

Guest Column: Is Masten the right choice for District 5?

April 8, 2022



Fifth District Newsom-appointed Del Norte County Supervisor Susan Masten takes her oath today. At the very minimum, Supervisor-Appointee Masten will serve in office until January 3, 2023.

With just 900 Democrats out of almost 3,000 registered voters in District 5, is the Gavin Newsom-appointed Masten a good fit for that district?

I would think not...

The June 7 Primary Election will whittle the five candidate roster down to the top two vote getters, realistically assuming no candidate will amass 50 percent plus one vote in June. The November General Election will determine who serves out the remaining two years of the late Bob Berkowitz' term.

Yurok Tribal member Masten will be the first Native-American to serve on the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors. In 1996, Masten ran unsuccessfully for the Board.

In this follow-up interview, I asked Masten if the appointment by Newsom, with a mediocre forty percent approval rating in Del Norte County, would hurt her chances to be more than a short term Supervisor. She stated, "I'm honored and humbled by the Governor's support. I'm my own person, and hope the voters of the Fifth District I meet through precinct town halls and door-to-door knocking that I will earn their support."

Newsom and Masten are both Democrats.

How will Masten represent the citizens of District 5? Unknown.

Masten: "Klamath is the step-child of Del Norte County."

Does that comment place residents of Bertch Tract, Harbor District and Parkway Corridor as full blooded pedigree Del Norters with parent / supervisors at the Flynn Center? Is Klamath perceived to be less important by some Yuroks?

My experience on the Board of Supervisors tells me otherwise. Klamath and the Yurok Tribe was never slighted, quite the opposite. Supervisor Berkowitz and I sat on the Yurok / Klamath Board of Supervisors Committee. We involved ourselves with Chamber of Commerce and Yurok Tribal priorities, including additional funding for the Klamath Chamber and on-hands assistance with Yurok Tribal recreation needs.

Masten has served on the Yurok Tribal Council as Vice Chair. She retorts, "I want to hear from all the people across District 5. I want to hear from people across the county as I will be voting on issues affecting all Del Norte County."

According to a North Coast Journal article August 6, 2015, then-Yurok Vice Chair Masten brought an investment firm associated with an individual named Charles "Duke" Shehan to the attention of the Tribal Council. The Tribe was seeking short term financing of approximately \$8 million to open up the Redwood Inn and Casino. Shehan was the sole proprietor of Humanitarian International Services Foundation.

Sadly, the Tribe voted to send Shehan a \$250,000 "financing costs" fee on the understanding that the non-profit HISF would be sending the first installment of \$1 million, forthwith. The "Duke" was a dud and a criminal swindler to boot and absconded with a quarter-million of Yurok cash.

Regretfully, Shehan was never charged with the Yurok swindle and served 36 months in Federal custody for a previous swindle. The Yurok case remains uncharged to date.

Masten deflected much of the responsibility to the Tribal Council's legal department failure to do its "due diligence," and the decision to move forward as a Tribal Council decision.

Masten nonetheless acknowledges "mistakes were made." Masten further acknowledges she undertook fraud prevention classes so, in her words, "this would never happen again."

"I always take responsibility," says Masten.

I'm not sure I understand what taking responsibility means, in this matter.

Lastly, as Susan Masten is the first Yurok to serve on the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors, I followed up with the issue of her Tribal loyalty and possible conflict with decisions made on the Consent Calendar and General Agenda on the Board of Supervisors, and the possibility of her recusal.

Masten adamantly responded, “ I’m an American, a Californian and a Del Norter. Personal and family conflict will be my only reason to recuse myself from any Board of Supervisors vote.”

Masten will face Terri Colton, David Markel, David Jones and Dean Wilson, Tuesday, June 7.

Roger Gitlin is a retired two-term District1 Del Norte County Supervisor. He is a retired Multi-Subject CLAD Certificated Credentialed teacher. Gitlin resides in Crescent City.