

Tribal members march Friday in call to end the cycle of abuse

June 8, 2020



More than 100 native and non-native men and women marched to Yurok headquarters in Klamath Friday to bring to an end the cycle of abuse fueled by allegations of bullying in the workplace by a former staff member.

Javier Kinney resigned in November as executive director with little public explanation other than a commitment from Tribal Chairman Joseph James to the Tribe's sexual harassment policies.

James rehired Kinney in April, which rekindled the animosity between tribal citizens and the council leader.

In a Facebook post, James reiterated his commitment to supporting women's and men's rights and in the belief in giving second chances. He did not attend the rally Friday.

The "Call to End the Cycles of Abuse" protest march began at 5 a.m. from Weitchpec to Sregon. From Sregon, the protesters went by water via jet boat to Requa, then marched from Jet Boat Tours parking lot the

rest of the way to the Yurok Tribal Offices in Klamath.

Among the many speakers was Ruthie Maloney, the tribe's former assistant director of self-governance. She said she was happy that so many turned out in support of the march.

"I thought it was good for (being during) the pandemic," she said. "It shows how important it is taking our lives in our hands to protest on this important issue."

Event co-organizer Susan Masten, President of Women Empowering Women for Indian Nations, was also ecstatic with the turnout, especially with such short notice at the beginning of the week.

"And we're pleased men, women and children are here, too, because it just shows we all care about each other and we all want to stop the violence," Masten said, adding the protest march an important step in removing Kinney. "I think this will ensure when an action comes to the table, it will pass. That's what we're counting on, that this will make the difference."

Masten said she would like to see council governance reformed.

"Today what do want to have are HR policies that protect the employees and ensure there isn't abuse at the workplace so the employees can feel safe," Masten said.

To keep the momentum from the march, she urged demonstrators to sign a petition and for elders to sign a special letter to tribal leaders, asking if anyone present had a hand in crafting the Yurok Tribe's Constitution.

Masten said the letter and the petition calls on tribal leaders to take three key steps:

- Institute mandatory harassment and anti-bullying training for the Tribal Chairman, Council and staff
- To conduct an independent investigation of the tribe's human resources policies
- To hold an executive session for employees to voice their concerns about any abuse in the workplace.