

ASSEMBLYMAN TIM GRAYSON INTERVIEW

FEBRUARY 16, 2021

Participants: Assemblyman Tim Grayson and Legislative Director Domonique Jones; LWV Diablo Valley Suzan Requa, Julie Hartford, Tracy Leighton, Joanne Supersad, Mary Schreiber, Aimee Abbett; LWV Solano County Sandy Coury and Rami Muth

I. Housing and Homelessness Reforms

Assemblyman Grayson spoke on this topic in two parts saying 'affordable housing' for recipients of a monthly housing supplement and 'housing that is affordable' are two different things. We need a new financing mechanism and reforms to streamline the process for builders to build affordable housing. Projects have been lost in the planning process due to bureaucracy. We need to streamline the process. There are currently four different agencies to navigate for financing, finding tax credits, etc. It would be helpful to have one decision-making body or agency. If we supplement housing costs with tax money, there should be deed restrictions on the property to keep it affordable.

There needs to be a partnership between building affordable housing and managing the affordable housing once it has been built. This could be done with a non-profit as a partner. Affordable housing is a tool to help the poor, but we are missing the middle-income workers who live from paycheck to paycheck. They make too much for assistance, but not enough to afford rent or a house payment. They would need to spend more on housing than is proportional to their income. We must make it affordable to go from renting to home ownership. For example, expand subsidies for those who want to get into home ownership.

RHNA (Regional Housing Needs Allocation) is a good tool for a Regional plan but can be like a lion with no teeth. When we deal with local municipalities and we want to enforce low-income housing standards, we need programs that are not just a stick (penalty driven) but a carrot (reward driven). In other words, the state should create policies that incentivize. This is a passion of Grayson's. He wants to look at discounting impact fees charged by local municipalities. The state can backfill impact fees and the state can partner with local governments in a positive way. In a healthy partnership the state would empower the local municipalities by backfilling costs that are incurred when municipalities lower some of the permitting fees, etc., or other initial fees when looking at building affordable housing.

Regarding zoning, this is a very local issue. It can get messy when the state steps in, but the state can incentivize zoning. An example is transit adjacent development where zoning could create transit housing hubs. It is important to have mass transit near low-income housing.

II. Equitable COVID-19 Recovery

Assemblyman Grayson framed COVID-19 recovery as a moral question where what it means to recover equitably needs to be prioritized. Equitable recovery was addressed along five

categories: education, small businesses, vaccine rollout, living conditions, and childcare. Inequity in education has always been a problem and COVID-19 has exacerbated it. Home schooling can be a problem of inequity, especially when there is lack of broadband or Internet access. Private schools have options, but many students are underserved. This is no fault of the teachers. We need to prioritize what it means to have access to an equitable education. Covid has shined a light on so many areas where there is inequity, but education is at the top of the list. He expressed willingness to work with the LWV to put together a forum with the various education stakeholders in the state.

Small businesses are also suffering, Small mom and pop shops are not getting traffic. Grayson would prioritize small businesses that are run by people of color, or women, or first-time business owners. Other areas that need to be addressed are vaccinations and living conditions. At this juncture, the State has taken the role as facilitator to get vaccine allocation into the hands of the county. Assemblyman Grayson referenced the "My Turn" system and including everyone in a matrix for equitable measurement of vaccine distribution. Regarding living conditions and whether the State would provide assistance paying back rent, there was discussion of a provision built into the budget where landlords could recover up to 80% given there was no eviction. SB91 (yes) has renter and eviction protections and page 2 covers details of rental assistance.

To have adequate childcare, we need to keep childcare centers open so essential workers have a place for their kids. At the county level, we could look to expand the Child Care Council role in how someone could qualify for childcare if they are an essential worker.

Help for landlords and tenants, state vaccines, education, broadband/Internet are all items that would qualify for an "urgency clause" in the budget which means they could be funded immediately. A place to start is with people who are suffering with nowhere else to turn.

III. Land Use and Climate Change

Assemblyman Grayson has not had many conversations about land use and climate change. We did tap into an interest of his. He referenced the book coming out by Bill Gates. He mentioned touring rice fields in California. Rice fields can take carbon out of the environment. Agriculture understands they are by nature carbon emitters and also they can take carbon out. He went on to acknowledge equipment used in agriculture uses fossil fuels. There used to be a Genome Institute funded by federal grant money in Walnut Creek and had interesting studies about harnessing some of the carbon that came out of the wetlands in the Delta. But the Genome Institute is now closed and there are no more funds. In California, a bigger problem for the environment is wildfires. Wildfires emit more toxic pollution in one day than all the traffic in the Bay Area over the course of a year. We need to do something about the wildfires. We need to better manage our forests. One solution may be prescribed burns. Other solutions may include Green Empowerment Zone grants, federal government programs, and green jobs workforce development training. He wants to keep his ear to the rail, stay connected with constituents in his district, and synchronize to move forward together.

IV. Personal Priorities

A personal passion for Assemblyman Grayson is people in need. Most people could not weather an emergency cost of \$450. Most people can't afford any kind of unanticipated expense of that amount. Homelessness is a problem. Throwing money at the problem doesn't fix it. Creating a dwelling doesn't fix it. We need to look at the causes of the homeless problem. We need to look at connections of mental issues to homelessness. A lot of people are suffering, a lot of people are in crisis, a lot of people are experiencing trauma. He supports a concept where there are 'wrap around services' including counseling, training, recovery, and help from what caused the problem. Childcare and transportation need to be addressed for the homeless. If we cannot provide adults with transportation and childcare, they cannot get a job. We must address how children of homeless people will get to school if their parents get a job. We need to talk about upward mobility. Once people begin to prosper, their rise will draw others into it.

There is a need to talk about how the students will make up their education. Students have lost over a year of their education. There is a need to address mental health and vaccine hesitancy and build morale.

There is a helpline in Spanish for government assistance (see Appendix). LWVDV has been working with the Latino community this past year to listen and help build morale. Anything else LWV can do to partner with the government and help get the word out is welcome.

Additional Notes

The interview began with Suzan thanking Assemblyman Grayson for his participation in Voter's Edge and leadership with the Family Justice Center. There are 3 networked Center locations currently and Grayson commented he is working with Councilmembers Brown and Pippin to open a Vallejo location soon. The vision is to have a presence statewide. The remainder of the hour covered the four topics as summarized in the report.

Overall, Assemblyman Grayson was prepared to address most of our topics, particularly the ones related to Housing/Homelessness and the COVID-19 recovery. His experience in governing a racially and economically diverse city and as a police chaplain was reflected in some well thought out opinions and ideas. His enthusiasm for his job shows, as does his compassion, and his desire to help those who are struggling as well as those who are trying to improve their lot in life. Importantly, he expressed interest in working with the League of Women Voters on issues where there is common ground.