

Assembly District 17 - Candidate Questionnaire

Why are you running for this office?

I'm running for Assembly because San Francisco is headed in the wrong direction, and the status quo is unacceptable. The American dream of upward mobility is out of reach for most San Franciscans. We see and feel the realities of this every day: a housing shortage that has led to rampant homelessness, and an oppressive cost of living, pushing families and workers out of San Francisco; a lingering pandemic and public schools that were closed for too long, leading to permanent learning loss; a spike in hate crimes against the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community; and consequences of climate change that threaten our city's shoreline neighborhoods with flooding and our air quality with toxic smoke.

Despite these harsh realities, I believe in San Francisco. Our city is resilient – we weather great difficulties and bounce back stronger each time. But we need a new champion in the State Assembly to shift our current trajectory. We need to deliver real results to solve our city's most intractable problems. I understand how the public and private sectors can work together to deliver the greatest benefit to everyone. I'm a policy wonk who has worked on national policy solutions in the Obama administration. And as the son of immigrants who grew up seeing my parents help refugees and workers, I've paid it forward throughout my own life by investing directly in people and organizations to empower communities.

San Franciscans deserve better -- not more of the same from politicians. With new leadership, we can bring bold new ideas to Sacramento. We'll do this by securing a guaranteed income for all, stopping anti-Asian violence and reforming our public schools. We'll build new systems to stop future pandemics and actually eliminate chronic homelessness. And we'll create a greener and more sustainable economy by fundamentally reforming our housing policy and subsidizing complete electrification of all vehicles and buildings. Together, we can ensure San Francisco remains a beacon of hope for equity and justice across all intersections.

What are your values and how did you get them?

The value I hold most dear is of equality of opportunity and social mobility. San Francisco represented these values to my family and me, as it enabled us to break into the middle class 30+ years ago.

My parents immigrated to the San Francisco Bay Area, leaving a dictatorship behind in search of a better life. We grew up with three generations in a single bedroom apartment. My mother used public transit every day to get us into the best public schools, working later as a librarian and community organizer to help refugees settle into America. My father transitioned from a student to an inventor, and built some of the first routers and data centers in the world.

San Francisco is a city of migrants. We are a sanctuary city for immigrants, LGBTQ+, those fleeing conflict, those seeking a better life.

My family's experience reflects that journey, instilling in me the values and learnings that we need to ensure affordable housing, good public transit, and excellent public schools, if we are to ensure social mobility for everyone to break into the middle class.

That's why I've focused my career on trying to ensure upward mobility for all. From advocating for small business policy in the Obama Administration, to helping female entrepreneurs with microlending services via my nonprofit Gumball Capital, to helping undocumented workers with guaranteed income through my foundation 13 Fund, I have sought to ensure we have the right policy, economic support, and technological tools for all people to advance into the middle class.

What communities do you represent and how do they hold you accountable?

My background and identity spans multiple intersections. I am a child of immigrants, a neuroscientist, a policy analyst, and an entrepreneur. Those identities and communities shape my values and priorities, as well as my experience - an experience intersecting science and technology and policy which I feel are necessary to solve the most critical challenges we face ahead from climate change to pandemics to housing.

I am on the Board of the SWANA - South West Asian and North African - Democratic Club, which shapes my perspectives on economic opportunity and social justice. I am on the Board of the Eastern Neighborhood Democratic Club, which has informed my perspectives on local issues specific to San Francisco's east side from food insecurity, transit access, to air quality.

What three endorsements are you most proud of?

I am most proud of our endorsements from communities of color and grassroots leaders.

I am the first candidate to be endorsed by the SWANA Democratic Club, and it means a lot as a member of that community to advocate on behalf of our culture and values. It has shaped my beliefs on the importance of guaranteed income and universal healthcare to ensure a stable safety net for all.

I was endorsed by Saikat Chakrabarti, the former Chief of Staff for Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and co-author of the Green New Deal. Climate is one of our chief policy priorities and his support in drafting a Green New Deal policy for California is essential. I am also advocating for a new public bank that can issue 0% interest loans for all individuals to retrofit their businesses, houses, or vehicles to net-zero carbon modalities.

I was endorsed by community leaders including Robin Pam and Matt Brezina who have led our Kid Safe SF movement, advocating for a car free city and championing climate change reform. They have shaped my perspectives on public transit infrastructure and the importance of ensuring that we pass legislation like AB 629 for seamless transit across the Bay Area.

What do you think David Chiu's top accomplishment was as Assemblyperson for AD-17?

David Chiu has an exemplary record across a variety of issues, from housing to anti-Asian violence to government reform. What I think stands out the most amidst his illustrious record is his advocacy for AB-525 for offshore wind generation.

AB-525 was one of the first significant pieces of climate legislation passed in years in California. Despite the fact that we have a supermajority of Democrats in the State legislature, it is incredibly difficult to get climate legislation passed due to the influence of oil and gas special interests.

The passage of AB-525 exemplifies David's leadership. He was able to build consensus on a divisive issue. He was able to ensure climate policy led to a just transition of jobs. He stood up to special interests. And he instituted new legislation that will have massive impacts on our climate policy for years to come.

This represents to me the type of leadership, courage, and policy specificity we need in our next Assemblymember, to continue David's legacy.

Can you describe an instance where you would have done something different than David Chiu as Assemblyperson for AD-17?

What three policy changes at the state level would have the biggest impact on California's housing crisis? Specifically, how would you work for these policy changes if elected?

Our housing crisis is a result of three core causes - prejudicial institutions that don't protect the people who live here today, bad policies that don't enable us to build enough housing for those who live here now or are looking to move here, and lack of structural support for technology that can help us meet those goals.

To help people who already live in California, we need to reduce evictions. We can do so by passing AB-854 coauthored by David Chiu, which would reform the Ellis Act to prohibit evictions in the first five years that a landlord owns a building. As a majority of evictions occur within this time period, this would help reduce a significant portion of evictions in San Francisco.

We need to build more housing of all levels, and we need to pass legislation that bans the practice of exclusionary zoning. This will allow us to build housing at all levels and heights, including affordable and market rate housing, and social and privately developed housing. Only by increasing housing supply, can we ensure everyone has a place to stay and our costs of rent are reduced.

To help build enough housing in time to stave off an exponentially worsening housing crisis, we also need to build housing faster. We need to introduce legislation that will support new technologies like modular housing, that can enable housing development in a fraction of the time, at a fraction of the cost, to ensure we can house people as fast as possible.

What piece of legislation or policy are you most proud of having worked on?

I am proud of having helped advise on small business policy in the Obama Administration. Under Secretary Gary Locke, I supported the Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship. We drafted policy recommendations on how to help small businesses get increased access to capital and loans to survive the financial crisis, as well as how to reform our government processes to assist the high growth

businesses of the future. Our recommendations were eventually incorporated into the Jumpstart Our Business Startups (JOBS) Act of 2012.

As over 50% of Americans are employed by small businesses, and they are often the gateway to opportunity for immigrants, it meant a lot to me to play a role in shaping small business policy in the Obama Administration.

Could you share a favorite San Francisco holiday tradition?

I am a classical music enthusiast, cinephile and nerd. So I always enjoy the Home Alone film showings at the San Francisco Symphony at Davies every holiday.