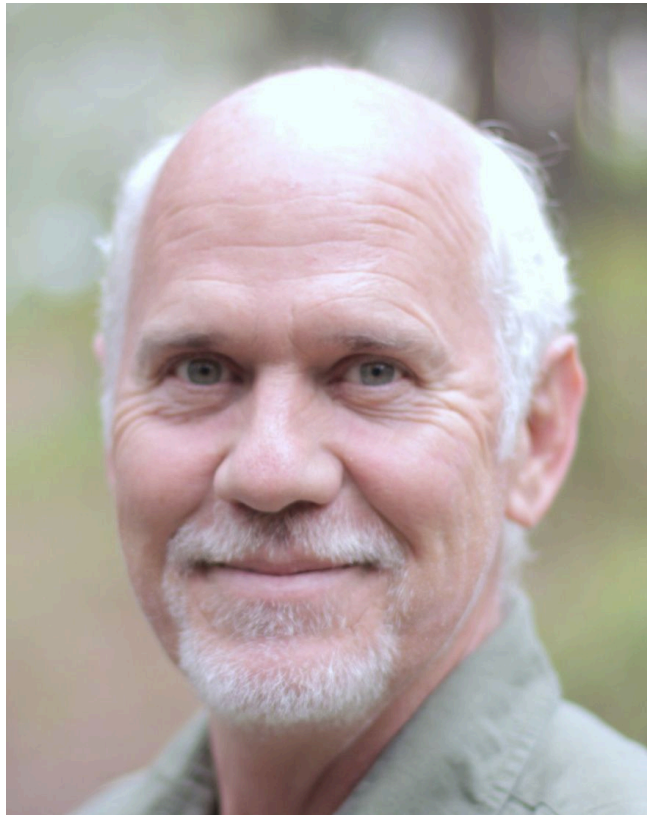

In My View: Who's in charge here

May 26, 2023



It has been more challenging for me to write a column commenting on breaking news with a 7-day lag to publication, so today I will write about something that has not yet happened.

By the time you read this I will be packing to take a trip to Los Angeles. I am one of five local delegates who represent our county on the California Democratic Party Central Committee. This means that I will be one of about 3,000 delegates to attend the California Democratic Party Convention.

This will be the first live convention the Democrats have held since COVID, and it will be energizing to reconnect with allies and friends in person. It's always good to travel and meet new people to get a fresh perspective. If properly done, conventions are fun!

More importantly, the Democratic Convention is about policy and political organizing. In most years there is only one convention, but this year due to the early 2024 primary, there will be two conventions. This first one in May is our organizing convention when campaigns are planned, officers are elected, and committee assignments are decided.

In November we will have our endorsement convention. This is when candidates will be seeking Democratic Party endorsement to boost their campaign before the California primary election March 5, 2024. Delegates will vote on these endorsements.

Policy Debate

Underlying all this party business runs a keen focus on policy discussions. There are three standing committees where most of this debate happens. The committees that gain the most participation are the Resolution, Legislation and Platform Committees. Hundreds of delegates will attend and testify at these meetings.

Resolutions are a written statement of policy. Once adopted by the delegates this becomes the official policy of the Party. There is always an intense effort by proponents of these resolutions to gain support for their issues.

The skeptic in me recognizes that a resolution of support from the California Democratic Party is only a starting point for gaining legislative action. However, the State Senate and Assembly are both controlled by Democrats, and these resolutions do help move legislation forward.

In my view, the Platform Committee has more lasting value than resolutions because it writes a Platform that is a compendium of approved policy positions. The California Democratic Party Platform is divided into sections called Planks, covering subjects including healthcare, business, labor, seniors, veterans, education, energy, and the environment. (cadem.org/our-platform/)

This Platform is reviewed and updated every two years in a meticulously participatory process. I am primarily interested in advancing good policies, so I have applied to be reappointed to the Platform committee for a third term.

Rural Advocacy

My participation with platform development has resulted in some very productive steps toward better understanding of rural issues.

Five years ago, I was instrumental in convincing the Platform Committee to add a Rural Plank that would focus exclusively on policies important to rural California.

Last year, I was the Chair of the Rural Plank Committee and was able to make further improvements to this policy document. The most cogent recommendations for amendments were provided by the Rural Caucus, a subdivision of the State Party that is comprised of delegates from rural areas.

The Resolutions Committee sparks support for new policy ideas and the Platform Committee weaves these updated policies into planks to build a strong platform. The Rural Caucus then helps with the next step, to bring these policies into fruition through programs and legislation.

Rural Caucus leadership and members have created a formidable lobbying force that can communicate with elected Senators and Assembly Members across the State. This helps to build alliances and support for well-informed rural policy.

One recent success of the Rural Caucus is bringing greater attention and funding to expand high speed internet into underserved rural communities. This progress is the result of relentless advocacy by the members of the Rural Caucus. Better internet will improve rural commerce, education, and health care.

A new focus of the Rural Caucus is developing affordable housing in rural areas. It has been helpful to share ideas and learn from successes in other counties. Speaking with a coordinated voice, Rural Caucus members will have an influence on California housing policies and legislation.

Who is in Charge?

The answer to this question depends on where you live. The Democratic Party is firmly in command of the California government. Every statewide office is held by a Democrat. The Democrats control a supermajority in both State Senate and Assembly. In Del Norte County, our State Senator, Assemblyman, Congressman and both US Senators are all Democrats.

This highlights the importance for local politicians to find a way to work with our elected Democratic representatives. Local government agencies including the Harbor District, School Board, City Council, and Board of Supervisors are all dominated by Republicans. Fortunately, there is one Democrat on each of these boards who can speak “democrat.” We should have more.

Republicans working with Democrats is most likely to happen on a local or state level. I have very little hope that the gridlock in Washington DC will end soon. We have a divided federal government that will not make much progress this year. It appears that no one is in charge.

The Republican Party has a fragile majority in the House of Representatives. The Democrats have a shaky majority in the US Senate.

As I write this, our country is headed toward the brink of a fiscal cliff. If the debt limit is not raised, the United State will default on our debts, causing a global financial crisis.

There is very little that I can do to fix the governmental disfunction in Washington, so I focus my efforts closer to home. Through my affiliation with the Democratic Party, I have an opportunity to advocate for effective local and statewide rural policies, with the confidence that my voice will be heard.

Kevin Hendrick is a 30-year resident of Del Norte County. kevinjameshendrick@gmail.com