



**Candidate Questionnaire**

**General Information**

**Candidate Name:** Rick Chavez Zbur

**Office Sought:** California Assembly District 51

**Proposed Ballot Designation:** Former Executive Director of Equality California  
(Or Occupation Listing)

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

**Campaign Team\***

Provide the names and cell phone numbers for the following campaign team members:

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

**Elected Office**

**Do you currently, or have you ever held public office?**

No.

**If yes, which public office(s) have you held and when did you do so?**

N/A

**Personal and Political Background**

**Current Occupation:**

Former Executive Director of Equality California

**Are you a registered Democrat?**

Yes.

**Have you ever been registered with another political party or selected “Decline to State” or “No Party Preference” for your voter registration party affiliation, and if so, for what period?**

No.

**In less than 250 words, briefly summarize your personal background (work experience, education, community involvement, etc.).**

I have spent my life and career fighting for equality and justice — for LGBTQ+ people, immigrants, communities of color and faith and people living with HIV. Justice for our planet and for the communities most impacted by pollution and climate change. Economic justice for working families and our most vulnerable. Criminal justice and gun safety reform. Health justice for everyone.

I grew up in a rural farming community in the Rio Grande Valley in New Mexico. Ultimately, I became the first person in my rural community to attend an Ivy League university. After graduating from Yale College and Harvard Law School, I moved to Los Angeles in 1985 and joined Latham & Watkins, one of the nation’s most respected law firms where I practiced law for over 25 years, became a partner in 1994 and was recognized as one of California’s leading environmental and government law attorneys.

In 2014, I left my law firm to become the Executive Director of Equality California, the nation’s largest statewide LGBTQ+ civil rights organization. At Equality California, I led the organization through a period of significant growth and an expansion of our mission to include advancing civil rights and social justice for the diverse communities to which LGBTQ+ people belong — communities of color, communities of faith, immigrants, women and people living with HIV. Under my leadership, Equality California has fought to protect and provide healthcare to immigrant communities, defend workers’ rights and raise the minimum wage to \$15, provide universal healthcare coverage, and much more.

**What endorsements have you received from organizations and prominent individuals? (You may either use the space below or attach a separate list.)**

Below is just a snapshot of my diverse coalition. A full list of endorsements can be found on my website: <https://rickchavezbur.com/campaign-endorsements/>

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- AFSCME-UDW
- International Union of Painters and Allied Trades District Council 36
- California Federation of Teachers
- Southern California Pipe Trades District Council 16, including Local 78, Local 114, Local 230, Local 250, Local 345, Local 364, Local 398, Local 403, Local 460, Local 484, Local 582, Local 709, Local 761
- Ironworkers Local 433
- UA Local 250 Refrigeration Fitters & Steamfitters
- IBEW Local 11
- UA Local 761
- United Steelworkers Local 675
- AFSCME 1902
- ILWU Local 13
- Operating Engineers Local 12
- CNA
- California Latino Legislative Caucus
- California Environmental Voters
- Equality California
- California Legislative LGBTQ Caucus
- LGBTQ Victory Fund
- Planned Parenthood Advocacy Project Los Angeles County Action Fund
- Southern California Armenian Democrats
- NARAL Pro-Choice California
- HONOR PAC
- Heart of LA Democratic Club
- Southwest Carpenters
- UFCW
- NUHW
- IATSE Local 33
- AFSCME CA PEOPLE
- SEIU State Council of California
- Teamsters JC 42
- Governor Gavin Newsom and every other statewide constitutional officer
- LA County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl
- LA County Supervisor Hilda Solis
- LA County Supervisor Janice Hahn
- LA County Supervisor Holly Mitchell
- State Senator Bob Hertzberg
- State Senator Ben Allen
- State Senator Henry Stern
- Assemblymember and Jewish Caucus Chair Jesse Gabriel
- Assemblymember Richard Bloom

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- Congress member Alan Lowenthal
- Congress member Brad Sherman
- Congress member Mike Levin
- Congress member Sara Jacobs
- State Senator Maria Elena Durazo
- UC Board of Regents Chair Emeritus, Frmr. Speaker John A. Pérez
- Assemblymember Miguel Santiago
- Jeff Farber, CEO, Koret Foundation
- Dean Schramm
- Richard Katz
- Wendy Greuel

**In the past five years, have you:**

- **belonged to an organization that has taken action or formally expressed a viewpoint on Israel or related issues;**
  - Yes
- **participated in an organized activity, including a forum, on Israel or related issues; or**
  - Yes
- **while holding office, introduced or co-sponsored legislation (other than purely ceremonial, supportive measures) on Israel or related issues?**
  - N/A - I have not held elected office.

**Policy Questions**

**Please describe your positions on the following issues. Please limit your responses to 250 words for each response. If you wish, one response may include up to 500 words.**

**1. Please describe your last trip to Israel and the Middle East, including the year of the trip and any group that arranged or sponsored the trip. If you have not yet been to Israel, when and to where do you plan on going in Israel, and the region generally, for your trip?**

I have travelled to Israel two times, the first time in the late 1980's and recently in December 2019, when I joined the AIPAC Progressive Leaders Program where we travelled throughout Israel, including Gaza. We were able to meet with Israeli Government officials and with both Israeli and Palestinian families and leaders

with a wide and diverse range of viewpoints. While I don't pretend to have the answers to the conflict, I learned that the issues are challenging and complicated— some of the smartest minds in politics and diplomacy have been working for decades and have made minimal progress. What I learned is that the overwhelming majority of Israelis and Palestinians want peace, but there is a lack of trust on both sides, and that building that trust will continue to be necessary and difficult. Achieving peace is also complicated by the terrorism that the Israeli people endure. I believe that Israel has a right to defend itself from terrorist groups like Hamas, and I believe that Hamas has cynically exploited and been the source of rising tensions— and their actions have cost both Israeli and Palestinian lives.

**2. Who do you speak with to develop your positions and views on Israel and the Middle East, including people overseas and local leaders in Southern California?**

As discussed below, I have been deeply engaged in issues around Israel in my role as Executive Director of Equality California and have worked with Trevor Chandler who runs the AIPAC progressive leaders program in California, and a number of members of the AIPAC staff and board. Other individuals to whom I turn are Jeff Farber, the CEO of the Koret Foundation, Jeffrey Abrams, ADL Los Angeles Regional Director, and his predecessor Amanda Suskind, Assembly Jewish Caucus chair Jesse Gabriel, Senate Majority Leader Bob Hertzberg, as well as close personal friends who are active in the leadership of their Synagogues and in the community— Dean Schramm, Richard Katz, Dena Bloom, Cary Davidson, Laurie Hasencamp and Mike Lurey, Rabbi Barbara Zacky, and Rabbi Stephen Jacobs. I also am endorsed by additional Jewish elected leaders across California, including: U.S. Representatives Alan Lowenthal, Brad Sherman, Mike Levin and Sara Jacobs, and State Senators Ben Allen, Henry Stern and Scott Weiner, among many others. I served on ADL's LA for Good Leadership Council for two years (until I left Equality California) and had a close working relationship with ADL.

**3. Please describe your relationship, if any, with the Israeli-American and Jewish community in Los Angeles.**

I served on ADL's LA for Good Leadership Council for two years (until I left Equality California) and had a close working relationship with ADL on a wide variety of issues including our work to fight religious intolerance and hate in all forms. I maintain a close engagement with the Progressive Leaders program of AIPAC and have attended and spoken on panels at the AIPAC conference over several years. I maintain strong relationships and dialogues with the Israeli-American and Jewish community members and leaders in Los Angeles, have friendships with individuals who are in the leadership of many of the area Synagogues, and will continue to foster and grow these relationships, and solicit the advice and perspective of these individuals when tackling issues related to Israel and the rich mosaic of the Jewish community in Los Angeles.

My mother's family — the Chavez family are descendants of "conversos", Spanish Jews who settled in New Mexico in the 1500's to escape persecution in Spain and were forced to convert to Christianity. I have always stood in solidarity with the Israeli-American and Jewish communities of Los Angeles, standing up against acts of antisemitism and hate. After the coordinated antisemitic campaign targeting the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified

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school system, I called for Santa Monica Police and other local departments to cooperate and focus on identifying the hate group responsible and holding them accountable to the fullest extent of the law. I will continue to stand in solidarity with – and in defense of – Jewish communities and the Israeli-American communities across Los Angeles, and across California.

**4. If elected, what committees and organizations would you try to be active in, and what policy areas would you try to affect that are relevant to Israel and the Middle East?**

When elected, I look forward to working with the CA Legislative Jewish Caucus, Democrats for Israel, the Israeli-American Council, AIPAC, the American Jewish Committee, ADL, Rabbis and Synagogues, and other Israeli-American and Jewish advocacy groups and leaders.

I will actively stand against any attempt to introduce BDS in the state of California, and locally at any universities or jurisdictions. Additionally, I will fight for better education around the Holocaust, antisemitism, and the culture and traditions of Jewish and Israeli peoples and will stand strong against attempts by anti-Israel groups to introduce anti-Semitic content in curriculum in our schools.

**5. Over the past decade, there has been a small but growing movement around the country to divest from Israel. These groups often use anti-Semitic language in their efforts, some target Jewish students on campuses and instead of discussing how to engage the democratic process to challenge Israeli policies that may be objectionable, they try to delegitimize Israel or question its right to exist. In short, these are frequently attempts to influence state and local governments and their universities and pension boards not to invest in Israeli companies or companies that do business anywhere in Israel.**

**What is your view on the Israel boycott and divestment movement and what will you do about it?**

I have been a vocal and strong and public opponent of the BDS movement. My introduction to this issue arose when pro-BDS groups launched a protest of a panel discussion on “LGBTQ Life in Israel” that was on the agenda of a large national conference of LGBTQ+ organizations several years ago, falsely claiming that the conference organizers were “pinkwashing” human rights abuses of the Israeli government by allowing the panel to occur.

As a result of that protest, the conference organizers first cancelled the panel, and then later rescheduled it, but implicitly invited a protest of the panel at the conference. The night of the panel, a large protest of the panel occurred, with pro-BDS protesters verbally

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(with anti-Semitic epithets) and physically attacking panel participants and attendees. Ultimately, the hotel called the police to break up the protest, and the next day the conference organizers issued a statement apologizing to the protesters that the police were called. I was appalled by the rampant anti-Semitism that had been allowed to take place and the response of the conference organizers.

Equality California issued a strongly worded statement critical of the conference organizers and of the need to stand up against all forms of religious intolerance, and calling out the protest as anti-Semitic. Disappointingly, Equality California was the only major LGBTQ+ organization in the country to issue such a statement, and our doing so resulted in the loss of funding from a key foundation sponsor who viewed our criticism as “inappropriate.”

Since then, I have made it a priority to provide leadership in the LGBTQ+ community to stand up to anti-Semitism that both motivates many in the BDS movement and results in anti-Semitism as one of its effects. At Equality California, we have partnered with both A Wider Bridge, and with the Anti-Defamation League, I have travelled to Israel with the AIPAC Progressive Leaders program, have spoken about BDS and the LGBTQ community at AIPAC conferences, and have met with scores of young LGBTQ+ Jews who are facing ostracism and anti-Semitism, particularly from LGBTQ+ student groups on college campuses across the country. Members of the Jewish community have been key allies in the fight for LGBTQ+ civil rights and the broader civil rights and progressive movements for decades.

Having been in the trenches on issues around the BDS movement, I remain unequivocally committed to standing up against anti-Semitism and all forms of religious intolerance, and will remain a steadfast ally in stemming the rising tide of anti-Semitic views and tactics that are gaining strength in the progressive movement, as well as the increasing number of anti-Semitic hate crimes.

**6. The FBI’s Uniform Crime Report for 2014 showed that there were more than 609 anti-Jewish hate crimes in the United States that year and even today, Jews were the most persecuted and targeted religious group in the country.**

**What steps would you take (for example, in the education and law enforcement arenas) to help prevent current and future anti-Jewish hatred and anti-Semitic activity in your jurisdiction?**

Here in the United States, we need to make crystal clear that antisemitism, acts of hate against Jewish people, and any hate crimes based on religion, ethnicity, nationality, or race – will not be tolerated. The antisemitic attacks that we’ve seen here in Los Angeles — including recently in this district — and across the country must be condemned unequivocally. Something that we know in the LGBTQ movement is that the need to

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educate and attempt to change hearts and minds to fight hate and intolerance in all its forms is never done. Sadly, and unfortunately, I believe that many in the progressive community have forgotten the lessons of the Holocaust, have been co-opted by anti Israel groups who are using anti-semitic tactics, and have failed to stand strong against rising religious intolerance toward Jews.

As I alluded to above, I believe that more robust education around the Holocaust, antisemitism, and the traditions and culture of Jewish people and Israelis both in our schools and in public service campaign efforts is critical to dismantling racist tropes and stereotypes and demonstrating to perpetrators of this violence that Los Angeles stands united against antisemitism.

**7. As a Democrat, what steps can we take to help fight anti-Semitism on both the left and the right?**

As a Democrat, one of the strongest things I can do is stand as a strong and vocal ally of the Jewish Community and spotlight the very troubling rise in antisemitic acts of hate here in California and elsewhere. While I was at Equality California, I was troubled by the rising religious intolerance we are seeing across the country, and as a leader of a civil rights and social justice organization, I believed it was important that my organization stood unequivocally against the antisemitism that's growing in our communities. I will continue to do that as a public official. I will work with local police forces to better learn and understand the status of prosecuting those who have committed hate crimes. I will continue to support and strengthen our gun safety laws, another priority of Equality California that we prioritized after the Pulse Nightclub shooting. Additionally, I look forward to connecting with Rabbis to learn more about the security concerns at Synagogues, and what we can do on the legislative level to address these concerns.

**8. What other issues do you think are unique or important to the Jewish and pro-Israel community, and how do you propose to make a difference with these issues and keep in touch with the community?**

On the global scale, given current events, I believe Israel has a right to defend itself from terrorist groups like Hamas, and I believe that Hamas has cynically exploited these rising tensions. I believe that Israel is one of our closest allies. In the short-term, I stand with President Biden in hoping that a ceasefire can be negotiated immediately. Every day that blood is shed is a day that instead could be spent rebuilding.

Locally, it is about outreach, community-building, and weeding out any perpetrators of hate against Jewish and Israeli-American Angelenos. It is about continuing to stand up against the BDS movement, continuing to be vigilant to prevent school curriculum with anti-Semitic content from being adopted, and continuing to support Jewish Students who are being ostracized in our universities. UCLA will be part of my new district and engaging on how Jewish students may need support will be an issue that I will focus on.