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Northwest Iowa Democrats gather to hear from party leaders

Democrats from eight northwest Iowa counties gathered in Le Mars on Wednesday evening, Aug. 2, to enjoy a meal together and hear from Iowa Democratic party leaders.

A crowd of nearly 100 filled the Willow Creek Banquet Hall, where they were served a variety of pizzas and salad made by Catalano's Wood-Fired Pizza in Le Mars.

Following the meal, attendees were introduced to two young candidates running for local offices this year. The program also included remarks by Ryan Melton, who is running for Iowa's 4th Congressional District seat in the U.S. House of Representatives; Megan Srinivas, a Democratic member of the Iowa House of Representatives; Iowa State Auditor Rob Sand; and Rita Hart, chair of the Iowa Democratic Party.

Melton initially ran for Congress in 2022, building a grassroots campaign with no paid staffers, a limited budget, and a core group of volunteers. In the process, he earned more votes than 70% of major party U.S. House of Representatives candidates whose fundraising totals were less than \$75,000.

"The biggest lesson I learned from last year is if you run for the right reasons, the people you'll need to help you will emerge," said Melton.

Srinivas just finished her first legislative session in the Iowa House. She talked about growing up in Fort Dodge, Iowa, and the way her community shaped her. She also discussed the recent special session and how her role as a doctor informs her views on women's health care access.

Sand reminded his audience that Iowa is still a purple state. Among the facts he shared is that Inside Elections, a respected non-partisan publication, ranks Iowa as the 10th most evenly divided state in the nation. It also sets Iowa's partisan baseline after the 2022 elections in between Georgia and Ohio, both of which have Democrats in the U.S. Senate. And while the average U.S. Senate race margin in 2020 was 28.8%, Iowa's was 6.6%.

"Iowa had the second-most split-ticket voters of any competitive state in 2022," Sand said. "In fact, the vast majority of Iowans who voted to reelect me also voted for Attorney General Tom Miller and

Treasurer Mike Fitzgerald, both of whom lost narrowly. That means Iowa's huge bunch of ticket-splitters voted mostly for not one, but three statewide Democrats."

Iowa Democratic Party Chair Rita Hart closed out the evening, sharing with the crowd the things she is doing to strengthen the state's Democratic party and prepare it for the 2024 election year.

According to Anita Cirulis, chair of the Sioux County Democrats, she and the chairs of the Democratic county parties of Woodbury, Plymouth, Lyon and Osceola plan to make the NW Iowa Dinner with Democrats an annual event and have already begun planning for next year.

"Gatherings like this dinner are vital to build morale, gain momentum, and raise funds to support Democratic candidates," she says. "We need people in office who can have a positive impact on the lives of Iowans and on the future of our country."