

RURAL DEMOCRACY SUMMIT

I [Supt Drake] was invited to participate in this thought leader exchange Thursday afternoon and evening. Our two prompts:

1. Is polarization affecting your sector of work? If so, what does it look like and how is it impacting your work on building thriving and prosperous rural communities?
2. From your perspective, what is the role of your sector of work in helping solve the problem of polarization and building a vibrant civic life and thriving rural communities?

A very diverse group of people were assembled and the discussion was rich. I was the only person representing K-12 public education. I had only been inside the gymnasium - the U of M - Morris has a beautiful campus and the Morris community is doing some really innovative work largely centered on environmental sustainability.

WCI's Rural Democracy Summit 2025:

Towards a Positive Rural Vision

Salon Participants | October 30th, 2025 | Oyate Hall

Participants Primary Affiliation

Elder Suzanne Kelly Minnesota Council of Churches

Imam Asad Zaman Muslim American Society of Minnesota

Janet Ericksen University of Minnesota-Morris

Jeff Drake ISD 544

Stu Lourey Minnesota Farmers Union

Bradley Peterson Coalition of Greater MN Cities

Aric Putnam MN SD14

Wade Swenson Lakewood | Rural Cancer Institute

Lynne Penke Valdes Otter Tail County

Aaron Brown Star Tribune

NeTia Bauman Greater St. Cloud Development (she recently moved to St C from FF)

Ben Hernandez Riverview

Heidi Roop University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

Troy Goodnough University of Minnesota-Morris

Anna Wasescha West Central Initiative

Mark Ritchie Former Secretary of State

Kathy Cramer University of Wisconsin-Madison

Lori Sturdevant Star Tribune

Liz Kuoppola MAHUBE-OTWA (FF office?)

Ben Goldfarb McKnight Foundation

Facilitators

Erik Peterson Bending the Arc Strategies (saw propaganda article in FFJournal w/n last 6 mos)

Adrienne Falcón Metro State University

Staff

Ben Schierer West Central Initiative

Justin R. Moen West Central Initiative