

For immediate release – May 3, 2018

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Rock County Dems event honors Reuther, UAW and Unionism

JANESVILLE – The sale of the GM plan was motivation for the Rock County Democratic Party’s annual spring fundraiser to honor the contributions of the United Auto Workers, other local unions and those of Walter Reuther, who built the UAW during his 25-year presidency.

The Spring Fling Dinner will be May 20 at the UAW Local 95 Union Hall in Janesville. Democratic candidates for governor and lieutenant governor are invited along with Democrats running for U.S. Congress and those running for the state legislature in Assembly Districts 31, 43, 44 and 45 and Senate District 15.

Candidates for Rock County offices, including county clerk, treasurer and clerk of courts are also expected.

The candidates will be present to meet and greet the public beginning at 4 p.m. Dinner is at 6 p.m. and the program begins at 7.

The event will feature the theme “We vote, We win,” and is intended to inspire enthusiasm for Democratic candidates in the coming primaries and the general election in November.

Tim Cullen, former majority leader of the Wisconsin State Senate and former Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, will be keynote speaker.

Cullen is writing a book focusing on the UAW’s efforts to keep the Janesville General Motors plant open in the 25 years preceding its closure in 2008. Cullen’s admiration for Reuther increased as he researched the UAW and the local plant.

“Walter Reuther was quite possibly the greatest labor leader in American history,” Cullen said. “He was an environmentalist. He marched with Martin Luther King and was with him at the “I have a Dream” speech. He was an advisor to Lyndon Johnson as the Great Society programs were created.”

Reuther’s progressivism and his vision for improving the lives of working people were remarkable, Cullen said.

Cullen, the author of an earlier book on recent Wisconsin political history, noted that 2018 is the 10th anniversary of the closing of the local GM plant and also the year that it will be razed.

“The GM plant and the workers were crucial to the history of Janesville and Rock County,” Cullen said. “This is a good time to talk about our history.”

The UAW Local 95 Union Hall, at 1795 Lafayette St., Janesville, was the first building to be named for Reuther after his death in 1970.

The event will also acknowledge the contributions of local unions and their leaders such as Doris Thom, the first woman to work on the line at GM in Janesville. Thom was a founder of Blackhawk Credit Union and a founder of the National Organization for Women. She died in late 2017 at the age of 97.

Tickets to the event are \$30, or \$230 for a table of eight. They may be purchased by credit card at <https://secure.actblue.com/donate/dprcpringfling>. They are also available by sending a check to the Democratic Party of Rock County, P.O. Box 2293, Janesville, WI 53547. Tickets will be mailed if checks are received by May 11, and will otherwise be held at the will-call table.

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