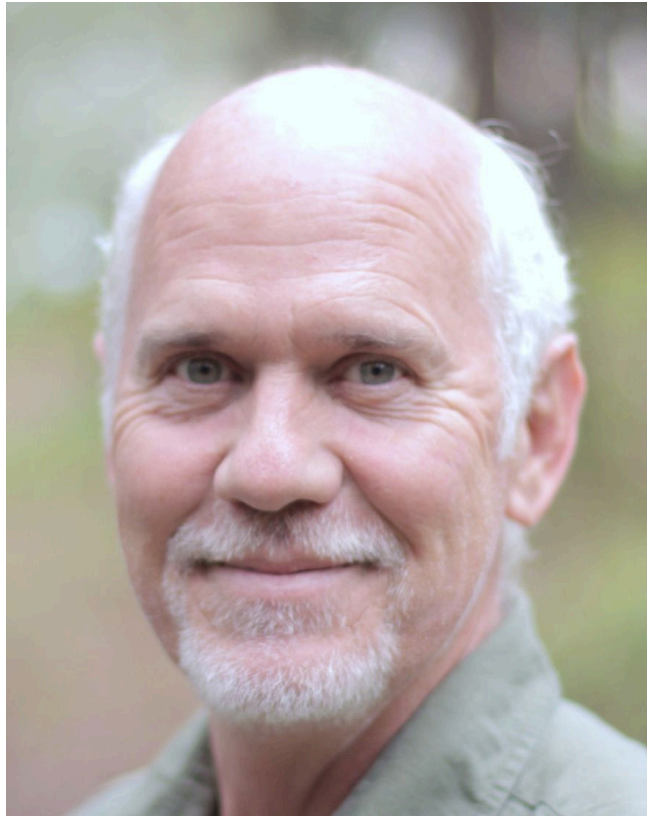


---

## Guest Column: When women succeed, America succeeds

May 14, 2022



There is a poster in the Democratic Party office that says, “When Women Succeed, America Succeeds.”

If we had more women leaders, we would have a more fair and just society. Women are half the population, yet are grossly underrepresented in the courts, legislatures, and local boards. As we have seen recently, male dominated courts and legislatures do not always make decisions that respect the rights of women.

For over two hundred years America has been ruled by men and the outcomes have not always been good. Its time we try something different and lift up more woman leaders.

Locally we are making some progress. We now have two strong, intelligent, and creative women on the Board of Supervisors, Valerie Starkey and Susan Masten. Supervisor Starkey has set a high bar for effort and productivity. I have been impressed with how hard she works. She seems to be everywhere providing constituent services and helping to advance county progress.

Despite the obvious skill set that Supervisor Starkey brings to this job, I have also observed that her opinions have occasionally been dismissed by some of her male counterparts.

For example, when she urged caution in proceeding with the appointment of our last sheriff, no one heeded her advice. She knew that it would have been prudent to do a more thorough vetting before making the appointment. The others should have listened to her.

Susan Masten is a new Supervisor but brings with her a lifetime of experience and commitment to community service. At her first meeting she suggested that the County form a special task force to help the struggling Sheriff Department.

Supervisor Masten instinctively knew that there was a need to bring people together to address issues that require immediate attention.

This is where she hit the bureaucratic wall. “We already have committees that take care of this,” she was told. If this is true, why are there still problems?

One would hope that experienced leadership would listen to new ideas and assign tasks so that every Supervisor can contribute using their unique sets of skills. Was Supervisor Masten’s idea discounted because she is new, because she is a woman or worse, because she is a Yurok?

It’s hard to tell sometimes why one person disrespects another, but I have no doubt that some people prejudice others because of their gender or race. I am disappointed, but not surprised, by some of the things that have been said about Supervisor Masten that reflect an implicit bias.

Some comments about Supervisor Masten’s heritage have been unfair and ill informed. “She is a Yurok, so she will only represent the Yuroks,” is a statement I have heard that has no foundation in fact.

When I ran for Supervisor two years ago, never did I hear anyone express a concern that I would only represent Irish people. Why then would anyone assume that Supervisor Masten would only represent Yuroks?

We all have our own tribes but that is not the entirety of who we are.

Supervisor Masten has stated clearly that she will represent all the people in the 5th District and Del Norte County. She has already held two town hall meetings in Crescent City and one in Klamath to hear people’s concerns and ideas for a better future.

Supervisor Masten swore an oath to “bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of California.” There is no reason to question her loyalties. She is an American, a Californian, a Del Norte, a Yurok and a woman. It is possible to be all these things and not be conflicted.

Nevertheless, Susan Masten can be proud of her Yurok heritage, which has a history of strong woman leaders. We could all learn from Yurok tradition regarding respect for women and their contribution to society.

*Kevin Hendrick is the Chair of the Del Norte County Democratic Central Committee*