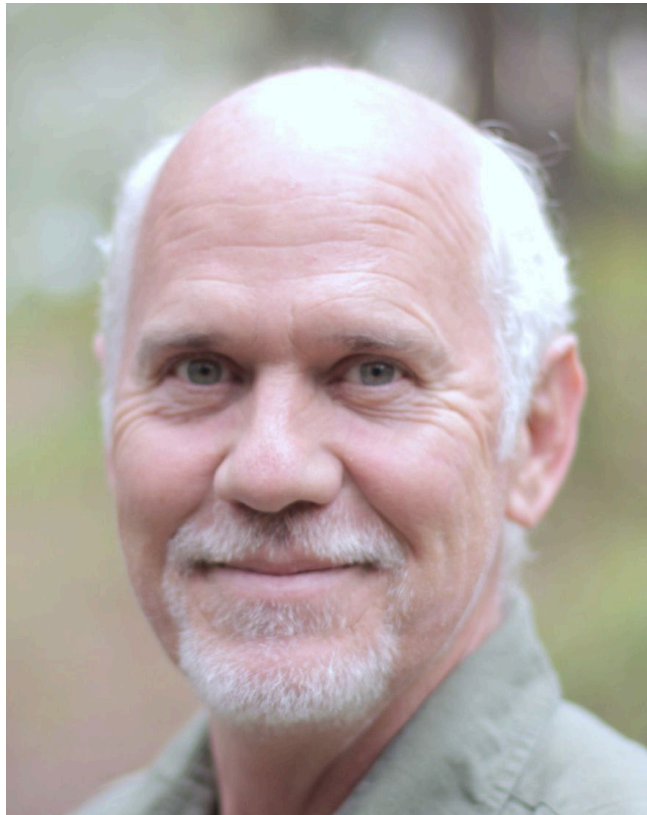

In My View: Democracy Can Be Difficult

December 2, 2023



I attended the California Democratic Party Convention, November 17 through 19, in Sacramento. I always expect that some controversy will spill over into the convention and that was most certainly true at this one.

More than 2000 delegates attended this Convention. This means 2000 different opinions on any topic. Democrats are a rambunctious bunch, but this convention became even more raucous when we were joined by hundreds of uninvited guests.

Anticipating trouble, the entrance to the convention had TSA level security. We were required to empty our pockets and security guards wanded us to screen for weapons. They had K9 officers with bomb sniffing dogs.

Democrats Party

I joke sometimes as the Chair of the Del Norte County Democratic Party, that I want to put the party back into the Democratic Party. When properly motivated Democrats can put on a good party. After attending a few preliminary sessions on Friday, I had two sponsored parties on my agenda.

I have mentioned before that when I attend these events, I have a very focused mission. I want to speak to elected officials and raise awareness of rural issues, help them learn where Crescent City and Del Norte County are and invite them to come up for a visit.

The first party was sponsored by outgoing Senate President Pro Tempore Tony Atkins and new Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas. I admit that I went for the free food, but I also found the opportunity to talk to Speaker Rivas, who comes from a rural county and will be a great ally on rural issues.

NorCal Party

The second party was sponsored by our Assemblymember Jim Wood, Senator Mike McGuire and other northern California representatives. I was welcomed by incoming Senate President Mike McGuire.

I wanted to speak with Assemblymember Wood to thank him for his service and wish him well, but he was absent. He recently announced that he will not seek reelection so that he could spend more time caring for his mother. It was a surprise that he decided not to run but people are lining up to run for this vacant seat.

At least four Democrats have declared their intention to run for Assembly, California Democratic Party Chair Rusty Hicks, Healdsburg Mayor Ariel Kelly, Mendocino County Supervisor Ted Williams, and Santa Rosa City Councilmember Chris Rogers. The Party planned to endorse Jim Wood but has not endorsed a replacement.

Party Business

The convention continued Saturday with an early meeting of the Platform Committee. We wrapped up our business and forwarded the final draft of the Platform to the delegates for approval on Sunday. This was followed by a two-hour general session filled with speeches and other party business.

When I returned from lunch, I found that protesters had gotten inside the entrance to the building and staged a sit-in. They were protesting the killing of Palestinians in Gaza and demanding a cease fire. At this point it was a “peaceful” protest. Though they were chanting very loudly they were not blocking ingress or egress.

I entered the main hall for the second general session and the first order of business was a forum with the four Democratic candidates running for U.S. Senate to replace Dianne Feinstein. This included Katie Porter, Adam Schiff, Barbara Lee, and Lexi Reese. It is likely that one of these will be our next Senator.

Party Crashers

As the Senate candidates were speaking, they were heckled by more protesters holding signs and calling for a ceasefire. Despite efforts to bring order to the proceedings, these candidates were shouted down and interrupted throughout the candidate forum. The session ended early as a result of this disruption.

After I left the convention, I walked down one block where an estimated 2000 pro-Palestinian protesters were amassed. What happened next was completely unplanned for.

Hundreds of protesters breached the convention hall, overwhelmed the security guards, and occupied the convention center. Some delegates were trapped and could not safely leave. As a result of this incursion, all Saturday evening events were cancelled, and it was unclear whether the Sunday meeting would occur.

Civil Disobedience

In America we have a right to free speech and a right to protest. I cherish these rights. I support peaceful, non-violent protest, but this was neither. This was an act of civil disobedience. Many delegates feared for their safety and two security guards sustained minor injuries.

It was inevitable with so many people involved that things might get out of hand with a few people taking it too far. It is justified for these people to be angry and protest what appears to be indiscriminate killing of the innocent civilians in Gaza. Some of these protesters have relatives who have been killed in this war.

When people feel they are not being heard they will speak louder. This protest was troublesome and shutting down the convention wasted millions of dollars that the Party and delegates spent. Yet the inconvenience of occupying the convention pales by comparison to the suffering caused by the occupation of Gaza.

The Vote Goes On

One of the actions scheduled for Saturday night was a vote of all the delegates to determine whether the Party would endorse one of the four Senate candidates. Fortunately, this vote had been previously arranged for votes to be made electronically. After everyone was evacuated from the convention the vote proceeded.

To secure an endorsement, a candidate had to garner at least 60 percent of the votes.

The result of this vote was 41% Barbara Lee, 40% Adam Schiff, 16% Katie Porter, 2% No endorsement and 0.13 % Lexi Reese. However, the vote that counts is in March when the top two will advance to the general election in November.

On Sunday there was a truncated general session to complete unfinished business. The revised California Democratic Party Platform that I worked on was approved without dissent.

Difficult Democracy

Democracy can be difficult, even messy, but I would rather live in a society with a government that tolerates dissent than not. Civic engagement is our patriotic duty. If we show respect for each other and listen, I believe that dialogue will lead to better understanding and better policies.

Your main tool to get the government that you want is to vote. Exercise this right. Vote!

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