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### Rent Board Convention Questions 2016

#### **1. Tell us something about yourself and why you have decided to consider running for Rent Stabilization Board Commissioner.**

I was born in Santa Monica, CA, the only other city in the country with an elected rent board (hopefully soon it will be with one of three, including Richmond). I have decided to consider running for the Rent Stabilization Board for two main reasons: First, Berkeley, which I consider my adopted hometown, is being horribly gentrified - both by the University and by private developers enabled by a City Council majority that is in their pocket. Second, students' housing issues are not being sufficiently prioritized. Costa-Hawkins, which has undermined our ordinance, disproportionately affects students (who move approximately every year). We should also expand outreach to students, including expanding on-campus counseling hours. Students are particularly uninformed about their rights; every displaced student means a further increase in rents.

#### **2. How much time are you able to devote to the campaign? A contested campaign can consume 20 hours a week of your time until the election. As a Commissioner, you'll be attending one lengthy evening board meeting a month and a minimum of two daytime committee meetings (plus preparation time!) Are your hours flexible? Are late meetings a problem? Can you attend daytime meetings?**

I am fully committed to working on this campaign, and have been taking steps over the past year to prepare. For example, when creating the ASUC Student Housing Commission, I wrote bylaws stating that I would provide the vision as Chair, while the Assistant Chair would be in charge of having commission staff implement them; this will free up my time by removing the need to micromanage staff. I am also working to limit my commitments this year in order to create more time to campaign. Finally, I have spoken with Councilmember Jesse Arreguin, who successfully ran for Rent Board while holding the equivalent positions in the ASUC. I have been prepared for a long time for the grueling experience of campaigning for public office.

For the past two years, I have attended nearly every city council meeting until the end of the meeting, which has prepared me for staying for long Rent Board meetings. My Monday evenings are relatively free, so I should be able to attend long evening meetings. I can also attend daytime committee meetings. My hours are flexible.

#### **3. What experience have you had with Berkeley's rent control ordinance, the Rent Board's staff, or the elected Board?**

The very first thing I ever did as ASUC Director of Local Affairs was write a memo on the Rent Stabilization and Eviction for Good Cause Ordinance for then-ASUC External Affairs Vice President Caitlin Quinn. I have made it a personal rule of mine to reread the entire ordinance from top to bottom *at least* once a year.

I have worked with Rent Board staff on multiple occasions. I worked with the Executive Director and additional staff during the appeal of the proposed demolition of 2631 Durant Avenue (of which I/the ASUC was an appellant). I have also worked with the wonderful Moni Law multiple times, including having the Rent Board sponsor ASUC's Housing and Tenants' Rights Week, working to find a location on the UC Berkeley campus for the Rent Board to hold its meetings (something I have also worked with Boardmembers on), and discussing ways to improve outreach to students (e.g. Facebook advertising and having a counselor working fulltime with students on-campus).

I have had significant experience working with the elected Board members. First, I have served with multiple Board members on the Berkeley Tenants Union Steering Committee. Second, I successfully advocated for increasing the registration fee to \$213 instead of \$212. Third, I got the Rent Board to unanimously endorse ASUC Proposition D (housing proposition D) last month.

**4. Tell us about at least three issues that you consider important to tenants in Berkeley.**

The most important issue for tenants is affordability. If one cannot afford the rent, they simply cannot afford to live in a location. Berkeley rents keep going up at increasing rates, and it is only going to get worse. That's why rent control (particularly vacancy rent control, which we used to have) is so important. And it's also why it's so important to raise the minimum wage in Berkeley (a campaign that I have served on the steering committee of for over two years).

A second important issue is safety. We had a terrible balcony collapse occur this summer. Students I have talked to are scared about the physical safety of their housing; one student even told me that her friend had fallen through a roof. This is a big problem, particularly for students living in apartments. Landlords may decide that they can get away with not fixing things because students leave soon and will be willing to put up with problems for just one year.

A third important issue for tenants is knowledge of their rights. So many tenants, particularly students, don't know their rights and thus are able to be taken advantage of. For example, many people don't realize that a reduction in service (e.g. a broken washing machine) in a rent-controlled unit entitles them to a reduction in rent if the landlord doesn't rectify the problem in a timely manner/ Just last week a student (who lives in a rent controlled unit) in my city planning class argued that an incentive against high-quality low-income housing was that tenants didn't want to ask for fixes because it would result in rent increases. I was able to put him in contact with the rent board, but unfortunately one-on-one conversations are not sufficient; we must increase outreach, particularly to students/

**5. What is the role of the Rent Board Commissioners? What powers do they have? What changes do you think should be made in how the Rent Board operates?**

The primary roles and powers of the Rent Board commissioners are to select (or dismiss) the executive director, to work with the city council to pass rent-related legislation (particularly through serving on the

4x4), to collaborate with the city's executive branch, and to collectively interpret the ordinance as a quasi-judicial body. The Rent Board commissioners elected in this election will have the especially important task of selecting the next executive director, which can impact Berkeley's housing market for years,

While I generally think the Rent Board is operating efficiently, I believe that it could improve in three important ways: First, it should increase its outreach campaigns, particularly as relates to students. Second, I think the Board should help and encourage other jurisdictions to adopt rent control (as Richmond is doing). This will help build a coalition for important statewide changes. Third, I want to explore how we can more efficiently focus the Board's lobbyists, including potentially on Costa-Hawkins repeal.

**5. (a) How do you feel about affordable housing? (b) What do you think about low-income housing?**

I am a strong supporter of affordable housing. But when we talk about affordable housing, we *must* include low-income housing. And beyond even that. We should always focus on the most vulnerable among us, including very low income and extremely low income housing. We cannot simply focus on just the middle class (or what is becoming the middle class in a gentrified Bay Area); we must also focus on the working class.

**6. The Berkeley Housing element says, "*Ensure that below-market-rate housing is distributed as evenly as possible throughout the community.*" What are the pros and cons of distributing low-income units as parts of new projects, and what are the pros and cons of using set-aside fees from those projects to build mixed low- and medium-income buildings around the city? We want to emphasize that this question is unsettled area and there are no right or wrong answers.**

I strongly support distributing below-market-housing throughout the city. Building affordable housing through mitigation fees (as opposed to in-lieu units on-site) is better than nothing, but it still leads to gentrification *within* Berkeley. Poorer folks should be allowed to live anywhere in the city. That is why I prefer encouraging on-site below-market-rate units over affordable housing mitigation fees.

**7. Is a pro-tenant Rent Board capable of treating both large and small landlords fairly? Explain.**

Yes. Under the leadership of the pro-tenant candidates, the Berkeley Rent Stabilization Board has provided resources - such as counseling - to all landlords - big and small - to ensure that they are able to understand and comply with the law. This is good for both landlords and tenants: Good-faith landlords are able to stay on the right side of the law, and tenants do not have their rights violated by an unknowing landlord (nor can a duplicitous landlord falsely claim that they had no way of knowing what they needed to do).

**8. How do you think that rent and eviction controls are related to homelessness? Can the Rent Board have any effect on the homeless situation?**

When landlords can evict tenants for no reason, then it leads to homelessness. When rents can be unilaterally and uncontrollably increased, then it leads to homelessness - both directly as tenants are displaced and that tenants who might otherwise move-in don't because they can't afford to do so.

**9. What do you consider to be your constituency or base of support? What organizations are you affiliated with? What qualities would you bring to the slate?**

Berkeley Tenants Union (Steering Committee Member) | East Bay Young Democrats (Boardmember) | California Young Democrats Renters Caucus (Founding Member and Regional Officer) | Berkeley Neighborhood Council | Berkeley for Working Families (Minimum Wage Coalition) | UC Berkeley Students for Bernie (Vice President, Former President) | ASUC Office of the External Affairs Vice President (Senior Staff) | ASUC Student Housing Commission (Founding Chair) | Berkeley Student Cooperative | Wellstone Democratic Renewal Club | CalSERVE - Cal Students for Equal Rights and a Valid Education | Yes on ASUC Prop D (Campaign Manager) | Beyond Survival: A UCSA Campaign for Housing and Food Security | ECO - The Environmental Coalition at UC Berkeley (Co-Founder and Executive Committee Member) | Cal Berkeley Democrats | Berkeley Referendum Coalition (No on Measure S)

I consider my largest and most obvious base of support to be students and young people (particularly the former). My connections to the student body are not merely deep, but also broad. For instance, while not Greek, I will draw in Greek voters because of my work against the GLA ordinance. I will be able to draw graduate student voters through my work with graduate students, such as serving on the Graduate Assembly Housing Advisory Working Group. Students, representing 25% to 30% of the population, will be an extremely important constituency in a presidential year (particularly with the implementation of same-day voter registration).

A second base of support will be neighborhood folks. I was a major player in the No on Measure S campaign (my start in Berkeley politics was being sued by the City Council). One of the first things I did as Director of Local Affairs was to join the Berkeley Neighborhood Council and work to repair the damage done by former ASUC External Affairs Vice Presidents, and I have now been a member for nearly two years. I have even been asked to run for the Claremont Elmwood Neighborhood Association (CENA). Finally, I/the ASUC was a successful appellant of the attempted demolition of 2631 Durant Avenue. Many of these folks are homeowners, and it is important to build alliances with them.

I would bring many important qualities to the slate. First, I would bring a diversity to the board that has not been seen in years (a student). Second, I would bring years of experience on the relevant issues from my tireless lobbying and speaking at meetings.

**10. Please check links on our website ([berkeleytenantconvention.net](http://berkeleytenantconvention.net)) to two potential ballot measures affecting tenants that will be on the ballot in November: (a) Safe and Affordable Homes tax, and (b) Amending Measure Y to increase relocation payments and prevent family evictions during the school year. Explain your position on both.**

I strongly support both measures. We must recover for the people the value of rising rents that has occurred because of vacancy decontrol and an overheated property market. Therefore, I support the windfall property tax. Furthermore, beyond simply publicly supporting the windfall property tax, I have publicly put forward ways to improve the proposed tax.

While, I am less familiar with the Measure Y amendments than I am with the windfall property tax, upon doing research I can definitively say that I support the proposed measure. We must do all we can to mitigate the effects of Costa-Hawkins (such as by disincentivizing evictions) and the many negative effects of the Ellis Act.

**11. The Convention asks all candidates to sign a pledge to not run against or endorse against the slate the Convention selects. Will you sign it? Do you think that the pledge is important? Do you think it's fair?**

I will happily and readily sign the pledge. This pledge is important (and fair) because together we are strong, but divided we are weak. Rent Board elections are done using multiple non-transferable votes. If we have more progressive candidates running than spots available, then we will lose by dividing our votes. Furthermore, we would lose organizational strength by dividing monetary and human resources if we did not abide by it. I am a team player, and plan to work to support our progressive candidates and ballot measures even if I'm not on the slate.

**12. If you are nominated by the convention, will you agree, in concert with other slate members, to hire a coordinator with full authority to make campaign decisions in consultation with the slate? The slate will retain the power to determine an overall budget and replace the coordinator.**

Yes. Through my work in/with the ASUC and the Berkeley Student Cooperative, I have seen the difference between having professional staff and not having professional staff. As much as all of us on the slate may want to work full-time on the campaign, we still have other obligations in our lives which we cannot completely drop. Therefore, we need to have someone focused just on this.

*Please return to [berkeleytenantconvention@gmail.com](mailto:berkeleytenantconvention@gmail.com) by 10 AM on April 5<sup>th</sup>*

*Late responses will be distributed at the convention but may not be in time for the screening by community groups. ALL responses will be posted on the website.*