



Speaker Bios & Contacts

Bernadette Comfort, Managing Director, Public Affairs

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Connected doesn't even begin to describe Bernadette's political roots in Pennsylvania. She can organize an event, build a crowd, and energize a room with a grace that makes hard work look easy. Her political instincts are spot on, and her talent in building coalitions is enhanced by a network that runs long and deep. Bernadette (her friends call her Bernie) works as a Managing Director of Public Affairs for Novak Strategic Advisors, a Harrisburg-based firm that offers comprehensive, strategic government affairs and grassroots solutions to real-world business needs.

She has over two and a half decades of experience working to promote and elect candidates throughout Pennsylvania. Bernie is an experienced coalition leader and has served in leadership positions on statewide campaigns in Pennsylvania over the last two decades.

For twenty-two years Bernie has promoted the advancement of women in all walks of life through her work as the Executive Director of the Anne B. Anstine Excellence in Public Service Series and the Dodie Londen Series in Arizona. As the manager for these executive leadership programs, Bernie has developed a network that includes leaders in business, non-profit and politics and has increased her networking, fundraising and training skills while training hundreds of public leaders. Governor Mark Schweiker appointed her to the Pennsylvania Commission for Women and was reappointed by Governors Rendell and Corbett. She served as a Commissioner for the PA Commission for Women. Bernie previously served in various management positions in higher education at Chatham University and the University of Pittsburgh.

Having been born in Philadelphia, raised in the Lehigh Valley, and having lived in Western, PA for over two decades, Bernie has a great appreciation for the Commonwealth and all it has to offer. When she isn't rubbing elbows with the political hierarchy, Bernie is busy raising a future public leader in her 14-year-old daughter, Luci. She would tell you that the jobs she loves most is being Luci's mom.

Dr. Laura DiMino, Assistant Executive Director

Center for Rural Pennsylvania

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Laura R. Dimino, Ph.D., is the assistant director of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. She joined the Center in December 2022. Dr. Dimino oversees the Center's Research Grants Program, and coordinates and develops external projects and Center initiatives. Before joining the Center, Dr. Dimino was the associate provost at Central Penn College, where she also served as director of Institutional Assessment and Accreditation. In addition, Laura previously served as a public affairs program analyst at the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, and as assistant director of academic programs at Temple University. Dr. Dimino holds a doctorate and master's degree in Political Science from the University of Rochester, and a bachelor's degree from Clark University.

Matt Espenshade, President

Pennsylvania State Grange

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Seeking a way to get involved in the community after graduating college, Matt joined the Grange in 1995. His local subordinate chapter, Elizabethtown Area Grange #2076, had always been very active in the local community, and had presented him a scholarship as a high school senior. Joining Grange also offered Matt the chance to become involved in the organization's Youth Program where he developed many friendships, as well as a deep appreciation for the history of the Grange. While attending a state youth conference in Hershey, he met his future wife, Charlene, a Grange member from a dairy farm in Wyoming County.

Since joining Grange, Matt has been active on the local, state and national level. Over the years he has testified numerous times before state level hearings, advocating for agricultural and rural issues. In 2019, Matt was recognized as the *Pennsylvania Granger of the Year*. In October 2022, Matt was elected to serve as the 26th Master (President) in the 150-year history of the Pennsylvania State Grange.

Matt is a seventh-generation dairy farmer on a Lancaster County farm that has been part of his family since 1867. His family milks 70 cows and manages 250 acres of crops, raising mainly corn and hay to feed their cows. Matt's wife, Charlene, is the Executive Director of the *PA Friends of Agriculture Foundation*, the charitable wing of the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau. They have two sons, Evan and Alan, in high school. As a family, they exhibit dairy cows at shows and fairs on the local, state and national level.

Matt Dole, Political Strategist

Communications Counsel, Inc.

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Matt Dole has more than 20 years' experience as a communications and political consultant. He's worked with corporations, school districts, universities, government agencies, non-profits, and over 350 political campaigns across a dozen states.

He has played an integral role in producing award-winning public affairs campaigns, television advertising, radio advertising, digital advertising, and printed material meant to inform and sway the public's – and legislators' - opinion.

In Ohio, Dole was appointed by Governor Mike DeWine to serve as Chairman of the Broadcast Educational Media Commission.

He graduated from Marietta College with a degree in history and currently resides in Licking County in Central Ohio.

Carrie Nace, Senior Associate

Novak Strategic Advisors

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Carrie currently serves as the Legislative Director of the Pennsylvania State Grange the largest rural advocacy organization in Pennsylvania. She represents the Grange in the Capitol on all issues affecting rural Pennsylvania and speaks to rural community groups throughout the state.

As part of the Novak team, Carrie applies her signature dedication, hard work, and appreciation for personal service to her projects and clients, just as she has throughout her career. She served as House Speaker Sam Smith's Constituent Affairs/Outreach Director for ten years and upon the speaker's retirement, put her knowledge of legislative issues and her deep roots in York and Adams Counties to work as State Representative Kate Klunk's district office manager. Carrie earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and International Relations at Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania and is a 2008 graduate of the Anne B. Anstine Excellence in Public Service Series. Prior to her career in state government, she worked for the British Embassy in the Hong Kong Economic and Trade office, where she helped with Hong Kong's transition to China. She currently holds leadership positions on many boards in Adams County, including Rotary, the Economic Alliance Board, and True North Wellness Board.

Chuck Strand

Executive Director, [Rural Minds](http://RuralMinds.org)

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As the executive director of Rural Minds, Chuck Strand leads a dedicated team of professionals committed to developing content and opportunities to confront mental health challenges and the stigma that surrounds mental illness in rural communities.

Chuck's background includes nonprofit leadership and patient advocacy as the CEO of Us TOO International, a prostate cancer nonprofit where he established and expanded partnerships, sponsorships, and fundraising along with educational program development and content creation. Chuck also has extensive marketing and communications agency account management experience working with Fortune 500 client companies.

He is passionate about doing purposeful work to help improve rural mental health and wellness and is honored to be serving as the executive director of Rural Minds. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in marketing from Ferris State University and completed coursework at DePaul University and the University of Illinois.

Chuck and his wife live in suburban Chicago where they raised their family. But he grew up in a very small town in rural northern Michigan near the shores of Lake Superior and experienced the mental health challenges that are common throughout rural America.