



Ensuring Opportunity Campaign to End Poverty in Contra Costa

Candidate Survey on Poverty Issues: City of Concord, City Council

The Ensuring Opportunity Campaign is a collaborative, cross-sector effort to end poverty in Contra Costa County by addressing structural causes at the policy level. As part of our campaign we distributed a survey to candidates on their approach to policy strategies that help residents who are struggling to get ahead. Below are their responses. Please note that as a tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, we cannot support or oppose any candidate for public office. These survey answers are meant to serve as a resource for voters.

Below is a list of strategies that support low-income working families. How important do you believe each of these strategies is to supporting low-income working families in your community? (Not at all important, Moderately important, or Extremely important)

	Pablo Benavente	Ed Birsan	Gloria Casillas	Hope Johnson <i>(Did not respond)</i>	Harmesh Kumar	Eduardo G. Manuel	Carlyn Obringer <i>(Did not respond)</i>
Increase local minimum wage to ensure workers earn a living wage.	Extremely important	Extremely important	Extremely important		Extremely important	Extremely important	
Strengthen and increase access to safety net services, such as CalFresh (food stamps), SSDI (disability benefits), health care coverage, EITC (tax credit for low-income workers), and CalWORKs (welfare to work).	Extremely important	Extremely important	Extremely important		Extremely important	Moderately important	
Promote and expand child care tax credits, renter's credits, and other tax credits that directly impact low-wage workers.	Extremely important	Moderately important	Extremely important		Extremely important	Moderately important	
Ensure worker protections and community benefits, such as project-specific community benefit agreements (to ensure living wage, local hiring, etc.)	Extremely important	Extremely important	Extremely important		Extremely important	Not at all important	
Other (please specify) or comments:		I have DONE these things- 1. proposed \$15 min wage for all city workers... *was defeated 4-1 2. signed and voted for an historic Project Labor Agreement for City Contracts over 750K			We also need to educate the community about how our tax dollars are being spent at the local level so that we can decided where they need to spend more to get maximum community benefits for their tax dollars. The homelessness and mental illness are very integrative and we need an integrative approach at the village level i.e. at the community level. I believe in Universal Health Care for All. Preschool and after school programs are also needed at the local level even though they are county and state issues.	Create a local agency that will help unemployed wage earners by promoting and networking their skills to local businesses. Additionally, give business start - ups some breaks in exchange to making businesses hire those "in the lists" who have already been screened	

Below are five commonly recognized policy strategies to end hunger. How important do you believe each of these is to ending hunger in your community?
(Not at all important, Moderately important, or Extremely important)

	Pablo Benavente	Ed Birsan	Gloria Casillas	Hope Johnson <i>(Did not respond)</i>	Harmesh Kumar	Eduardo G. Manuel	Carlyn Obringer <i>(Did not respond)</i>
Strengthen the capacity of emergency food assistance networks, such as local food banks	Extremely important	Extremely important	Extremely important		Extremely important	Extremely important	
Streamline and improve participation in the nutrition assistance program CalFresh	Extremely important	Extremely important	Extremely important		Extremely important	Not at all important	
Improve the quality and accessibility of child nutrition programs, including school breakfast and lunch, summer meals, and the supplemental nutrition assistance program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	Extremely important	Extremely important	Extremely important		Extremely important	Moderately important	
Dismantle “food deserts” (areas in which it is difficult to buy affordable or good-quality fresh food) by developing accessible and affordable avenues through which people can purchase nutritious foods	Extremely important	Extremely important	Extremely important		Extremely important	Not at all important	
Address the underlying socio-economic factors that give rise to poverty and hunger	Extremely important	Extremely important	Extremely important		Extremely important	Moderately important	
Other (please specify) or comments:		This is what I have done: Created within Rotary the Picker Squadron that has collected/gleaned 24 tons of fruit and donated directly to the Food Bank and Food Pantries in concord. On the Community Service Committee I directed community bloc grants to the Food Bank, homeless outreach and CASA.			Our system of permits and code enforcement has become very complicated and punitive for ordinary people and need to be simplified at the local level. Restaurants and grocery stores have to throw lot of food every day which is about to get expired. We need to create a integrative and coordinated system to pick up that food and feed the homeless, elderly and low income families with children.	Appropriate 2% of lotto winnings in every county towards "Food For the Poor" program	

Below is a list of strategies to address housing insecurity. How important do you believe each of these strategies is to meeting the housing needs of your community? *(Not at all important, Moderately important, or Extremely important)*

	Pablo Benavente	Ed Birsan	Gloria Casillas	Hope Johnson <i>(Did not respond)</i>	Harmesh Kumar	Eduardo G. Manuel	Carlyn Obringer <i>(Did not respond)</i>
Promote efforts to dedicate land permanently to affordable housing (low- and moderate-income)	Extremely important	Extremely important	Extremely important		Extremely important	Not at all important	
Create a permanent funding source to support the development of affordable housing	Extremely important	Extremely important	Extremely important		Extremely important	Moderately important	
Support Community Land Trusts	Extremely important	Moderately important	Extremely important		Extremely important	Not at all important	
Support the Housing First approach, which prioritizes providing housing to homeless residents as quickly as possible and then addressing additional support-service needs	Extremely important	Moderately important	Extremely important		Extremely important	Not at all important	
Support policy prohibiting discrimination against Section 8 voucher holders	Extremely important	Extremely important	Extremely important		Extremely important	Extremely important	
Other (please specify) or comments:		This is what I have done: Had 25% affordable housing for the Concord Naval Weapons Station that includes 80 units for homeless. Brought the affordable housing crisis to the Council single handedly and forced them to look at rent control items and the generation of new housing. Pushed for higher impact fees to be used to relieve housing problems.			Again city's code enforcement and planning commission's arbitrary permit policies are very ineffective. The permit and building fees are very high for small single family homes. In some case city is double dipping or triple dipping in collecting the fees which need to be reviewed. We also need to involve the faith communities in the affordable housing arena to educate their congregations and also to get the support for human upliftment and harmony in the local community by active participation from their congregations.	Give landlords who rent Sec. 8 tenants a break in the property tax (like a certain percentage discount)	

Do you support expanding Contra Costa Cares (county funded health coverage) to cover all adult residents who don't have health care because of their immigration status? If so, how will you work to make it happen? If not, what will you do to ensure that all residents have access to high quality and affordable health care?

Pablo Benavente

Yes, we need to allocate funds whether it is a bond measure or find other revenues to make sure EVERYONE is part of our community has access to healthcare.

Ed Birsan

I was part of the team that created RotoCare in Concord that provides free medical to those without insurance regardless of residence, legal or other criterion.

Gloria Casillas

I support health care for all adult residents, who have lived and contributed to Contra Costa County. Many non documented residents who live in this county and else where do pay taxes. I feel because they contribute they should also have rights to health care. On how to make this happen without depleting resources will be a challenge. I hope to do research, listen to ideas and explore.

Hope Johnson

(Did not respond)

Harmesh Kumar

I support 100% covering all children, women, adults and elderly for health services. I do not mind if I have to pay some health tax to the county on an annual basis. Our for profit health care is failing all of us and making health insurance and pharmaceutical companies' CEOs more fatter. We need to promote bonds for affordable housing and health care for all at the local level so that we can give some stability to our local communities and reduce unnecessary anxieties. It is more so for the families who are struggling to take care of their persistently mentally, developmentally ill children, adults, elderly with dementia, people with Traumatic Brain Injury and people with other disabilities.

Eduardo G. Manuel

In case of undocumented alien who has no health coverage, if someone who is a citizen/green card holder guarantees or co-signs to pay the premium, then health coverage should be afforded to the subject undocumented alien.

Carlyn Obringer

(Did not respond)

What do you think are the two most pressing issues for residents in your community who are struggling to make ends meet? And if elected, what will you do to address those issues? Please be specific. (Limit response to 200 words. Only the first 200 words will be published.)

Pablo Benavente

We make sure the new housing developments in the city include affordable units. Now that the city council has picked Lennar as the Master developer, I plan to work with community leaders to ensure the construction of affordable housing for veterans, seniors on fixed incomes, single parents, and other Concord residents who cannot afford to buy a market rate home. Also, we need to make sure we are an inclusive community that thrives of its diversity. Right now the underrepresented community such Latinos, Asians, African Americans are not being represented at the city council we need to make sure that they have a voice in the political process. We need to have a strong code enforcement so that people who rent do not have to live in unsuitable conditions.

Ed Birsan

Number one priority for those that are trying to make ends meet remains the ability to get a decent job and wages that they can do more than just make ends meet. I have promoted good job development in all fields and we have seen a rise in wages and a decrease in unemployment. We have over 125 million dollars of construction under way now and with the weapon station build out it will be a BILLION dollars and they are under prevailing wages not just living wage.

Second priority is to get affordable housing for those in the city so that they can have stability in their homes. In this I have looked at various rent control matters.

Gloria Casillas

One of the most pressing issues for residents in my community who are struggling to make ends meet, is wages. Wages need to go up on Concord, that being said that involves job growth. Concord needs to entice companies that can provide higher earning jobs. Another issue, is housing. As mentioned before, I believe in safe and affordable housing for future and current residents. Many residents will be priced out of buying or renting. I don't want Concord to become too expensive to live in and cause income segregation. Housing affordability should not be higher than the cost of living in Concord.

Hope Johnson

(Did not respond)

Harmesh Kumar

Two major issues: Affordable housing for middle class and sky-rocketing rents for low income families. Homelessness and mental health problems

I will promote a bond at local or county level to establish an affordable housing fund. I will also promote incentives for property owners to house low income families and cut the red-tape. I will work with other stake holders to create a coordinated system to provide social and mental health services to homeless and prevent other people and families who fall through the cracks to become homeless.

Eduardo G. Manuel

As far as I can tell no one in my community are struggling to make ends meet.

Carlyn Obringer

(Did not respond)