributions. The clean money/clean election laws would not only offer the opportunity for anyone of any party a way to engage in a viable campaign, but would change the very nature of the process. Candidates run on their ideas, ability and integrity, not on how much money they can raise. They would agree to a fixed number of debates as well. And if elected, they can concentrate on the public interest rather than on raising funds for their next campaign, beholden to their special interest supporters.

So, how much would all this visionary venture in a better democracy cost the taxpayer? Always the bottom line, isn't it!—and why shouldn't the best government we can have not be worth any price? Actually, clean elections only would cost New Yorkers about \$3.-\$5. each every election cycle; and there is an added bonus: the billions that now go for tax breaks and subsidies to big contributors could be available, instead, to satisfy state and local budgets for schools, healthcare, the environment, etc. A potential quiet revolution!

For more complete information, see New York Citizens for Clean Elections at www.nycce.org. or Citizen Action of New York for Clean Money, Clean Elections Campaign Coordinator, Jessica Wisneski at jwisneski@citizenactionny.org.

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