



Queens Central Democratic Club
Candidate Endorsement Questionnaire 2020
New York's 6th Congressional District

Thank you for applying for the Queens Central Democratic Club (QCDC) endorsement. If you have any questions about this document or the endorsement process, feel free to email us at qcdcny@gmail.com. Please email us the completed questionnaire by Sunday May 17th.

Full Name: Sandra Choi

1. What is the single most important issue to you as a candidate for federal office? Why?

No single issue is more important than making sure every American in this country is guaranteed comprehensive healthcare. We need single payer Medicare for All and we need leaders that will commit to making this their number one priority on day one. In parts of New York Congressional District Six, we have the nation's highest percentage of residents who have no health insurance and many more who are underinsured. Our community is home to some of our nation's most marginalized communities that face invisible barriers and discrimination in their everyday lives, including our healthcare system. As a candidate who quit their job to run for office, I currently do not have healthcare coverage. Many members of my community, including my family, have no or inadequate healthcare despite working some of the most dirty, difficult and dangerous jobs in our society. I know that we are not the exception. Many Americans intentionally forgo treatment and choose to remain sick rather than go into bankruptcy because of an illness. This should not be the norm in our country.

No country is strong when its people are sick and poor. A single payer healthcare system will strengthen our economy and raise the quality of life of our citizens. The movement for a national healthcare system started more than a century ago during the Progressive Era as the nation rebuilt itself after the Great War. In 2020, our country is long overdue to reform its healthcare system. Even as the presumed Democratic presidential nominee has refused to commit to making a single payer healthcare system a reality in this country, it is important that down ballot progressives with direct ties to the needs and pains of this district, advocate for this reform.

2. What endorsements do you have from elected officials, political organizations, unions and community leaders?

At the moment, none. I have participated in several endorsement processes from unions and political advocacy groups. Several endorsements went to the incumbent. I am awaiting news from the rest.



3. What is your vision for how the federal government should respond to the COVID-19 crisis?

Three months into the pandemic, the federal government has still failed to provide a national testing and treatment strategy that aggressively curbs the spread of the virus. Cities and states are left to act on their own without a central blueprint from Washington DC. The political dynamics between city and state leaders determine the level of coordination and cooperation. In New York (City), we have daily press conferences from the mayor and governor, who at times, provide conflicting information that leaves local residents more anxious and feeling ill prepared against this virus.

The federal government must use every resource available and deploy in response to this pandemic. This includes providing accurate and timely information to the public and take every action to curb the spread and protect the health of its citizens. This includes everything from enforcing social distancing, deploying contact tracers, setting up field hospitals and remote testing sites in hard to reach areas. It must also leverage its existing manufacturing network (NIST MEP) to produce and deploy masks and PPE. Most importantly, they must accelerate vaccine discovery, enable medical professionals and scientists to share data and further drug discovery from known and novel drug development processes. They should find relevant departments within the Defense Departments and Departments of Health and Human Services and the National Institute of Health which can continue pandemic surveillance. The past administration set up a dedicated office for this, and this will have to be reinstated in the very near future, it would have to act as an office that centralizes intelligence on biological systems that pose a danger to American lives.

4. What has the COVID-19 crisis revealed to you about the condition of the American social safety net?

It is vulnerable, fragmented and inadequate. It may have been worse however if there was not coverage that had been expanded from the past administration. The federal government must guarantee food access, healthcare, housing, education and direct income payments for all Americans, including our undocumented population. To date, Congress has passed four COVID-19 relief bills. Last week, House Democrats pushed through a fifth relief bill on its own, the \$3.5B HEROES Act. This bill and its predecessors were loaded with pork that provided relief for those with unlimited resources while failing to provide and guarantee the basic needs outlined above. In this district, there are residents who have had no income for months and dealing with mounting rent and bill pressures. With the average American unable to meet a \$400 emergency expense, some are unable to secure groceries for their families. Across the borough, residents are lined up for miles, several feet apart, to secure groceries through neighborhood food pantries. The collective impact of these experiences will have a devastating impact on the mental, economic and emotional well being of our communities. We need a resilient social safety net infrastructure that protects and provides the basic guarantees outlined above.

5. How has the COVID-19 crisis affected your views on the state of health care in the country and in Queens?



My family's experience as a caregiver to my grandmother, who lived with Parkinsons Disease, shaped my views on healthcare at a young age. Some of my earliest childhood memories are of my parents living under the stress of surprise medical bills, finding funding to cover expensive prescription drugs, and trying to navigate the U.S. healthcare system as new immigrants in this country. It taught me how national origin, race, language privilege and money all play a role in who gets treated and who dies in our nation's healthcare system.

In the first few days of the COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S., we witnessed Queens emerge as the national and international epicenter of the virus. It was no surprise that Elmhurst Hospital was at the center of it all. It is the only public access hospital in central Queens serving serving low-income immigrants, including those who are undocumented. Many of them served as essential workers including drivers for ride share companies. While Elmhurst Hospital reported apocalyptic scenarios of patient deaths, it was reported later on that there were empty hospital beds only ten minutes away. A family friend was one of the first to die from the virus. Anil was a longtime resident of Elmhurst via Nepal who supported his family by driving for Lyft. Around the same time, there was a news story out of Los Angeles about another ride share driver who was denied care at a private hospital and died while trying to find a hospital that would provide treatment. Over the past few months, an estimated 12.7 million Americans lost their employer sponsored healthcare at a time they need it the most. I've always understood the structural inequalities in our healthcare system. With the COVID-19 crisis, its only emphasized the urgency of reform and implementing a single-payer healthcare system in this country.

6. Do you support a single-payer healthcare system? What would your ideal healthcare system look like?

I support Rep. Jayapal and Sen. Sanders' version of Medicare for All in the House and Senate. America's single payer healthcare system must provide universal coverage (everyone in), eliminate employer sponsored healthcare, and provide extended coverage such as vision, dental, mental health services as well as long term patient care. It is important to note that across the district, the private healthcare industry is the largest employer in almost every neighborhood. Before our nation begins to transition to a single payer system, we need to start conversations now about how this will impact those employed in the industry and how we can support them.

In addition, I support Medicine for All where the federal government owns and operates a national prescription drug manufacturing network that produces and delivers generics of life saving medication such as insulin directly to the public and bypass the private pharmaceutical industry. While the proposal for a national and public drug manufacturing system has been popular with progressive policy organizations some time, no similar legislation had been introduced in Congress until the pandemic hit. Senator Warren's COVID-19 Emergency Manufacturing Act (introduced April 30, 2020) would establish an Emergency Office of Manufacturing for Public Health within the Department of Health and Human Services to produce life saving medical equipment, drugs and a vaccine for COVID-19 and diminish the



role of Big Pharma's to profit and keep the life saving medication from our citizens that may not be able to afford it. If implemented, this bill will provide an important blueprint for our country to invest in its own drug manufacturing network that serve Americans in the post crisis period.

7. What is your vision for addressing the housing crisis in the country and in Queens?

Queens is the most severely rent burdened borough in the city where residents devote up to half of their income towards rent. Even prior to the pandemic, our district was witnessing a housing affordability crisis that was spiraling out of control. The lack of housing security traps many residents in a cycle of poverty and debt. My aunt, who is the sole breadwinner of her family of four as a makeup artist at a department store in midtown Manhattan, has lived in the same two bedroom apartment located on Queens Blvd for over a decade. Her rent has gone up 120% in the fifteen years her family has called Rego Park their home. During the same time, her hourly pay rate went up only 20%. During the 2008 Great Recession, she was laid off from her position, and was forced to take out a high interest loan to pay rent. Over the past decade, she steadily paid off the loan. During this pandemic, she finds herself in the same position she was in more than ten years ago and applying for loans so that her family can stay in their home.

Every day, we witness the impact of gentrification and the displacement of long time residents who can no longer afford to stay in the communities and the neighborhoods they grew up in, especially along the transit hubs located on Queens and Northern Blvd. Some of our most marginalized populations, including immigrant seniors and undocumented Americans, who rely on fixed and limited incomes, live in densely populated housing units that impact their safety and well being.

It is clear that the private housing market is failing us and our government has failed to protect its people from the worst housing crisis that has given way to the highest rate of homelessness that our city has ever experienced. Estimates show that this pandemic is expected to increase homeless by 45%. We need to invest in upgrading existing public housing stock and expanding it, empower nonprofit affordable housing development through LIHTCs and Community Land Trusts to develop truly affordable housing units for the neighborhoods that need it, protect renters through a National Bill of Renters Rights that include a guaranteed right to counsel. Most private sector housing & real estate developments that try to maximize profit and the existing federal economic development tools that incentivize it such as the New Markets Tax Program, Opportunity Zones, and the Immigrant Investor (EB-5) Program are not tailored towards meeting the needs of the working class who desperately need affordable housing. When elected to Congress, my office will work closely with community developers and help streamline the development process for them to deliver the affordable housing this district needs. I will also scrutinize any project in our district that utilizes federal funding or programs to fund development projects that have the potential to displace existing residents.

8. What is your vision for addressing climate change in the country and in Queens?



On the legislative level, I support the Green New Deal as first drafted by Rhiana Gun Wright and introduced in the House by Representative Ocasio-Cortez. I also support the follow up version championed by Governor Inslee in early 2019 as part of his candidacy for President. This includes supporting our nation's transition to 100% renewable energy sources by 2030, ending all subsidies to fossil fuel industry, holding polluters accountable by imposing a carbon tax, decarbonizing our nation's infrastructure and investing in the development of a green economy by investing in clean tech manufacturing as well as research and development in this field.

9. Should the federal government raise taxes on the rich? How high should these be?

Yes, the federal government needs to raise taxes on the ultra wealthy members in our country. I support Senator Warren's Ultra- Millionaire wealth tax (released during her campaign for President) which calls for 2% on wealth between \$50 million and \$1 billion, and a 3% tax on wealth above \$1 billion.

10. Should the federal government raise the federal minimum wage? How high should it be?

Yes, the federal government must raise the federal minimum wage to at least \$15/hr.

11. Please identify a time when you have disagreed with the national Democratic Party. What did/ would you do to work through this disagreement?

Throughout my public policy career, I've worked for Democrats in New York and across the country. At different points in my life, I've worked for Congressman Rangel, Senator Schumer and Mayor Duggan in Detroit. As a woman, a minority and an immigrant American, it was a given that I identify as a Democrat. Despite the inter-party drama that dominates Hill politics, the reality is that because the Democrats have moved so far right, they have in many ways become indistinguishable from the Republican Party. Many elected representatives, across party aisles, share the same donors and are tied to the same interest groups. Over the course of the presidential primary, we saw how popular progressive candidates and their platforms were suppressed and rejected by the moderates in the Party. I am running for Congress because I believe in the promise of this party to truly serve the working class as the party of the people.

12. Why are you uniquely qualified to represent us in Congress?

Throughout my life, I've been responsible for navigating different worlds and bridging the gap between them. I understand the weight of growing up in poverty and the importance for many residents, particularly first generation immigrant families, to break intergenerational poverty within their lifetime. At 13, my first job was translating for patients and doctors at Elmhurst Hospital. I am the first in my family to



attend college and graduate school. I am a lifelong public servant with valuable experience working at the intersection of community, public and private sector development serving marginalized and traditionally disinvested communities here at home and across the country, including in red or purple states. I have worked on all levels of policy and understand the dynamics of each. As a nationally recognized economic developer, I've successfully designed and implemented innovative economic reforms including job creation and business expansion programs. I have consistently earned the respect of the people around me and succeeded in positions and in spaces where I was the youngest, the only woman and/or person of color.

Queens is the most diverse district in this country. We represent the future of this nation. I am confident that my personal and professional experiences give me a strong platform to advocate for the unique needs of this district and shape the national conversation around immigration reform, a single payer healthcare system and racial justice in our nation's highest legislative body.