

As of Monday, March 18, I am resigning from the Hudson County Democratic Organization. Having served in this role for almost seven years, and as Chair of the Hoboken Democratic Committee for almost five years, this was not a decision I made lightly.

I can no longer have my name associated with an organization as dysfunctional and antiquated as the HCDO.

The behavior of the HCDO this campaign cycle and the behavior of their endorsed campaigns are not emblematic of the Democratic party I want to be a part of.

On November 15, 2023, the HCDO publicly endorsed Tammy Murphy for Senate. No convention.

No calls to municipal chairs. Not even a semblance of a Democratic Process. And then three weeks later, an endorsement for Congressman Rob Menendez for Congress. Again, no Democratic Process.

Make no mistake, while I am offended by this gross rejection of democracy, this is how the HCDO chooses to operate. I have to honor that.

But I no longer have to be a part of it.

I no longer have to be part of an organization that chooses to make decisions without the input of its membership and flagrantly disregards anyone who chooses to operate differently.

Like the Hoboken Democratic Committee.

In February 2024, we announced our plan to hold a meeting to endorse candidates for Senate and Congress. This decision was made by our eight-member Executive Committee after consulting with various committee members. Our process was simple: every elected member gets a vote, and those votes determine the outcome. We invited candidates to submit written statements.

Since we announced this meeting, I began receiving calls and emails denigrating and diminishing the integrity of our process. Multiple senior advisors on the Tammy Murphy campaign called me to coerce me into changing our process, essentially calling it a sham. The campaign manager for the Menendez campaign (who also serves as a paid staff person of the HCDO) asked why we were running this process before the filing deadline and suggested some Hoboken members recuse themselves if they work for the City of Hoboken, even though those members were duly elected by the public.

The hypocrisy is startling - campaigns gladly accepting endorsements born without any democratic process denigrating the Hoboken Democratic Committee's extremely democratic process and timing.

But this was perhaps the final straw. Coming into 2024, I was already disillusioned with the HCDO.

When I first ran in 2017, I was looking for a way to channel my upset, anger, and frustration about the 2016 Election into tangible action. The Democratic Committee was the perfect place for me to get involved. I was inspired by the opportunity to work on issues I cared about – climate change, women's rights, youth involvement, and most importantly, fair and free elections. I spent my first two years learning the ropes, meeting people, and even getting involved at the County level on the Correctional Advisory Board. And five years ago, I took on the role of Chair. I was hopeful that having built those relationships and having showed the HCDO that I was a reasonable and motivated leader who they could partner with, we could truly begin to actualize the change we all wanted to see.

I could not have been more misguided.

For seven years, I tried to work within the system, hoping to influence change from within. I put together slates of committee candidates, only to have multiple people rejected, without reason, for what I can only assume is their perceived lack of loyalty to the HCDO. Our committee worked hard to get Joe Biden elected President, with no support from the HCDO. In 2023, I endorsed both Craig Guy for County Executive and Anthony Romano for County Commissioner. Irrespective of their qualifications or visions for our County, part of my motivation to make these endorsements was a last-ditch effort to show our willingness to work within the system and be good partners.

None of it mattered. For years, the HCDO has ignored us, dismissed us, and actively tried to diminish us. We saw the same people over and over again take on leadership roles and paid positions in county government, the HCDO, and on campaigns, to the point where it's now hard to tell where the HCDO ends and County Government begins. The Hoboken Democratic Committee members, duly elected members of the County Committee, learned about county committee decisions and endorsements made in our name from the press. And now, rumblings of yet another battle for HCDO Chair where members will be used as pawns in a proxy war.

I no longer wish to spend my time and effort working to influence an organization so committed to the status quo. At a time when women's rights are eroding across our country, gun deaths are at an all-time high, and climate change is threatening our very existence, I wish to be part of organizations that are inclusive, modern, diverse, and democratic.

The HCDO is not that place. It has become abundantly clear that the priorities are not to bolster and grow the Democratic party but to consolidate and maintain power with the "County Machine."

I couldn't be prouder of the work that the Hoboken Democratic Committee accomplished during my tenure. Our endorsement of Mayor Ravi Bhalla for the U.S. House of Representatives and Congressman Andy Kim for U.S. Senate are just the latest in a string of accomplishments. Since I joined the committee, we held fundraisers to support candidates in the 2018 Blue Wave, we mailed thousands of postcards and raised money for swing states to help Joe Biden become President, and we recruited new and diverse members to run for committee and launched many of them into other leadership roles. It has been my honor to work alongside these people and I look forward to supporting them in other ways moving forward.

Sincerely,
Rachel Hodes