

**Napa County Latinx Democratic Club  
Candidate Questionnaire  
DEADLINE FOR RETURN: September 4, 2020**

**Candidates Name: Mariam Aboudamous**                      **Area/District: American Canyon**

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**Party Affiliation: Democrat**                              **Campaign ID #: Pending**

**Campaign Manager: None**                              **Contact #: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Candidate Specific Questions**

1. What qualifications do you have for the office you're running for and why do you deserve the Napa County Latinx Democratic Club's endorsement?

For the last four years, I have been serving the City of American Canyon as a City Council member. I began volunteering in the City of American Canyon since the age of 13. When I turned 16, I obtained my first job working for the City of American Canyon in Parks and Recreation. I genuinely care about this town and am familiar with the issues that are most important to it. I am the only candidate in this race who grew up in American Canyon and went through the entire school system here. I am currently the only woman on the American Canyon City Council and am the only woman in this race.

Furthermore, American Canyon is at a time of major change and development. I am currently a practicing attorney in the realm of construction defect litigation and have the ability to understand complex legal matters that come before the City Council.

2. Please include an example of your leadership on Latinx issues? Also, what will you do as an elected official to ensure that POC and our Latinx communities are represented?

I have been a mentor to first generation and disadvantaged youth through programs at Napa Valley College such as Umoja and Student Support Services. Furthermore, I started the first ever community service organization in American Canyon when I was still in high school. Through this organization, I was able to be a positive influence on youth and people who were not in ideal situations.

I frequently visit schools and talk to students about reaching their full potential. I am a first-generation American who was not supposed to achieve as much as I have achieved

to date. I do my best to lead by example and encourage students and youth to reach their full potential and plan to continue to do just that in the future.

3. What are your top three priorities, and how will you ensure that you accomplish those?

Traffic, housing, and economic development have always been my top three issues on the City Council and I believe that they go hand. These issues are major for our county and must be addressed regionally and collaboratively. A huge portion of our residents are commuting out of the county to work at jobs that help them afford living in our county. We have another large portion of commuters who are coming into Napa County to work at jobs that do not pay them enough to allow them to live in Napa County. What this does is clog our only thoroughfare in and out of town and pollutes our air. In essence, we need to identify housing solutions for people commuting into town and jobs for the people commuting out of town. These are some of things that I have been working on for the last three years and plan to continue working on if I get re-elected.

Regarding traffic, I was the only Council Member appointed to the subcommittee to negotiate the development agreement (“DA”) for the Watson Ranch project. This DA had been in the works for at least 12 years before I was elected. Finally, we have been able to get it approved and it brings with it the much-anticipated Newell extension. Newell Drive actually begins in Vallejo as Flosden Road and is now intended to connect all the way to South Kelly Road to bring us a much-needed secondary north-south connection. There is so much more that I’m working on pertaining to traffic because, after all, it’s the reason I initially ran for public office. I’m currently working on road connectivity, commuter incentive options, west side connector, Highway 29 improvements, bike and pedestrian connectivity, etc.

In American Canyon, we take every opportunity we come across to build affordable housing or assist families in obtaining housing. We owned two homes as rental properties and recently sold them to low-income families as affordable housing units. We currently have an ordinance that requires each new development to build affordable housing units or pay a fee in lieu of so that they City can build the housing. In 2017, we adopted a new accessory dwelling unit ordinance in order to make it easier for people to build additional unites on their existing property that can be rented out as affordable housing. We have recently opened the Valley View Housing project which is exclusively low-income and senior housing.

Housing has become such a burden in the Bay Area and the Napa Valley. So much more needs to be done. We frequently hear about first time home-buyer assistance programs but they are so unrealistic. It is nearly impossible for anyone to qualify for them in Napa County.

Since the bulk of our residents are community out for employment options, it's essential for us to determine where our residents are going and bring similar jobs to American Canyon for them. I've learned that we need more jobs in the medical and tech industries. When I came back to American Canyon after college, I found that none of my friends were still living here. They were out chasing career opportunities elsewhere. We have some of the best schools in the country and it breaks my heart that we're losing such bright youth to other communities. I've been working on bringing a tech incubator to Napa County and am confident that it will happen soon. We also have our first ever medical building in the works.

However, during such unprecedented times, I would like to add public health as a major issue as well. We shouldn't need to wait for a public health emergency to focus on prevention. Things such as washing your hands regularly and staying outside of everyone else's personal bubble are things that we can be teaching our children in school. I would like to see the City incorporate other preventative health programs such as healthy cooking, exercise, and how to stop smoking in our regular programming.

## **Issues**

4. Latinx community members are often deemed essential workers, what will you do to mitigate the effects essential workers suffer during this pandemic, including your employees?

First and foremost, we must ensure that each and every one of our essential workers is equipped with the proper protective equipment necessary to keep them safe while they are keeping us safe. Second, I believe that paid time off for people who test positive or have been exposed are essential. The pandemic is more than enough for anyone to worry about. I don't believe it's fair for our essential workers to struggle financially because they have been exposed to COVID as a result of serving their community. Third, regular deep cleaning and sanitizing is essential. Although this virus has been very destructive, one can go a long way in avoiding it by consistently sanitizing and deep cleaning their surroundings.

5. How will you tackle the next upcoming natural and public health disaster and how will this plan actively engage the Latinx Community? What is your plan to ensure that disaster planning is culturally competent and provides language access?

Frankly, I don't have a plan for the next natural or public health disaster. We don't know what the next disaster will be and, because of this, we need to ensure that our basic infrastructure is in place for when the next big thing hits. For example, when the fires happened in 2017, I quickly learned that many undocumented members in our community were sleeping in their cars because they were afraid to be picked up by ICE if they went to the shelters. Furthermore, information about the fires was only being disseminated in English, which did not ease the fears of our immigrant communities. I

immediately reached out to the Board of Supervisors and asked them to start doing updates in Spanish and advocated for sanctuary shelters.

More recently, during the PSPS, American Canyon lost power for over 4 days with very little advanced notice to prepare. I physically went to my City Manager and directed him to start posting hardcopy updates at City Hall, the Library, and other places that would be easily accessible to the public. The reason I asked him to do this is because we were sending nixle alerts and posting video updates on social media but not one had any cellular phone or internet service.

Both of these things are minor examples of learning as we face these disasters and the importance of keeping in mind the diversity of our region.

6. What is your stance on Black Lives Matter? How do you link this movement to the needs of the Latinx community?

Black Lives Matter is a movement focused on the importance of our minority communities as a whole. It began out of the frustrations caused by white police officers taking away the lives of young black men so easily as if they didn't matter. Some people respond with "All lives matter." Although that statement is absolutely true it is misguided. How can all lives matter if black lives are being taken for granted? Unfortunately, in today's society, it's not just black lives being taken for granted. It is all people of color. BLM represents all people of color and how our lives have been taken for granted for many generations.

7. What is your stance on re-appropriating police funding? What does this mean to you in your role and what policies will you pursue to address this call to action?

At this stage, I am not willing to re-appropriate police funding in the City of American Canyon. Yes, I can see that some police departments have gotten too big for their britches and must be defunded. However, I do not believe that is the case in American Canyon. I believe that our community has an excellent relationship with out law enforcement and we have a police chief who prioritizes cultural diversity and awareness. I believe that we are lucky to have this in American Canyon.

8. Families of all ranges continue leaving our community because it is too expensive for them to live here. Many families are doing long commutes in order to work here, therefore increasing their carbon footprint, missing on important family time, and much more. What is your commitment and plan to increase workforce housing so families that work here are able to live here? And what will you do to help keep families that are living here to remain here (e.g. increase the quality of life, health and wellness, youth and children activities, etc....)

My top three priorities as a Council Member focus on just this. In addition to everything that I have already laid out in question 3, we provide grant opportunities for low income families to be able to make improvements to their homes.

Furthermore, I constantly advocate for our youth and providing scholarships for youth programming. I do not want any child to miss out on our programming because of a lack of funds. I believe that sports teams and other activities are essential to a child's physical and mental wellness.

9. Do you believe it is the role of elected officials to take policy steps to assure adequate affordable housing? Yes  No

9a. Specifically, what suggestions do you have to make housing more affordable? And would you support requiring new developments to set aside a certain percentage of affordable housing?

We need to continue to build more housing so that our supply meets our demand. We also need to change the way that we think about development and prioritize higher density housing in urban cores. In American Canyon, we already require that 10% of all new housing developments to be affordable housing. For non-residential developments, developers are required to pay a fee in lieu of to our affordable housing fund in order for the City to be able to build the affordable housing at a later date.

10. According to a report from July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020, homelessness has continued to increase for the last several years in Napa County. In 2016, 317 people were reported to be homeless. In 2020, it reported 464 people. What can you do in the role you're running for to address this important and growing issue?

We need to work together with regional partners in order to combat homelessness. It's important, not only to be able to provide housing and employment opportunities for our homeless populations, but to actually understand how they became homeless in the first place. If it's due to the lack of employment, then programs that assist with job placement and employability. If it's a dependency issue, then programs that assist with rehabilitation and independence. San Francisco has many more homelessness resources than we do in Napa County, yet the homeless population there is huge. I believe that's because San Francisco leadership is not necessarily addressing the root of the issues and is merely throwing money at a problem (by way of housing and food) to make it go away.

11. In the role you're running for, what can you do to help ensure that transportation meets the needs of youth, working people, families, and seniors?

First, we need to drastically improve our public transportation systems. Currently, our bus system is inadequate and it's basically all that we have in Napa County in terms of public transportation. We need more efficient routes and higher frequency. Bus stops should be located in easy to get to, dense neighborhoods.

Second, we need to work with our large employers to provide incentives for employees to commute using public transportation. I have already begun this dialogue with larger employers up valley in an effort to better understand the needs of our community.

Third, we need to provide safer routes for cyclists and pedestrians. Currently, Highway 29 is a nightmare to ride your bike on and it's the only road going north to south. In American Canyon, we have adopted a bike plan, which includes much safer paths for our cyclists and pedestrians.

Fourth, we need to develop higher densities in urban cores in order to make necessities more accessible.

12. What action steps will you take to diversify the local workforce in your city or town? Additionally, what hiring processes will you pursue to increase the diversity of your City/Town's staff, and boards and commissions?

In American Canyon, that's simple. We have a very diverse community and a very diverse employee pool. The problem is bringing in higher paying jobs and implementing a local hire policy.

12a. Do you support a policy where aspiring citizens can serve on boards and commissions?  Yes  No

13. Racial Gaps In Maternal Mortality Persist. Black mothers die at a rate that's 3.3 times greater than whites, and Native American or Alaskan Native women die at a rate 2.5 times greater than whites, according to a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Would you work to decrease maternal mortality among women of color, protect reproductive rights and a women's right to choose?  Yes  No

14. What is at least one specific thing you can do as an elected official to address the needs of LGBTQIA+ people?

Organize a training through the LGBTQ center in Napa for Council and staff members in order to gain a better understanding of unique challenges to each group and how we can make support more tangible. I have attended trainings of this sort through the California League of Cities and learned so much. I believe that knowledge is power and

the more that we can teach people about various diversities, the stronger our community will be.

15. What specific things will you do to defend immigration and the economy in our your jurisdiction? And would you consider making the jurisdiction you're running for a Sanctuary Jurisdiction?

I am an immigration lawyer by trade. I spend every day fighting for and assisting undocumented immigrants in obtaining lawful status. I frequently volunteer at various immigration fairs. I come from immigrant parents and immigration is a topic that is near and dear to my heart. When the Napa fires happened in 2017, I advocated heavily to the Board of Supervisors to make the fire shelters sanctuary shelters. I work regularly with our law enforcement to ensure that our immigrant populations feel safe in our towns. Although I am supportive of sanctuary cities, improved relationships with law enforcement and our immigrant populations may be an even stronger tool.

16. What will you do combat climate change in your area and promote the green economy?

We recently had a presentation before the City Council by Napa Climate now, where we learned about simple, cost effective ways to reduce our carbon footprint and combat climate change. I directed staff to work on a zero-waste food composting program, replacing gas leaf blowers with electric ones, replanting trees, and explore the feasibility of all electric reach codes.

Also, in the City of American Canyon, we have completed an inventory of our facilities and determined where we can install solar power and battery backups. We have recently begun construction of this project ("Engie project").

We must work on building higher densities in urban cores. Studies have shown that people of color and who are low income are disproportionately more effected by climate change than others. This is because they are commuting further to their jobs that do not pay them enough to work closer to where they live. Higher densities in urban cores make it easier for people to get to their jobs, doctors, grocery store, etc. without needing to get in their cars.