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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Event: Announcement Rally
Time: 3:00 pm to 4:00 pm
Date: Saturday, November 18th, 2023
Location: St. James Park, Downtown San Jose, CA



Press Contact: John Miller
Interim Communications Director
john@charleneforcongress.com
(917) 526-2790

Tribal Chairwoman Charlene Nijmeh declares her candidacy for Congress in California's 18th District: "We need one of us to fight for us"

(San Jose, CA) – Muwekma Ohlone Tribal Chairwoman Charlene Nijmeh is declaring her candidacy for Congress this week. Chairwoman Nijmeh will be calling on the federal government to legislate sweeping new reforms to federal housing policy in order to address the Nation's staggering affordability crisis and supply shortage.

"Entrenched incumbents sit very comfortably in Congress, entirely detached from the struggles that families endure to keep a roof over their heads. I feel that struggle. In the Bay Area, that burden is very heavy. It's too heavy," the Chairwoman plans to say in prepared remarks at an announcement rally scheduled for Saturday, November 18.

The Chairwoman will be challenging one of Congress's most powerful members – a 30-year incumbent who represents Silicon Valley and serves as Ranking Member of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee. The incumbent has taken staggering sums of money from Silicon's Valley's biggest tech companies – including Google, Meta, Apple, and Cisco – while pushing back against tech industry regulations.

In public remarks spanning her six-year tenure as Tribal Chairwoman, Nijmeh has described her People's struggle to remain on their 10,000-year-old homeland in the face of enormous gentrification pressures in the Bay Area. She blames Big Tech for driving the gentrification while ignoring the Tribe's struggle – and the struggle of San Jose's other marginalized communities as well.

"The incumbent has ignored the basic housing needs of San Jose's marginalized communities simply because she doesn't all that much care about our housing needs. I can only conclude from her behavior that she would prefer that we move out of San Jose and into the hinterlands of the Central Valley," she argues. "It's the type of subconscious bias that sits at the crux of racism and elitism, but my community knows it well."

Nijmeh believes that housing affordability and homelessness will be the primary issues of her campaign. So much so that she is advancing the *Housing Affordability and Supply Act of 2025*, which would award municipalities that up-zone urban areas to accommodate more housing units with 'infrastructure block grants' to combat NIMBY-ism.

That legislation would also accelerate funding for supportive housing developments that are owned and managed by non-profits that specialize in supporting the unhoused and those who are mentally ill.

Supporters of Nijmeh believe that the incumbent's cozy relationship with Big Tech will make the congressional district competitive this cycle. Big Tech hasn't been held accountable for the mental health impacts that the social media platforms are having on children, or the human trafficking that is enabled by their technologies.

Nijmeh argues that children need to be protected from Big Tech like a previous generation needed to be protected from Big Tobacco.

The 18th district is majority-Latino, and the incumbent has been out of step with the constituency since she was redistricted out of her much wealthier, much less diverse Silicon Valley district that she used to represent.



CHARLENE C. NIJMEH

Chairwoman, Muwekma Ohlone Indian Tribe

Charlene C. Nijmeh is the chairwoman of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, which is comprised of all known surviving American Indian Lineages aboriginal to the San Francisco Bay Region. Charlene began her engagement in Tribal affairs at the early age of 8 when she was exposed to her Tribe's efforts to repatriate her people's ancestral remains during the early 1980's, and has served as Chairwoman since 2018. The previous Chairwoman, Charlene's mother, instilled in her a deep sense of duty to care for and protect the balance between Mother Earth and its inhabitants.

In 2008, with a group of like-minded family and friends, Charlene started 7th Generation Recycling, a commercial textile recycling company. In 2012, she founded and continues to chair the Green Education Foundation to support local schools and communities in educating our citizens on the responsibilities we all must carry to live a more sustainable life. The foundation led to Charlene forging partnerships internationally to build a closed-loop recycling program that currently diverts 60 million lbs. annually of textile waste from our nation's landfills to reuse stores in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Mexico. What can't be resold is reprocessed into building insulation, carpet underlay, and mattress filling. Charlene's Green Education Foundation is now partnering with Telavisa and Club America to bring the textile recycling movement to Mexico.

Nijmeh chairs the board of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe Inc, a non-profit corporation devoted to preserving the material and cultural heritage of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe. Charlene also serves as chair of the newly formed Muwekma Ohlone Preservation Foundation, a non-profit land trust dedicated to the repatriation of Muwekma's aboriginal lands and to construct a Native Village for the Muwekma Ohlone people.

Get to know the
Muwekma Ohlone:



Watch Chairwoman
Charlene Nijmeh's
TedXBerkeley talk from
January 2023 detailing the
history of the tribe and
where things stand now:



Learn about the foundation
that Charlene started to
support youth education
programs that teach children
the importance of recycling:



It's time to put People before Politics.

"California can be a better, more affordable place where opportunities abound for every community in every corner of the State. I'm going to fight to make California an even more incredible place to live, work, and play. I want to work for you -- to create more living wage jobs, to improve our schools, and to make public safety a public priority again. With two decades of experience building a recycling company, starting a charitable foundation, and now leading a Tribal government, I know what it takes to find solutions, to bring people together, and to get things done."

Housing Affordability

The only way to reduce housing prices is to increase the supply of homes. Our public policy posture should be focused on bringing new units into the marketplace at every price point, including the provision of deeply-affordable units for the working-poor segments of our population, multi-bedroom housing that is affordable for working families, and all styles of workforce housing. The Department of Housing and Urban Development must reinvent its approach to housing and urban development -- and that will take legislation that reshapes our national housing policy. I will call for new legislation: the Housing Access and Affordability Act of 2025 -- which will make it easier for affordable housing developers and non-profit organizations to access federal financing to construct new units on underutilized urban land.

Homelessness

To address the San Francisco Bay Area's uniquely large population of unhoused people, our congressional delegation must work together to fight for federal funds that provide for the transitional housing, drug treatment facilities, and work programs that are needed to get people off the streets and onto a long-term path of personal growth and independent living.

We all deserve safe streets

All Californians -- and all Americans -- deserve safe streets and healthy neighborhoods. The mental health crisis that is taking place on our streets is undeniable. America can do better in providing troubled individuals the help that they need to redirect the trajectory of their lives. Access to better support services is just the beginning. These challenges demand values education programs and anti-addiction curriculum in our schools. Coupled with more holistic reentry programs for formerly incarcerated persons, we can make our streets safe everywhere -- and we can do so compassionately.

A functional immigration system

Our immigration system doesn't work. It's broken, backwards, and irrational -- and it's causing havoc on our borders. We need to make it easier for people to migrate here lawfully, safely, and transparently. That requires comprehensive immigration reform that makes the American dream a possibility for all.

Protecting children on the internet

For decades, Congress has failed to protect our children on the internet. I will demand that Hollywood and Silicon Valley put our priorities -- protecting our children -- before their priorities. The Big Tech companies have ignored the psychological harms that their social media platforms have on young users. New consumer protections are needed to keep these platforms out of the hands of children -- like were once legislated to reign in the abusive practices of the tobacco industry when they targeted minors. We will require paywalls to access pornography so that minors can't have easy and free access to it. We will demand that tech companies do more to prevent human trafficking and use artificial intelligence to identify sex trafficking in our midst. For too long, Silicon Valley has turned a blind eye to the sex trade that is enabled with their platforms and technologies.

World Class Mass Transit

The San Francisco Bay Area -- including San Jose and the South Bay -- deserves a world-class mass transit system that serves the day-to-day needs of our residents and our workforce. It's time to build the mass transit system that we need to accommodate Silicon Valley's next generation of economic growth. It will require an expansive deployment of new light rail and an extension of the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system to San Jose and Silicon Valley. I will fight for federal funds to begin building the infrastructure that will evolve our region into a more livable reality for working people.

Better Parks and Public Spaces

Parks and public spaces are a democratizing force in any society. The sprawling and poorly planned development that has engulfed the South Bay over the last three decades has undermined our region's access to open space, neighborhood parks, recreational amenities, and the town square. It's a profound loss and impacts the quality of life of our residents. I am committed to making our community the most enjoyable and livable place in America -- and I fight for the federal funds that will make your life better. I will also fight to curb the poorly planned sprawl that continues to threaten our open spaces and natural environments.

An Era of Energy Innovation

The Bay Area's vibrant tech industry has a unique role to play in transforming North America's energy mix. Our unparalleled ability to innovate to solve the challenge of resource constraints and the costs of power generation is precisely what the Nation needs to remain competitive across every facet of our economy. Robust innovation is the pathway towards a truly diverse renewable energy mix that is affordable to ratepayers and void of the environmental impacts that impose unseen costs on the next generation. By creating a system of competitively-awarded 'Energy Development Block Grants' to fund clean energy demonstration projects, we can accelerate the pace of innovation.