

Richelle Noroyan – Santa Cruz City Council 2014

1- Please tell us why you are interested in reaching out to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender community.

ANSWER: I am interested in reaching out to the LGBT community of Santa Cruz because they bring important issues to the forefront of our community. Equal rights under the law is the bedrock of our form of government and I want to work with organizations that support this concept.

2- Why do you want the endorsement of The LGBT Alliance, Santa Cruz County's grassroots progressive gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender political organization?

ANSWER: I would like your endorsement because I want a campaign that has broad community support and shows my commitment to civil rights, LGBT rights and public policies that defend people against discrimination.

3- Please tell us about your history with the LGBT community, and your awareness of issues specific to our community.

a - Have you had any opportunities to address LGBT issues in the course of your community service or professional life to date (i.e., have you helped formulate corporate non-discrimination standards, worked on the board of a non-profit that developed a LGBT outreach program, etc.)? If so, please tell us about this work.

ANSWER: Starting in college as president of the Young Democrats, I coordinated anti-discrimination and pro GLBT rights rallies with the members of the Lesbian and Gay Student Alliance when I was a student at CSU Fresno. As a campaign staffer for federal, state and local candidates I reached out to the GLBT community for fund raising and campaign field activities. As a member and chair of the Santa Cruz County Democratic Party Central Committee, I coordinated a contingent of candidates, elected officials and community members to march in many Santa Cruz Pride parades and registered voters at the celebration in the park. As a legislative staffer to Assemblymember Ira Ruskin, I publicized his co-sponsorship of the same sex marriage bill and attended GLBT events on his behalf. While I was the Program Manager for the Tobacco Education Clearinghouse for California, I was tasked with managing a team that created educational material to fight the tobacco industry's advertising. Tobacco companies specifically target the GLBT community and they spend an inordinate amount of money on advertising to the GLBT community. I worked with health educators from the GLBT community to ensure our anti-tobacco material was effective and respectful.

b - The queer community is diverse, and we work to represent all elements of it. In support of that objective, we'd like to ask, specifically, whether you are familiar, at any level, with the issues faced, specifically, by the bisexual and transgender communities. If so, what influence would this have on your decisions as an elected official? If not, what steps will you take to become familiar with the issues, needs and concerns of these communities?

ANSWER: I have friends who have transitioned from one gender to another. I have made it a point to ask questions and gain perspective so I can understand the issues they face. I know there are health insurance issues that need to be addressed to ensure coverage for transition services and aftercare when surgery is involved. I am also aware of the intense discrimination and hatred people in this position have had to endure. I would do everything in my power as an elected official to speak out against this

type of discrimination and create an environment where hatred was not accepted.

c - As documented in the The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute publication, "Bisexual health: An introduction and model practices for HIV/STI prevention programming" (2007), which is available for download at the URL below, in many cases bisexual people face even greater health risks and obstacles to accessing effective health care and health information than their peers in the queer community, including higher levels of self-harm, suicide attempts and thoughts of suicide. What specific steps would you take to address the issues raised in this report, and elsewhere, that are specific to bisexuals, including "biphobia" and lack of service provider awareness of bisexuality?
http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/bi_health_5_07_b.pdf

ANSWER: I will continue to be constantly conscience of building an environment where people are not judged for who they are. Many times people who have been marginalized do not feel empowered to get basic health screenings because of discrimination they have had to endure. I will work with city staff to ensure mental and physical health benefits for city employees provide services to address these disparities. We must also make sure that the health providers the city contracts with have been properly trained on health issues facing the bisexual community.

A summary of the top ten health issues for the bisexual community, sourced from the above report, can be found here:

http://brown.edu/Student_Services/Health_Services/Health_Education/lgbtq_health/bisexual_health/health_concerns_for_bisexuals.php

4 - Many adults, in and outside of the queer community, express their sexuality in a variety of ways, many of which are not well understood by the general public or the service provider community, and often subject to severe social stigma; this frequently leads to poor health outcomes for the individuals in question and / or complications when interacting with the legal system and social services providers. What do you know about "alternative" sexualities aka Leather/BSDM/Fetish (often collectively referred to as "kink") and their associated communities? Are you willing to learn more about them and engage in dialogue with people from your community who express their sexuality in this manner, in order to ensure that these constituents are better served by the agencies and institutions that you will be overseeing?

The Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance, which "works to advance the recognition of sexual, gender, and family diversity" and "to affirm sexual freedom as a fundamental human right" addresses these issues as part of their larger agenda of supporting "sexual freedom." Their web site is at
<http://www.woodhullalliance.org/>

<<http://www.woodhullalliance.org/%E2%80%8E>>

The National Coalition for Sexual Freedom (NCSF) has an introduction to SM that outlines the governing principles followed by responsible individuals and organizations within these communities:
<https://ncsfreedom.org/key-programs/education-outreach/education-outreach-program-page.html>

ANSWER: I also believe sexual freedom is a fundamental human right that should be free of government interference. I am willing to learn more about "alternative" sexualities.

5 - Many adults, in and outside of the queer community, participate in relationships that do not fit the traditional two-partner model, and in doing so, are subject to discrimination in housing, insurance coverage and access to health care, immigration, custody and parental rights.

What do you know about these “alternative” relationship structures, often referred to by those participating in them as the practice of “polyamory” (defined as “the practice, desire, or acceptance of having more than one intimate relationship at a time with the knowledge and consent of everyone involved”), the people who participate in them, and the communities that have formed around them? Are you willing to learn more about how these types of relationship structures work, and engage in dialogue with people who participate in them, in order to ensure that these constituents are better served by the agencies and institutions you will be overseeing?

ANSWER: Yes, I would be willing to learn more about these types of relationships in the context of how they relate to city agencies and institutions.

You can find out more about these types of families, and the issues they face, on the Family Matters Project website (sponsored by the Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance) at <http://www.familymattersproject.org>, which is "dedicated to advancing, respecting and protecting the fundamental human right to family by eliminating discrimination based on family structure and relationship choices."

6 - Have there been any LGBT people who've had a significant impact on your life as role models, inspirations, mentors, friends, etc.? If so, please tell us a little bit about how they've influenced you.

ANSWER:

John Laird has had and continues to have a large influence in my life. He is one of the most important mentors in my life. He was the officiant for my marriage ceremony and encouraged my participation in local Democratic party politics when I returned to Santa Cruz after college.

I met Wiggys Sivertson through working as a district director on Ira Ruskin's staff. Wiggys is a walking encyclopedia on the struggle for LGBT rights and assisted me greatly in understanding the dynamics and progress in Silicon Valley for LGBT rights. Wiggys was our Assembly office's Woman of the Year and I had the privilege of spending the day with her and her partner in Sacramento for the festivities.

Adam Spickler was a co-worker while I worked for the California Assembly. I greatly admire Adam in his willingness to educate the community in his gender transition journey. We both serve on the Santa Cruz County Democratic Party Central Committee and have coordinated events together.

At my wedding, I didn't have a maid of honor, but a man of honor. Through his personal struggle to accept himself as a gay man and how difficult this was for him, I gained compassion and knowledge for LGBT youth struggling with self acceptance. Suicide rates for LGBT youth saddens and alarms me. More must be done to create a nurturing atmosphere for these young people.

7- Please describe your philosophy for working with under-represented communities of which you are not a member and, specifically, how this will manifest itself in your tenure in office.

ANSWER: Ask questions, ask questions and ask more questions. Be available for in person discussions, attend community events, and consider the impact a new policy decision has on particular segments within the community. Be sure to encourage and support under-represented community members who want to participate on city commissions and outreach to more than just mainstream media when trying to be inclusive.

8 - Please tell us what you know about current City-operated or funded programs which impact the LGBT community, and what suggestions, if any, you have for improvements.

ANSWER: The city for FY 2014 is providing the Diversity Center \$5,000. The Santa Cruz AIDS project also receives funding as well as services for suicide prevention. While AIDS and suicide services impact all communities, I know the impact felt in the GLBT community is more profound. If more youth focused programming for LGBT youth is possible, I would like to see more anti-bullying services.

9 - Local non-profits that serve the LGBT community, along with other non-profits, have experienced considerable cuts in funding from all sources over the past couple of years. As a member of the City Council, where would you place funding for health and human services on your priority list?

ANSWER: As we come out of the worst economic disaster since the Great Depression, I would be willing to evaluate the ability of the city to increase social safety net spending. I would like to see more services that go towards anti-crime prevention, especially anti-violence programs. The city of Santa Cruz has the 9th highest violent crime rate in California according to the FBI.

10 - Will you insist that the City not associate with organizations - such as the Boy Scouts and The Salvation Army - that have clearly stated their intent to discriminate against LGBT people, supporting, instead, such inclusive organizations as Girl Scouts or Big Brothers/Big Sisters or Goodwill?

ANSWER: National organizations can have different policies than their local chapters. I would want to investigate if the local chapters of these organizations followed national policy. If they did practice discrimination, I would remind people of the city's anti-discrimination policy. I would not want to see the city subsidize services or support organizations that practice discrimination.

11 - Will you ensure that medical insurance for City employees covers complete health care for gender reassignment surgery and medical care for transgender employees and family?

ANSWER: Yes. I would like to learn more about medical insurance benefits for transgender employees and their family members.

12 – If elected, do you intend to take a leadership role with respect to LGBT youth in your city, working to ensure that all schools are safe for all students? If yes, please cite a concrete example of how you would do so. In particular, did you support AB 1266 (text here: <http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billStatusClient.xhtml>), which guarantees equal access to all school programs and facilities for students in accordance with their expressed gender identity?

ANSWER: I do intend to take a leadership role with respect to LGBT youth. I would like to make myself available to young people looking for a mentor or an internship in local government. I will attend GLBT youth events and would be more than willing to be part of a meeting with school administrators who set anti-bullying policies. I would also write letters of support as well. I also support AB 1266.

13 – If elected, do you intend to take a leadership role with respect to rights and services for LGBT elders in your city? If yes, please cite a concrete example of how you would do so.

ANSWER: Absolutely. Sexual orientation should not be a barrier to receiving services. I would write

letters of support, make phone calls or be available for in-person meetings to advocate for LGBT seniors facing discrimination. I know discrimination in long term care facilities towards LGBT seniors is a serious issue.

14 - What would you do to support HIV education and services for at-risk communities in your city? Specifically, do you support syringe exchange in an effort to stop the spread of HIV and other blood-borne diseases and will you work to keep the program based on best practices and evidence-based research? Do you support safe needle drop-boxes in public areas, such as parks or bus depots? Will you support the syringe exchange program if it encounters interference? Do you support training for your police department around needle exchange?

ANSWER: Yes, I support syringe exchange programs that follow best practices. I also support placing vandal proof needle drop boxes in public areas to lessen the amount of improperly discarded needles found in public and accidental needle sticks in public.

15 - Do you support marriage equality, and did you do so publicly? Are you aware of a nation-wide movement to create "religious exemptions" to marriage equality and other nondiscrimination laws (e.g.: AB 2237 - text here: http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/13-14/bill/asm/ab_2201-2250/ab_2237_bill_20140221_introduced.html)? Do you have a position on such exemptions?

ANSWER: I support marriage equality and have banked against Proposition 8. I am very pleased to see AB 2237 didn't come close to becoming law in California. I do not support religious exemptions and feel the recent Supreme Court ruling regarding Hobby Lobby set back rights for women more than 50 years. That ruling has unfortunately opened the door to allow religious exemption laws to flourish. We should all be alarmed and outraged.

16 - Have you in the past, and will you in the future, attend GLBT events, such as GLBT Pride, Queer Youth Leadership Awards, or the BAYMEC dinner? If you have not attended, why not?

ANSWER: I have organized contingents to march in the local Pride Parade as a member of the Santa Cruz County Democratic Party Central Committee and hosted a booth at the festival in the park to register voters. I've attended several BAYMEC dinners and plan to attend this year again. I have enjoyed all these events and think they're great community building events.

17 - If you receive The LGBT Alliance's endorsement, will you display it in your campaign literature?

ANSWER: Absolutely. I would be grateful to have the LGBT Alliance's endorsement.

18 - Have you received endorsements which you think might be of interest to the GLBT community?

ANSWER: While it's early in the campaign for group endorsements, I have been endorsed by many individuals. Former Senator Joe Simitian, Assemblymember Luis Alejo, Supervisor Zach Friend, County Superintendent of Schools Michael Watkins, Santa Cruz Mayor Lynn Robinson, Watsonville Mayor Karina Cervantes, former Santa Cruz Mayor Emily Reilly, DJ Reb Botelho, Rose Filliceti, Robin McDuff, Sandy Skees, Soquel School Board Trustee Amanda Jackson-Miller and many more.

19- Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

ANSWER: I grew up in Santa Cruz in a working class family. My parents owned small businesses

including Hugo's Armenian Restaurant. I am dedicated to this community and became interested in politics watching the amazing footage of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's. I related to it hearing my grandparent's struggle to survive the Armenian Genocide as children. To me civil rights are the foundation of our democracy and the GLBT movement is my generation's civil rights movement.

I have both private and public sector experience. I worked for Assemblymember Ira Ruskin as his district director and a variety of political campaigns as both a volunteer and paid staffperson. I also worked for eight years at Apple Computer and SCO in software developer relations. I believe having a combination of experience in public policy and private business will allow me to make good decisions as a city councilmember.

I want your endorsement and would be proud to to earn your support. Thank you for allowing me to be part of your endorsement process.