

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

**Candidates Name:** Geoff Ellsworth                      **Area/District:** St. Helena

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**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?

I support a full spectrum community and believe that in our diversity we are all one community. I am committed to ensuring equitable wages, housing and opportunity. I have worked with many local nonprofits including the Upvalley Family Center in St. Helena to increase support and funding to build a stronger foundation for our Latinx population.

I have a strong comprehensive overview of Napa County dynamics, in how our municipalities and unincorporated areas interact and how we tie into the larger San Francisco Bay Area region.

I have been on the St. Helena City Council since 2016, St. Helena mayor since 2018 and active in local politics/community issues for the previous 7 years. I serve on various countywide boards including the Napa Valley Transportation Authority (NVT), Groundwater Sustainability Plan Advisory Committee (GSPAC), Watershed Information Conservation Council (WICC) and the Napa County Climate Action Committee (CAC), I also work with various non-profits and organizations throughout Napa County that seek to serve community needs including the Community Leaders Coalition (CLC) and Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD).

I have also attended numerous events like the Latino Leaders Lunch which is an excellent platform for cross cultural and cross jurisdictional dialogue.

Also I grew up in St. Helena working for my parent's winery and agricultural supply company, so I have an historical perspective both in the community and the major industry here that adds value. Through that I gained a background in the understanding of liquid flow/water dynamics that relates directly to local countywide water management issues.

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 advocated for increased diversity training and prioritized discussions on racial and social equity, living wage, equitable and affordable housing, and equitable water distribution which are all critical elements and components of serving our whole community. In St. Helena we have prioritized funding to our underserved communities to help build a stronger foundation for the future.

I also helped form a local St. Helena Community Multicultural Group and have promoted numerous multicultural and bilingual events to help integrate and celebrate cultural differences and possibilities for cross cultural synergies.

In these efforts I have also reached out to the Mexican Consulate in San Francisco to participate in our Cinco de Mayo and September 16<sup>th</sup> Celebrations, to strengthen the bonds of partnership as we more fully recognize the friendships of our countries and the significant cultural and economic contributions of our Latinx community.

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

Water/Climate security, Housing and Equitable living. I will continue to advocate and push on policy to achieve these goals. Listening, seeking varied perspectives and working collaboratively with others has been a successful means to gaining consensus on many long delayed issues in St. Helena.

I want for the future to see a systemically balanced, well integrated and productive community that extends through our municipalities and unincorporated areas. Fostering a more balanced and diversified economy will help sustain all of our residents through climate emergencies, disasters and economic downturns.

Water is the cornerstone of our communities and industries; working to employ the most equitable water distribution while investing in modeling, monitoring and sustainable approaches will ensure a successful future for all that depend on this precious resource.

Climate is an issue we are all contending with from environmental impacts to fires, water security and the change in our local microclimates. We need to be nimble and resilient to adapt to changing climate dynamics. Working closely with the agricultural community gives an opportunity for Napa County to be trailblazers in employing the latest practices in concepts such as carbon sequestration, water conservation and low impact farming. Sustainable and regenerative practices will ensure that Napa County is always relevant in the farming sector while building climate resilience.

Housing for our workers to live and work in our community is a big issue. The benefits are considerable when we can support our workers with equitable pay and affordable housing. Having people living and working in their community not only keeps their tax dollars circulating in the local economy but also boosts the local community through our schools and organizations, and keeps a pride in place. Keeping workers local also helps mitigate the impacts of traffic on our strained roadways, though it important always to factor in considerations of scale as it relates to our small towns, rural county and our shared resources.

Equitable living means finding ways, including concepts such as a living wage, housing equity and employee equity to work in balance as a full spectrum community.

## **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?

Making sure coverage of social services and funding for social services is being provided during emergencies like this, particularly for those with little margin or reserves. Supporting those in need and identifying any gaps will give us a greater understanding and how we can address these deficiencies. Any community is defined by how they care for their most vulnerable and I am committed to caring for all those in need, and helping them build a stronger foundation for the future.

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?

Communication is key during any emergency and bilingual communication needs to be broadcast to the entire community at the same time. This can be achieved by prioritization of the discussion on communication and offering a broad means of communicating on all platforms such as city alerts, nixle, television, social media, radio and cross jurisdictional coordination of our public safety and public information officers.

A cornerstone of my leadership has been messaging in both English and Spanish. I have worked hard as mayor to provide personal communication to our community, and anything that I send out I strive to provide in bilingual formats. I recognize the inequities in our current system and hope to amplify the voices of those that are being under served and under represented.

Building communication and trust BEFORE any disaster or event occurs is a necessary component of this and I am actively working on communication networks to shore up those gaps.

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

The Black Lives Matter movement and racial justice/social justice are of critical importance broadly and locally as well. I am proud and heartened to see St. Helena community members holding a peaceful weekly BLM protest at Lyman Park each Monday and I try to attend each week to show my support.

In St. Helena we are also advancing on the conversation through public policy – we have held a special meeting and review process on police policy and practice, and we are having an upcoming Town Hall scheduled on racial justice and social equity where we can identify action items to implement and shape our public policy.

The BLM movement links to the needs of our Latinx community by highlighting systemic inequities that have similarly marginalized our Latinx community - economically, culturally and racially. The BLM movement is holding the system that leads to these inequities accountable, and it is in this window that we can also identify and work to repair long term systemic inequities to our Latinx community.

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?

The reasons are clear for people wanting to look at reform and in St. Helena we have been swift in response and are engaged in community discussion and action. The City of St. Helena has moved forward briskly in reviewing our police protocol, policies and procedures we are advancing in our commitment to racial equity and justice.

We have a well diversified police department and in our recent town hall meeting on police use of force policies our police chief gave the community, city staff and city council an overview of our policies. St. Helena has already been practicing progressive approaches in police policy by not employing techniques such as chokeholds and other restraints that have proven deadly in other communities. But we always want to do more.

I appreciated the attentive leadership of St. Helena Police Chief Chris Hartley for issuing an early statement recognizing the significance of what happened in Minneapolis, and what has also occurred in so many cities and communities throughout our nation where lives have been tragically extinguished. As a community and a city we want to make sure our policies and response are matched with the same sense of urgency and concern that our nation has felt.

At the same time I think it is important to remember and recognize that our police officers and public service officers are our front line response in any emergency situation and they have shepherded us through many emergency events, as well as standing watch for our community year in and year out. I want our police to feel supported as we work together towards thoughtful and collaborative steps in reform.

As a mayor and city we also took former President Obama's Commit To Action on Police Force pledge – committing to the reform necessary to combat police violence and systemic racism within law enforcement.

I also see a value in partnering with agencies and non-profits that specialize in de-escalation techniques and are trained in mental health and limited physical interaction and response. It is paramount that we address these delicate situations with humanity and a calm to resolve incidents in a non-violent way by employing all resources and techniques available to us. As a community we need to commit to preventing senseless acts of violence from occurring within our communities and robbing families of their loved ones.

Community policing has proven to build good relations and trust amongst officers and their community. Having officers be out in the community walking and on bikes makes them more approachable which changes the dynamic and lessens the power dimension.

I have been humbled and proud to be a part of an ongoing peaceful gathering at Lyman Park each week demonstrating that Black Lives Matter. It is important that our community remains united in peace, and united in our commitment to each other. This is an opportunity for a more peaceful and just future for all people in our Country, in Napa County and in the town of St. Helena.

The tragic events throughout the nation have challenged us to commit more deeply locally to practices dedicated to exercising the highest standards of equality and the fostering of peace and non-violence to protect the liberty and justice of all individuals. This point in history has to be recognized and reconciled for future generations.

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....)

Housing for our workers to live and work in our community is a big issue. The benefits are considerable when we can support our workers with equitable pay and affordable housing. Having people living and working in their community not only keeps their tax dollars circulating in the local economy but also boosts the local community through our schools and organizations, and keeps a pride in place. Keeping workers local also helps mitigate the impacts of traffic on our strained roadways, though it is important always to factor in considerations of scale as it relates to our small towns, rural county and our shared resources.

With our proximity to the San Francisco Bay Area we can be a hub for innovation, higher paying jobs, equitable pay and more equitable living. In investing in a diversified economy we can

foster a path to homeownership and an opportunity for our young people to thrive and build equity here in Napa County.

Napa County has higher education institutions (Napa Valley College, Upper Valley College, Pacific Union College, Culinary Institute) and a huge healthcare sector (Adventist Health in St. Helena, Queen of the Valley Hospital, many private practices throughout the county) and these are institutions that can become partners in education and higher level job growth.

Employment opportunities should be broader for our people here, and we should be creating better opportunities for our young people. I would like St. Helena and Napa Valley/County to offer a more diversified economy and workforce. Currently our young people, working parents and community members are often being limited to lower-wage jobs.

Our young people should grow up believing they can be the next great engineer, surgeon, architect, author, artist or entrepreneur etc. and I would like to see those dreams be able to be realized in the community that they grew up. We want to foster a town where our young people of all social and racial backgrounds can return to and start their careers and foster the next generations. To achieve this we need to rethink our current model and start fostering and employing industries and businesses including tech/biotech/medical tech that can offer employment opportunities and careers that can provide growth, quality pay and thoughtful compensation that include equity options. This will allow our youth and community to have a pathway to homeownership and building personal equity.

We need to require a living wage and also aspire to greater heights where we can offer job opportunities where people can not only survive but thrive.

Also we can also be trailblazers in employing sustainable, regenerative practices in agriculture that are rooted in good land stewardship, promoting our world class wine region with ideas like regenerative ag, reforestation, biochar, carbon sequestration and dry farming, as well as workplace innovations regarding housing, transportation, wage equity and social equity.

Our social and governance structures are the foundations upon which our industries thrive, and in these areas too we can be innovative. Fostering new diversity in our local economy that complement our existing sectors will also provide a consistent and stable platform to benefit our entire community moving forward.

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?

Absolutely it is the role of public officials to address affordable housing. The housing component is a clear reflection of the inequities in our community and the crippling effects of low-wage jobs. I am supportive of paths and industries that properly compensate and care for their workforce. We need to move into a different mindset when it comes to industry and employees. I believe in not only providing equitable pay and benefits to employees but also offering incentives and paths for long-range success including prioritizing housing and housing equity.

Employee Owned business models are of great interest to me as is workforce housing. Offering housing and paths to homeownership are key to strengthening our community, schools, organizations and non-profits. We need to invest in the people who sustain our businesses and local industry. I would like to see the business model moving forward offering employee stock options, pathways to ownership or ESOPS, along with incentive benefits like housing, healthcare, transportation incentives and more.

New development and projects need to be required to provide affordable housing not as small stipend payment towards potential projects but actual tangible, livable housing to sustain a portion of their workforce. It is disheartening to see projects approved and move forward yet the affordable housing commitment seems to get widdled out of the equation. We need to do better and close the gap on these loop holes.

A few tangible solutions on the housing front would be:

- Land banking and seeking opportunities with city land to create a hybrid of affordable housing for all ages, walking paths, outdoor space, community gardens and community centered hubs.
- Partnering with nonprofits and industry to accommodate appropriately scaled multi-site housing balanced across the city, using land banking as a part of this.
- Partnering with first time home buyers in financing strategies to the benefit of both sides.
- Fostering relationships with businesses and local industry that invest in workforce housing and livable wages.

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?

This is a sad and tragic reality that our residents and community members are facing. Napa County has tools and networks of social services that are a foundational model that can help us identify the needs of our homeless community and match the resources to these individuals.

Homelessness is a complex and challenging issue with various causes that we must recognize and respond to in the most humane and thoughtful manner. We are fortunate to have many non-profit community aid partners in Napa County. I would like to see us engage with these partners and the experts who specialize in homelessness to work towards funding the agencies and organizations that are equipped to offer the services and care that is needed to bridge people from the streets to shelter and care.

There have been some progressive approaches to homelessness in other cities with concepts such as the tiny home movement and that is something that might be worth exploring in conjunction with organizational services that can help aid individuals not just with homelessness, but also address some of the other life challenges that lead to homelessness and that our homeless population is grappling with.

**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?**

A consistent, clean and reliable source of public transportation is key to minimizing the traffic on our roadways. The railways are another untapped resource that would be a strong tool in decreasing the number of vehicles on the roadway.

Exploring a ride-sharing economy and getting people acclimated to a new way of transportation is something that I think young people are more receptive too and also offer tremendous cost savings to individuals and families. There are also some creative and adaptive ride sharing apps that engage people in more of a shared and communal vehicle investment.

Industry and workplaces have opportunities to be trailblazers in these arenas by offering ridesharing incentive packages, employing bikable routes and providing charging stations to encourage the investment in electric vehicles. I am in support of tiered start times and workplaces to offer flexible schedules to accommodate ridesharing. Telecommuting is another way to decrease the vehicles on the roadways which we have seen as a great success firsthand with the effects of COVID-19.

Increasing our bike culture and offering greater pathways in the community for safe bikable transportation can invite more engagement. Making our cities more bikable and bike friendly with bike paths separate from the roadways, bike racks and bike/pedestrian crossing are all positive investments for mitigating our traffic challenges.

I have also actively engaged the Napa Valley Bike Coalition and support their efforts as well as the VineTrail project that will offer a direct line from Vallejo up to Calistoga upon completion. The solutions are there, we just need to invest in them and employ them.



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?

While our city government and many of our local businesses are already actively employing a diverse workforce, I think areas for great improvement with businesses are in work force wages, benefits and creation of higher level jobs, and the ladders to get there. I feel the bilingual capabilities of many in our Latinx community can be a tremendous resource that can work into these efforts.

I also see considerable need for change and improvement with our board and commission processes as our public offices, boards and commissions are currently not accurately reflecting the demographics in our community.

A change in this is long overdue and I feel more encouraged recently with increased participation in local community and political efforts by our Latinx population, with the type of organization and leadership to bring the changes we need to see.

As the landscape and makeup of these elected and appointed positions takes shape through a collective effort, I believe more diversity will ensue and the population in the community will be reflected in these leadership positions.

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

Absolutely, the input and perspective from aspiring citizens is very valid and would be extremely informative and valuable to a board. I would want to be sensitive to the concern that this role may expose them in unintentional ways or put them in danger or jeopardy. This is where a legal path to citizenship is critical to offer protections for someone to openly participate.

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

A woman's right to choose is wholly her own and paramount for women's health and women's rights.

Access to affordable and equitable healthcare is critical especially in underserved sectors in our society. Early education and universal access to healthcare are key in addressing these inequities. Women need to have access to healthcare but also options in healthcare so they can make informed decisions on family planning, prevention, prenatal care and infant/child care and medicine. I support universal healthcare that could provide this type of support to our full spectrum community.

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

The LGBTQIA+ are our community and we are theirs, we are not separate. I believe that education is key in making progress on this front. Diversity training that engages people in the discussion of inclusivity and embraces our differences has proven to be an effective and powerful tool in bridging the gap of misunderstanding and "set-in-stone" mindsets. It certainly has helped me to deeper understandings and I would like to foster more of this type of program.

Looking to our youth who seem to have evolved with a greater awareness and acceptance of our differences can teach us all a lot. A clever approach would be having our youth mentor our adults and aging population to gain a greater understanding of what inclusion and acceptance really mean as a society and as a community.

In St. Helena we recently installed a ceremonial flag pole that provides the perfect place to showcase Pride Month and celebrate our diversity. The flying of the Pride Flag is more than just a symbol as it showcases us as any ally and a safe place, demonstrating that we stand together as one with LGBTQIA+ people and can be a resource.

I am also a huge supporter of coming together through celebrations, and hope as we move past Covid to foster more of these types of events that celebrate inclusivity and diversity.

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?

Our immigration system is broken and a clearly defined path to citizenship is necessary to address this inequity. Napa County and the City of St. Helena owe much of our economic success to the work of migrant and immigrant labor and it is important we recognize this and create safeguards for the rights of all.

The City of St. Helena provides funding and resources to support local non-profits that provide safe services, guidance and resources for undocumented workers. Humane treatment and respect of all members of our community is necessary for civil progress. Providing refuge and sanctuary as a city and community is something I support.

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

Climate change considerations are paramount as these changes will affect every aspect of our lives and dramatically impact the way we live.

The globe is already experiencing extreme weather, increased wildfires, severe droughts, water shortages, rising sea levels, warming oceans, heat waves, melting ice caps and loss of biodiversity....these challenges will only be amplified over time. Leaders in every sector, city, state and country need to be creative, nimble, resilient and adaptable to ensure a quality of life of future generations and for our planet.

I am dedicated to implementing the 2030 carbon drawdown goals in our 2019 St. Helena and Napa County Climate Proclamations. We need to have the drawdown goals at the forefront of our conversations and we must remain committed to those standards when considering policy, projects and planning, this will ensure that we do our part to reach these necessary goals.

Below are approaches to bring these goals to fruition:

- Local government can employ green building codes and clean energy practices through the legislative process and incentivizing programs, this includes transportation and waste management sectors.
- I am committed to protecting and preserving our water, open space and natural resources through environmental stewardship, that includes addressing local deforestation and contamination issues.
- Supporting strong climate goals and actions/target dates that will benefit our community now and into the future through legislation.
- Plan for the long-term availability of potable drinking water and safe groundwater.
- Enhance methods for assuring a reliable water supply, equitable water distribution and equitable rate-sharing/cost-sharing for residential, commercial and agricultural users.
- Balance considerations for economic growth with programs that sustain open space and watershed lands and forests.
- Engage with Napa County and other government decision makers to recognize and mitigate cumulative impacts from development projects both in and outside the city limits of our municipalities, including intensification of water use, increased traffic and affordable housing needs.