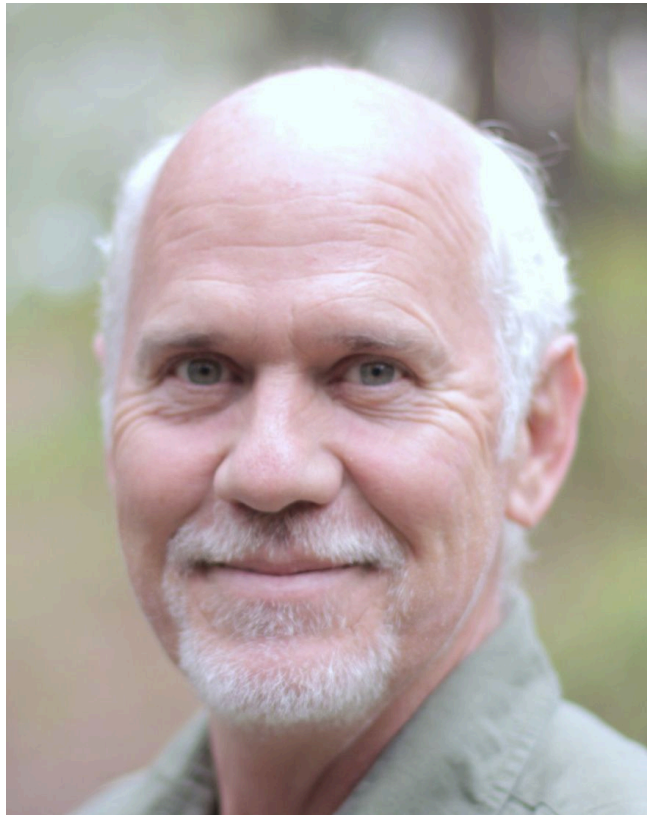


In My View: The State of Rural California

June 11, 2023



I drove home last week from Los Angeles after attending the California Democratic Party Convention. It took over 12 hours to drive more than 800 miles up Highway 5. California is a very big state and most of it is rural.

My mission when I go to a convention is to speak to as many elected officials as I can about the special needs of rural California. My goal is to find allies that will help us advance the interests of Del Norte County and other rural communities.

A New Senator

It is always easier to speak with politicians when they are running for office. My laser focused target for this convention was to meet the three candidates that have announced that they are running for U.S. Senate.

Dianne Feinstein has said that she will not be seeking reelection in 2024. Three current members of the House of Representatives have declared their candidacy. They are Congressman Adam Schiff, Congresswoman Katie Porter, and Congresswoman Barbara Lee.

It is likely that one of these three will be our next U.S. Senator from California so now is the time to let them know that we exist. I stalked them like paparazzi and found an opportunity to speak with each of them.

Invitations

By introducing myself as the Chair of the Del Norte County Democrats I was able to get them to think at least for a moment about where Del Norte is. I invited them each to come up to visit with the hope that they will be aware of us after they get elected.

When I invited Barbara Lee to come to Crescent City, she had to ask where that was. She did not know about Del Norte County. Now she does. Adam Schiff knows where Crescent City is and was very polite but non-committal about a visit.

Katie Porter told me that she has scheduled a van tour to northern California this summer. In retrospect, I am not sure if she meant San Francisco when she said northern California. She lives in Orange County and almost everything is north of there.

Next Governor?

I know that this is a long shot to ask, but I am always impressed with any candidate that visits our county. Eleni Kounalakis made a point to visit all 58 counties when she was running for Lieutenant Governor. Taking the time to travel and speak to constituents across the state demonstrates a commitment to represent everyone.

I also spoke with Lieutenant Governor Kounalakis at her campaign booth. She greeted me with a hug and called me her OG, because I was an early supporter. She has now announced that she intends to run for Governor in 2026. There will be other candidates running but she will certainly be a front runner.

If elected, Eleni Kounalakis will be the first female California Governor and she knows where Del Norte is.

Raucous Caucus

Have you ever been exasperated by an argument with a Democrat? Imagine being in a large room with more than 2000 Democratic activists. The Democrats are a raucous caucus and never pass on an opportunity for a good policy debate.

Governor Newsom gave a speech at the general session and was greeted by several dozen protesters chanting and holding up signs that read, "Medicare for All." Without missing a beat, Governor Newsom kindly affirmed their right to free speech and continued with his own speech.

Democrats agree that everyone should have access to affordable health care and there are only disagreements over how to pay for it. However, it is clear to me that no financing mechanism will overcome the drastic shortage of health care practitioners in rural California. It doesn't matter what kind of insurance you have if there is no doctor to go to.

Our Assemblymember Jim Wood told me that there is a growing healthcare crisis caused by the closure of rural hospitals. We are fortunate to have the healthcare services that we do, but other rural communities are at great risk of losing vital lifesaving services.

Best News

The featured guest at the Rural Caucus meeting was the next Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas. After the meeting Assemblymember Wood introduced me to Speaker designate Rivas and we talked about rural policy.

I was pleased to learn that he represents an Assembly District that is predominantly a rural agricultural area, including Gilroy, Salinas, and the Highway 101 corridor south. They have the same issues we do, including a lack of affordable housing, reliable broadband, and accessible healthcare. Speaker Rivas will start on June 30.

As the leader of the Assembly, the Speaker has the power to steer legislation through the process. Having a Speaker from a rural area makes it more likely that bills will pass that address rural issues. This will also make it easier for our Assemblymember Jim Wood to find votes for his own initiatives. This will be good for our county if we work with our state representatives and stay focused on proposing solutions.

Rural Advocacy

The first principle stated in the Rural Plank says, “California Democrats will encourage elected officials to consider the effect on rural California when proposing new policies or programs by evaluating whether the outcome is fair and feasible in rural communities.”

I have been reappointed to the Platform Committee and will continue as the Rural Plank Committee Chair. Over the coming months the Platform Committee will hold a series of workshops taking comments on all the issues that are represented in the Platform. (cadem.org/our-platform/)

Every step of the way I will be advocating for viable rural policies and programs.

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