

Andrea Lopez-Villafaña ([00:00:00](#)):

Do you have my phone number for questions? Oh, no. Bring it up here. I turned off my phone. Isn't. Imagine going like, all righty. I think we might just be able to start and people will continue to flow in. How is everyone doing? Oh, come on. Polus 2023. Come on. Yeah, that's more like it. My boss is here, so please clap and smile. <Laugh>. Just kidding. Hi everyone. My name is Andrea Lopez via Fania, or some of you may know me as Lopez from the podcast. I am the managing editor of Voice of San Diego, and I'm sure if you're here, that means you know what Voice of San Diego is, and you probably, probably also know what SANDAG is. But Voice of San Diego is a local nonprofit newsroom and we focus on investigative journalism that holds our local leaders accountable and also empowers the public to make to get involved in government and policy decision.

Andrea Lopez-Villafaña ([00:03:15](#)):

So bear with me. I have a very long list of sponsors thank you to our team for making that possible. So, I'd like to give a minute to recognize our sponsors who helped make politicized possible this year. A special thanks to the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of San Diego for being our partner for six years. That's awesome. So thanks for letting us use your beautiful rooms. And also thank you to A A R P Burnham Center for Community Advancement, the San Diego County Water Authority, the San Diego Foundation, Atlantis, California American Water, Cox, the San Diego Housing Federation, Burnham Moore Center for Real Estate at USD's NA School of Business, planned Parenthood, his development Climate Action Campaign, Novo Brewing, and our media partner, K P V S.

Andrea Lopez-Villafaña ([00:04:12](#)):

And a special thanks to the Burnham Center for Community Advancement for sponsoring this very important session. Now if you're unable to attend any of the other sessions and you are interested in them, we will be providing those online and I will be forcing our reporters to write some of the interesting stuff that happened at those. So you can check out [stories@vosd.org](mailto:stories@vosd.org) and to submit questions. We have this handy app, but I also placed some note cards and pens over here. If you're having trouble with the app, I will be sitting over here. You could just hand me that whenever you want to submit a question. But this is the app and you can tweet along the sessions and share your experience on Twitter or x whatever they're calling it this days. And Instagram and tag us at VSD and hashtag POLUS 2023. So let me introduce your wonderful moderator. She is NBC seven reporter, Priya Schrider <laugh>.

Priya Sridhar ([00:05:26](#)):

All right. Are both of your guys' microphones working? Yes. Okay, perfect. Test, test. So I wanted to start out with hopefully what will be the easiest question today. You know, many people in the audience might be familiar with your background, some might not though. So tell us a little bit about yourselves, why you think you're the best person for this job and why you wanna be the district for supervisor. Amy, we'll start with you.

Andrea Lopez-Villafaña ([00:05:49](#)):

My name is Amy Rechart. I'm a lifelong San Diego.

Priya Sridhar ([00:05:53](#)):

So I was raised

Andrea Lopez-Villafaña ([00:05:53](#)):

Right here in San Diego. My mom was a secretary,

Amy Reichert (00:05:57):

And my dad worked at Fed Mart. How many of you remember Fed Mart if you're younger, let me just tell you, that's the 1970s version of Walmart. Okay. So my parents, I grew up in tears Santa, and my dad was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis when I was very young. And that is when my mom became the caregiver and the breadwinner for me and my two younger brothers. And later on I went on and I graduated from San Diego State with a degree in political science. And I liked to tell people it was the best 10 years of my life, <laugh>. And I really didn't use my political science degree. What I did after college, I became a licensed private investigator, and I got my license in 1999. And part of my story is I was adopted when I was a baby. And so when I was 25, my mom who adopted me and who I consider my mom, told me my biological mother's name.

Amy Reichert (00:07:00):

Now, this was before Google and I found her, and that's when I realized I had a knack for it. And so I am a small business owner of Amy Riker investigations, and I've had that ever since 1999. Fast forward in life some of the things that are my why for running and part of my background that all weave together. When I was 30 years old, I was eight months pregnant with my firstborn. And that's when my dad died of complications when he was only 56 years old from multiple sclerosis. And five weeks later, after a normal uncomplicated pregnancy, I was a week overdue. My daughter Ashley, was born in a coma and she only lived for three days. I held her in my arms as her heartbeat faded, and her life was over as quickly as it begun. So, part of my story, part of my why for running for supervisor is I was one of those people that had a mental health crisis. I was diagnosed with major depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. And yes, sadly I turned alcohol back then. And also part of my story is a story of hope and treatment and recovery. And I've been sober for the past 20 years.

Amy Reichert (00:08:28):

Again, part of the why that I'm running for a supervisor is we have a mental health crisis right now in San Diego County, and it is intertwined in homelessness and also drug and alcohol addiction. And so later, as we touch upon those issues, I'll be sharing more of my story and my why. But right now in San Diego, we are at a crossroads, and I just really wanna serve people. My why was crystallized this year, it was the County Board of Supervisors meeting to decide for the District four office if this office would be by appointment or special election. And there was a lot of commotion in that room there, over a hundred people there to speak. And I'll never forget, there was a woman sitting in the back row, and she had four children. And I felt drawn to her and I started speaking with her, and it turned out she was going to lose her homeless motel voucher in 17 days.

Amy Reichert (00:09:30):

She was a single mom with four kids. And so I said, I'm gonna help you. And over the next week, I found out how difficult it is to get a single mom with four kids who's gonna be on the streets, help. We're at a crisis right now. I just wanna serve people. I just wanna help people. And so I come before you and I just wanna thank everybody that's here on a Saturday. I want to commend you, give yourselves a round of applause for being here on a Saturday, and I look forward to hearing your questions. Thank you. Monica, if you could tell us a little bit about your background and why you wanna be the next District four supervisor.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:10:13](#)):

Sure. Oh, it

Amy Reichert ([00:10:14](#)):

Works.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:10:15](#)):

Okay. When I was tapping, I didn't hear <laugh>. Okay. Hello everyone. Good afternoon. Thank you so much for, for being here and for participating in this public process. We, well, I certainly didn't know that I would be here, right? But we are here and it is a time of great opportunity. It's a time of great challenge in our region. We are sort of experiencing a paradigm shift, but it is a time of great opportunity. And I truly believe that every single person that wants opportunity and wants to thrive in our region should be able to do that. And it is our responsibility to ensure that that opportunity is available and accessible to whoever who wants that opportunity. So, as, as was said, I'm, I'm Monica Montgomery step no hyphen. And I'm a, a current council member of the City council, district four in the city of San Diego.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:11:12](#)):

This is the community that I grew up in. It's a community that that raised me. And I had to be sort of dragged to public office. I served as a staffer for about three years. I worked at the A C L U leading a local campaign on bell reform in our region. And I also, when I first entered into the legal field, because I am an attorney by trade, it was during the time we were experiencing an economic crisis. And a lot of people, particularly people of color who have been targeted, but really many people of all, all backgrounds who had been targeted into subprime loans. We helped those folks be able to keep the homes that they had, the homes that they planned to build wealth for their families. We fought against the banks in order to do that.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:12:04](#)):

And so that was sort of my entryway into the legal field. And then I went into being a staffer and really learning the system following those who were ahead of me and then ultimately becoming an elected official. So my, my why kind of goes back. There are a lot of reasons why I feel that I'm the best person to do this job for such a time as this. But my why does go back to 2016 17 when my boss at the time in response to a study that showed us, you know, what the community members have been telling us about racial profiling in our communities, showed us that it was in fact, true that, that folks of color were being profiled by the San Diego Police Department in this study focused just on the San Diego Police Department.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:13:04](#)):

And in her reaction, she, I'm paraphrasing, but just said that, you know, black people are stopped and arrested because those are the ones that commit the crimes. And so sort of in protest to that, but at risk to my own personal life I left that office and I did not know where I was going to go. I did not know what I was going to do, but at that time my faith held me and my values and principles really held me because I knew that I could not go out into public and, and, and represent my boss, which is what you're supposed to do, right? As a staffer. And so that's where the A C L U came in. And that's where I ultimately decided to run for office because I really wanted to uplift community voices, voices that are not always heard.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:13:52](#)):

Many voices in this room where you, you are finding the issues that are going on in your communities. You may not have, you know, feel like you have a say in that. I wanted to bring that to City Hall. And so when we won that race without any institutional support other than ss, s e l u, local 2, 2 1, and also the National Unit of Healthcare workers supported us during that time. It was a, a, a groundswell of support from the grassroots part of the Democratic Party and just folks that, that were wanting a change. And so when I walked into City Hall every single day, I felt that I was carrying those 20,000 people that came out and made history in that district for race. And so bringing that same community governance model, I think to the county is going to help because we have so many issues to tackle.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:14:46](#)):

And it requires, I think that level of service, level of expertise, level of experience to be able to get us through the time that we are facing right now. And so that is, you know, my why. And we're gonna talk about all the other things, of course, the experience the chair of, of the budget right now, there's a lot of budgetary decisions that have to be made at the county. It, it, it looks easy, but it's just not. It's not. And, and we, we have to have someone there that has what it takes to make our way through a system that is broken, that has not been built for all of us to thrive. And so that's my why, and that's why I'm doing this.

Priya Sridhar ([00:15:31](#)):

We have so many issues that you guys touched on that we're gonna delve into a little bit more. But I wanted to start out with the situation that's happening at the border. I believe since September 13th, we've seen more than 10,000 street releases of migrants across the county. The Biden administration recently has changed their stance a little bit on how they're approaching the border. Yesterday chair of the county board of supervisors, Nora Vargas, announced that she would like to allocate \$3 million towards addressing these migrant street releases. Monica, do you support that idea? And, and what do you think should be done about what's happening at the border?

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:16:09](#)):

Yeah, so just first of all, thank you Priya for doing this. It's always good to see you and thank you vice of San Diego for continually hosting these very complex discussions that we have to have. They're very helpful for us. So I wanna go back a little bit and, and give a little bit of additional context. There are a lot of our community advocacy groups that have been every day opening up their doors to make sure that folks that are being dropped off by Border Patrol, at least 600 people per day right now are being taken care of. Many, about 90% of those people have sponsors throughout the United States. So they just need a little bit of help to get to where they're going. That's the majority of the people, a large majority of the people. But there are folks that don't quite have it set up with the sponsor and the like.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:17:04](#)):

So, you know, it's really, I, i look, I try to look at everything from my limited knowledge of history. But we are the majority. This is a country where most people, except for those who were enslaved, which is where my ancestors come from, came here from somewhere else. This is a country of immigrants, period. And so, yes, we need laws and we, we have a structure, and I understand that, but from a moral standpoint, I do think it is, it is incumbent upon us to make sure that everybody is taken care of. But outside of that, the county is the public health agency. And so when folks enter into our region, we have

a responsibility to keep everyone safe while they are here. We just have that no matter what, right? And so there's a lot of things, things going on in this situation.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:18:06](#)):

And I will say from my from the community many of my communities, there is tension, right? That we have to bring up. There's tension. We have a lot of people living on the streets. We have people, when I'm looking at every day, major disparities in our systems where it is easy to look at our system and say, we're not taking care of our own people, right? And so I understand that, but from a historical perspective, and I think from a moral perspective, we do have a responsibility. Now, the last thing I'll say about this is that, yes, we should not have this responsibility on our own. Notice I said border patrol is dropping people off. I do believe it's possible that the county has not taken advantage of all that the federal government has laid out. Some of our legislators have placed money in certain pots for us to apply for, but more than that, it needs to be a structural change because it's not gonna stop. And so right now we have the choice of allowing people to be dropped off and go where they go and do what they do. And we have a choice to ensure that we are shepherding people to their final destination. So I do, I do support the allocation because I do feel that it is necessary, and I understand how complex this situation is.

Amy Reichert ([00:19:31](#)):

Amy, what are your thoughts on that? On Tuesday, the board of supervisors is going to vote on a resolution to allocate \$3 million. And what is really going on is this is the federal government's responsibility. And as I've looked at this program, this program has a \$1.2 million burn rate per month. This \$3 million is not going to last very long. It's only going to last maybe two, two and a half months, and then more money from the county is going to be required. So you're probably wondering, where is this county money coming from? This \$3 million money amount, it is coming from C O V I D money, money that was given to the county for mental health, for our homelessness issues. And we have profound ones. And this is not free money. This \$3 million is gonna be coming from a pot where this was going to be used.

Amy Reichert ([00:20:40](#)):

So homeowners could get zero or low interest loans so that they could buy property. We have a profound affordable housing crisis in San Diego County, according to the Homelessness Solutions Prepared Action Program from the county of San Diego. 400,000 county residents are severely rent burdened. That's just a fancy government term for the, the rent is too high in San Diego County. And so here is the analogy I want to use, and I wanna be really clear. This is the federal government's responsibility, and we will quickly burn through county money \$1.2 million a month. It won't just be \$3 million, mark my words. We, they will need more and more and more, unless we stand up to the federal government. So I'll leave you with this. Imagine a mom who takes lunch money from her own children and then gives it to the next door neighbor's, kids, so that she can look like the good mom to the neighborhood.

Amy Reichert ([00:21:59](#)):

I just wanna remind everybody, this is not free money. This was c O v I money allocated for profound serious issues that we are facing here. And I believe instead of continuing to do the federal government's job, I would be a county supervisor who would stand up and demand that the federal government do its job. I think it's not compassionate to release people at 10 o'clock at night onto the

streets of San Diego without food or shelter. My heart is people are seeking asylum and they have profound needs. But the thing is, is it is the federal government's job, and we need to make a, make sure that they do it. Thank you.

Priya Sridhar ([00:22:51](#)):

I feel like we could have a whole hour on justice one issue. So I wish I could ask you guys some follow up questions, but I know we wanna talk about a few other issues as well. So let's move on to homelessness. One of the numbers that I find the most staggering that we've heard in the past year is that for every 10 people who we get into a shelter off the streets, there's another 13 that are becoming homeless. What do you think the county can do to encourage people to utilize the resources that are there? And is there more that can be done to address this from the county level? And Amy, we'll start with you.

Amy Reichert ([00:23:24](#)):

I do believe that this is the county's responsibility. And one of the things that we learned during the pandemic when we housed people in the convention center is that we need a regional response. And here is the thing. You will never hear quick or easy answers from me, nor will you see me or hear me label an entire group of people. We know that unhoused people, there are foster care youth, one out of four, when they age out of the system, they are homeless, domestic violence victims, L G B T Q youth who've been kicked outta their homes, veterans, disabled, elderly. As we know, this is a growing crisis. I quoted that number earlier, 400,000 county residents are having difficulty if they'll be able to make the rent next month. We have 400,000 county residents or more that if they had a crisis, like their car breaking down, wouldn't be able to get a hold of a thousand dollars to fix their car.

Amy Reichert ([00:24:36](#)):

For many people in our county, as they're driving around, if the engine light goes on, that's the apocalypse to that person because they don't have the money to fix it, and it means they won't be able to go to work or provide for their family. So just with that context there, I do want to say that the homeless population is not a monolith. It is very complex, and it is a humanitarian crisis, and it is clearly getting worse. I do wanna be really clear, I have lived in San Diego since I was four years old, and I have never in my entire life ever seen the quality of life in the city of San Diego worse. And when I go to venues like this, I ask people to raise their hands. I ask, do you believe that San Diego County is worse than it was five years ago?

Amy Reichert ([00:25:40](#)):

And nearly the entire room raises their hand. It's the one bipartisan issue that most people agree on. Homelessness is out of control. Quality of life issues are real. Our government is failing. The state of California has spent \$25 billion on housing first, and yet homelessness is worse. So, okay, now that I've said what the problem is, let me shift towards solutions. What my proposed plan is, shelter first with treatment, allow me to explain. We know that in the homelessness population, there is an intersection of addiction, mental illness, and also crime. And so what's happening is for those who suffer from mental illness and they are sent to jail, and last April, 30% of inmates in San Diego County jails were on psychotropic medications. What we're also seeing in our jails is unacceptable inmate deaths. People who are struggling with severe mental illness, being put in situations where they're taking their own lives, and also overdoses as well.

Amy Reichert ([00:27:04](#)):

And it's because our jails were not built, nor are they staffed to be able to help people who are struggling with severe mental illness or severe addiction. So I believe in a diversion program. So here's the bottom line. If you ask people, again, it doesn't matter. Democrat, republican, independent, what's the number one issue facing San Diego County? It's normally homelessness is the number one. And then number two, cost of living. And then number three, cost of living. Yes, I said that twice intentionally. So when you really kind of probe people though about homelessness, what they are truly, truly concerned is what's going on in the encampments. And there are many people, they are compassionate, but they don't feel safe in their own neighborhoods because of the growing encampments in their own neighborhoods. And so we must address this. So I do have a solution. Again, when it comes to the intersection of addiction, mental illness and crime, I don't believe people should be sent to jail.

Amy Reichert ([00:28:21](#)):

I believe that they should be sent to mandatory treatment. And I believe if we address this population in particular, we're also going to solve the quality of life issues that people are most concerned about. And I also believe it's the most compassionate solution too. I, I respectfully disagree with my opponent on the unsafe, the, the unsafe camping ordinance. I, I do believe that it is okay, and it is compassionate to say we love you too much to allow you to sleep and die on our streets. Last year, 588 people who are unhoused died on our streets in San Diego County. That's a sixfold increase since 2012. And so, no, I don't believe that somebody has a right to sleep in front of a business. I mentioned that my dad was in a wheelchair, and one of the things that he was able to do before he got really sick was he was able to go on his, it was called an amigo scooter throughout our community on the sidewalks. And so what's happening is we have encampments in front of schools, in front of businesses, in parks, and it's actually blocking people's access to these places as well. And what we're seeing is quality of life issues. So again I believe in a loving bottom line. That's why I brought up my recovery background. Thank you, Amy. I wanna give Monica a chance to respond to some of the things that you just said, Monica, thank you.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:30:08](#)):

Yeah, it's really good. Thank you, Amy, for mentioning the camping ban. I mean, it just, one, number one, I wanna point out that, you know I'm the only one here that has had to stand for something on a dais and actually take a vote. So I have to, you know, actually, you know, respond to people that may not agree with me and kind of work through those issues and those problems, which I think is super important when we're talking about county representation, because there may be some in here that you know, agree with the camping ban. And, and believe it or not, I can understand a lot of those reasons, and there may be some that, that didn't agree with it, right? And so it's very important to be able to navigate those spaces, especially when dealing with such complex issues.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:30:57](#)):

I, I, I wanna be quick to go into some of the solutions that, that I see. But since that was brought up let's dig in. One of the issues that we have with homelessness in particular, and if anyone actually watched that 11 hour meeting that we participated in, they would understand that some of the things that I brought up were you know, pointing directly to the statistics of black homelessness in particular being at 28% in the population overall being about four or 5%. And understanding that we are not going to be able to police our way out of this problem, even though enforcement is important. Structure is important, rules are important, and laws are important. We understand that. We also know that the same system that puts out these laws do not apply them to every person equally.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:31:55](#)):

And so when I go and actually take votes on a dais, I keep that in mind. Number two I believe that the majority of the enforcement that is going on right now could have been done without the ordinance. The ordinance adds in an overlay that was specific to the downtown development community. And now we are seeing encampments in a lot of our different neighborhoods where folks do not have the resources that they would've otherwise had in downtown. Number three, we have a 97% occupancy rate in our shelters right now. People are still sleeping on the street, they just don't have their tent.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:32:39](#)):

So there, there is a better way to deal with these issues. And it starts with humanity. That's what it starts with. So I, we, we are in our neighborhoods every day. We have had to tell people, look, if you don't want these resources, you can't stay here. You can't. We got you. We've, we've been talking to you for about six months, right? You know, we wanna help. And now I understand that type of intervention, but what is happening on our streets right now? It is criminal, and I'm not going to support that, and I never will. But I do support order and structure as long as it is fair. So with that, that's the reason why I voted the way that I did on that. But I'm still working with our police department. I'm still working with the mayor's office. This is an, an issue and a problem that we have to continue to address daily.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:33:46](#)):

I wanna say one thing. Homelessness intersects with all of our systems. Amy Mitchell, foster care, that is accurate. The criminal legal system that is accurate. San Diego, and I think, you know, it was back in the Karl DeMeyer days, which is a, a big supporter of Amy got rid of, did a freeze wage, and also got rid of our pensions. So we don't have the jobs, wages and benefits that other communities have at that also contributes to a lack of affordability for our community members. So it's very complex and it touches all different systems. There's a lot, there are a lot of more affordable solutions like providing rent subsidies specifically for our senior population, whose demographic has increased the most, according to our last point in time count folks who have retired here, who have built this region cannot stay here.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:34:45](#)):

And it is shameful. And so building housing is very, very important. Being able to cut through a lot of the red tape that is there is extremely important. Having education to community members who will oppose every single project, no matter what it is, if it's coming into their community, is extremely important. We have to do this together, and we have to make hard choices together. And so I appreciate, you know, bringing up this issue because there, it's a continuum. It's not just one thing. And last thing I'll say is my promise is if I am your next supervisor for district four, you may not see me on the news a lot because at least my first six months, I'm going to be bringing stakeholders together from the grassroots organizations all the way up to the federal level. I'll meet with the president if I have to so that we can iron out and lay out a plan that digs deeper than what we're doing now, because homelessness is a symptom of a lot of the root causes that we are dealing with in this region, in this state, and in this nation. And we can't keep looking at it. Like, I just don't wanna see it. You know what, I don't wanna see it either. I don't like to see people suffering, but stepping up to this plate, we have to dig deeper than that. So I'm looking forward to doing that work.

Priya Sridhar ([00:36:17](#)):

Thank you both. And I'm getting awesome questions from the audience. You guys can keep those coming. Unfortunately, I'm not gonna be able to get to all of them. And as you probably noticed, we're not imposing any sort of time limits on you guys, but I would encourage you to keep things brief so we

can get to as many issues as possible. This is one of the questions from the audience, and we're gonna start with Monica this time. What is your top priority to improve transit for district four residents?

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:36:42](#)):

Yeah, this, this is a really good one because as we are talking about our climate crisis, we're talking about a lot of the G H G goals that we have to meet, that the state has mandated for us. It's important that transit is a big part of that conversation. We have free, free ride day this past week. And that's always extremely popular. We do because of the topography of our region. And some of the resistance, you know, of course understandably so, that we have come up against with some of the funding mechanisms that we could use to increase and enhance our transit. We really have to focus on more frequency in our current transit system more rapid bus routes. Those are extremely popular. We're also meeting a lot of our goals that the state has imposed upon us by instituting our the, the green buses that you see hopefully throughout, throughout the, the region.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:37:45](#)):

But it's important that we make our transit more convenient so that folks, it is an option for people. You know, it's hard, it's really hard to, you know, sacrifice an hour and a half of the day getting to work when you can maybe get there in 30 minutes. And that's just the reality of it. And so building out our transit in that way, and also, you know, focus on focusing on transit priority areas is extremely important when it comes to housing and meeting our climate goals. So there is a lot there. We've been doing that work. I serve on the m t s board. A lot of this decisions that I have been able to be a part of at the city of San Diego to increase some of our housing density, particularly in places that our TPAs are now a sustain sustainable development areas in the city of San Diego, will, will contribute, contribute to that, but it's about frequency.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:38:38](#)):

While

Amy Reichert ([00:38:38](#)):

We

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:38:38](#)):

Plan for maybe a larger system that is even more convenient, it really is about frequency and understanding that we are in a very unique region and that our decisions have to take into consideration our topography.

Amy Reichert ([00:38:53](#)):

Amy, what are your thoughts? By a show of hands, how many of you took public transportation to this event today?

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:39:02](#)):

Yeah, that's

Amy Reichert ([00:39:02](#)):

About the percentage of the population. So approximately 4% of the population of San Diego County takes public transport transportation on a regular basis. Let me give you some more numbers. Our transnet, so the sales tax that we paid that voters said would go to road improvements. Two thirds of Transnet actually goes to public transportation, and yet we're still not seeing people who deeply care about the environment as I do, taking public transportation. Why is that? Now it's very easy to say, well, I'm just gonna spend an extra half an hour on the road. But let's face it, working people who have families and loved ones, they wanna spend time with their loved ones. That's the quality of life thing that I'm talking about. And so if it's going to be taking a bus to work or being with their families or loved ones for an extra two hours, I would imagine most people are going to choose their family.

Amy Reichert ([00:40:16](#)):

And the fact of the matter is, yes, topography is an absolute issue in San Diego County. It's hilly here. And so for me to get here today, it would've required you know, walking up a hill, which is fine, that's okay, right? To a bus stop. And then from a bus stop getting to a trolley, and then from a trolley taking a bus stop up here. Now I go back to my days of being a single mom, raising kids in this county, and it's not easy. And I can remember having unreliable transportation. And as I talked to San Agans, it's not just convenience that they're concerned about with public transportation, they're also deeply concerned about public safety while they're riding buses or trolleys. And so, unless and until we solve these root problems with public transportation and why people who deeply care about the environment want to take public transportation, but the burden is so high with convenience and public safety, we must address this.

Amy Reichert ([00:41:27](#)):

So I do have solutions. I believe what we can do with public transportation is we can come up with solutions where we have last mile connectivity. I would love to see public transportation modernized instead of taking buses everywhere. What if we could have shuttles on apps where it's a ride share model where you are safely picked up from your home and you're taken to your destination. We can make sure that these vehicles are environmentally friendly. I just believe that the current public transportation system, not much has changed with our bus routes since I was a teenager taking buses from Tira Santa to downtown San Diego to study for my bat mitzvah, the buses pretty much have not changed in about 35 years. So we need to modernize public transportation, and we need to get more buy-in than 4% of the population.

Priya Sridhar ([00:42:34](#)):

This is another audience member question, and I'm just gonna read it exactly the way they wrote it. And we're gonna start with Amy this time. What can the county do to help increase the supply of housing? Isn't that more of an issue for the city council? Council?

Priya Sridhar ([00:42:47](#)):

Amy, what are your thoughts?

Amy Reichert ([00:42:50](#)):

Yes, I wanna bring up, first of all, a really controversial topic. SSB 10, how many of you know what SSB 10 is? Okay, this is a very informed room. I'm against SB 10. I do not believe that it is the answer for our region's housing situation. Let me just give you the reason why. So I believe what it would do to residential neighborhoods is instead of people owning property in their own neighborhood, what would

happen is corporations would slowly take over our communities where corporations will have huge housing complexes with no setback and no parking, and turn us into Los Angeles or San Francisco. Okay? Now I've told you what I'm against. Now, let me share with you what I'm for. So as we look at county data, our population has declined since 2020. According to the county, we actually are minus 50,000 people in San Diego County.

Amy Reichert ([00:44:08](#)):

How many of you, by a show of hands know a friend, family, or loved one who've left California in the past few years? Yeah, and here's the thing that they're telling me. They're saying, Amy, I just want to be able to afford a single family home, not a condominium, a single family home. And so they are going to states where they can do that. Here's the problem. In San Diego County, we're not building single family humps. In fact, what we've seen in the past 25 years is enormous sprawl that has been built in Southern Riverside, Murrieta, and Temecula. So what we have is we have a lot of people who have bought single family homes in those areas, but guess what? They commute to San Diego County to serve right here, residents here in the county. That's not good for the environment. So there are unintended consequences of not building.

Amy Reichert ([00:45:10](#)):

I believe, and by the way, I'm not endorsed by the developers, <laugh> at all. Developers actually supported my opponent in the primary by hundreds of thousands of dollars. So let me just make that perfectly clear. In fact, it is only through pure heart and hustle that I made it past the primary because my opponents combined total and PAC money was a million dollars to my zero. I was not endorsed by developers. So now that I've laid that on the table, I do believe in smart growth, and I do believe that we can build what people want, which is single family homes right here in the county, and we can do that and protect the environment. Thank you, Monica. I'm sure you'd like to respond to some of that <laugh>.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:46:06](#)):

Yeah, I, and I think I, you know, I don't, I don't hopefully Amy, this is what you meant. Actually the developer organizations did not support anyone on this stage, I think in the primary. So just to, to, to be clear about that, that's what happened. So yes, the, the question was with regard to land use decisions and building housing isn't that primarily the responsibility of the city? So the city's within the county do if they are chartered or they are, have the ability and the requirement to make their own land use decisions. So yes, that is absolutely accurate that a lot of the talk about a bunch of these different laws that are coming down from the state are within the city's jurisdiction to do so. And as a supervisor we have that type of land use jurisdiction over the unincorporated areas.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:47:13](#)):

And so for this particular district, it would be Spring Valley, Casa de Oro Mount Helix, and those, those places out in the East County and excluding La Mesa because they have the ability to make their own decisions as does Lemon Grove, right? So that is the answer to the question. So in a very real sense, in this particular supervisorial district, most of those land use decisions will be made by the cities that encompass the district. That is very true. That is why the issue of SB 10 and others don't, they're very controversial, but to speak of them in a way where we will be making decisions about them and the majority of the Supervisorial district is just not accurate. That's not true. We won't be doing that. And so

that is a distinction here, because I think, you know, we're in a time where a lot of rhetoric, just generally politically speaking, is being put out there to provide misinformation to people.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:48:13](#)):

And so it's very important, especially in this room, as I know you all are ambassadors in your own communities, that we make sure that we communicate that. So, but the county can still have a major role in building housing. And I, you know, <laugh>, when I got here the young lady, I don't know if she's here, I don't know, I don't see her. But she, she came up to me very quickly and said, I am trying to build a project <laugh>, and this is what I need. And I worked for the county, and it took seven years to do 11 sub parcels. So the point is, I think we all want housing agree that this is really something we can get together on a bipartisan level, but the efficiency of the government systems really is at play here. And so when we have folks that are applying for permits to, for them to have the guarantee, especially for developers, and I, you know, I wasn't endorsed by developers.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:49:19](#)):

You know, I, I do, you know, work with developers often, but I do hold their feet to the fires, to the projects that they're bringing to my community, my current community that I represent. We have to be realistic about what they can do if they don't have a guarantee. And that if our government systems are taking them through a process that should last maybe six months, and it's taking them three years, we're really just not gonna meet our goals in that way. So the county does have a responsibility, the county does have land that the county can build upon. And then there's also discussion about the, the vm, the new V M T standard. So all of that is under the county's jurisdiction. And yes, the county still has a large voice in, in the way we build, how we build what we build, and whether we're meeting our climate action goals while we are building.

Priya Sridhar ([00:50:13](#)):

Thank you. And one of you two brought this up, I forget exactly who did the number of inmate deaths in our jails much higher than comparable sized counties across California. There has been talk about potentially screening anyone who comes into the jails, including staff for drugs or contraband. Monica, we'll start with you. Should the county board be taking more of a position on what's happening in the county jails, or should that be left up to the sheriff? And what do you think should be done as far as the high numbers of inmate deaths?

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:50:50](#)):

Well, let me say this, legally, the, the, the responsibility is the sheriff's and the, and the county board of supervisors, I think has a limited decision making power. And that's really over the budget, right? So just to be fair, there's no currently the county board of supervisors cannot interject themselves in a way that I think will force the sheriff's hand other than, you know, budgetary decisions. That being said, I think that there is always an opportunity when we hold these platforms to speak out against what we see as wrong. And what is going on in our jails right now is wrong. Now it is not just the sheriff that we're, that we're talking about. There's, it, it's, again, it's across those systems. We have a lack of nurses, of doctors. We are, you know, folks are dealing with a lot of salary issues mandatory overtime. There's so many things going on within that system that is impacting the jail death. But I will go back to the, the, the issue of morality and humanity.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:51:59](#)):

This is really at the core of how we deal with people in the way we see them. Everyone's life matters and is worth something whether you are in a jail system or not. And so approaching these issues in that way will help us decrease the amount of people that are dying in our jails. And no one should be in their cells suffering for hours upon hours upon hours, no one. And so I think at the core of it, that is what we can promote. We can talk about when I started the peace movement, let's live, let's love, you know, it really does focus on that, that treating each other like human beings, understanding that everyone doesn't come into this world under the same circumstances, right? And as I said before, there, there are rules, there are laws, but we're all still human beings. We've all made mistakes and we are all here. And so having that mentality, I think is very important. I know that the Senate president pro tem introduced a bill at the state level that would help cure some of these issues. At the very least, our, our board there at the county club that deals with these types of complaints and the complaints of death, do have an opportunity to get all the reports that they need in order to make their proper determination through that bill. Because that has not been happening.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:53:25](#)):

So this is just something that I've always fought for. I've always fought for accountability in every realm of government. Certainly law enforcement is no exception. And I think that needs to be a part, a big part of this conversation.

Speaker 5 ([00:53:38](#)):

Thank you, Amy. Thoughts?

Amy Reichert ([00:53:40](#)):

Yes. Well, I set the table and explaining how we have a mental health crisis in our jails with 30% of the population being on psychotropic medications. Clearly what we've been seeing with state audits and investigations regarding our jails, it's unacceptable what's happening there with inmates taking their own lives and also drug overdoses. So there must be accountability, but what is the root cause of this issue? And we have to look at the fact that our San Diego County Sheriffs currently are short-staffed by 250 deputies. So, and in our jails, there's mandatory overtime for these deputies 16 to 18 hours extra every week, and they're asked to work on their days off. They're missing family events, and that is causing mental health issues with people who are serving and protecting and supposed to be serving and protecting our most vulnerable in our jails. And so I absolutely believe in accountability when it comes to the budgetary issue.

Amy Reichert ([00:54:51](#)):

I believe that a supervisor can step in and provide the sheriff's department with more resources for recruitment and making sure that these deputies aren't working an extra 17 or 18 hours a week. Clearly when they are, they are overtaxed overburdened. And we're going to continue to see these inmate deaths. Now I do, I do wanna pivot to something else really quick. I hear how people will say, you know, we have to treat people with compassion and respect. And one of the things that I did in this campaign was I made a vow. I made a vow that I would never name, call or mudsling. And what I have seen in the past few months is not what people are saying on stage right now. And so I just wanna ask you, I, I did see you Monica say in an email, you referred to me as anti-science science denier, and an extremist in a fundraising email after you vowed publicly that you would never mud sling or name call. I have never done this in this campaign, and I just wanna ask you from my heart, please don't do that. It, it leaks

down to everything publicly when we do that. And so if we're gonna treat people with compassion and respect, how you campaign is how you will govern. And so, I know I'm putting you on the spot.

Priya Sridhar ([00:56:28](#)):

No, let's give Monica an opportunity to respond to that. <Laugh>, I'm, I think you should answer the question, and if you

Amy Reichert ([00:56:34](#)):

Are going to name call, I just would like for you to point to actual examples.

Priya Sridhar ([00:56:39](#)):

Monica, do you wanna address the question <laugh>?

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:56:44](#)):

Sure, I'll <laugh> I actually don't think anything about that is, is not true. And also, and, and I don't, I think this strays from some of the issues that I said in the very beginning were extremely complex in a forum or debate that people came to hear. But, you know, I try not to get on social media as much. I'm very grateful that I have folks that keep me abreast, but I've been called a lot of things a police defunder, which I have never done. That was from your, your Twitter account. I've

Amy Reichert ([00:57:28](#)):

Never used the

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:57:29](#)):

And, and see this is why I don't wanna get into it because I, i, I can bring the receipts when there's time for that, but right now there's, it's, it's, it's substantive issues that we need to be talking about. But, you know Amy, you were the head of one of the organizations that was, was anti-vax. And I.

Amy Reichert ([00:57:50](#)):

Anti-Mandate,

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:57:51](#)):

You know, I have a lot of family members.

Amy Reichert ([00:57:52](#)):

Anti mandate.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:57:53](#)):

I feel a lot of ways about that. And I understand it, but it was, it was, you were extremely vocal in that you have categorized that as civil rights and people's, you know, had the right to do what they wanted and then they had a consequence for that. And that's totally fine. But I think just, you know, you being honest about what you have said and what you have done and who has supported you and, and you at right wing, you know, when I say that you, you have been, you know seen with people that were just in the middle of a possible government shutdown, Marjorie Taylor Greene, and, and Ted Cruz and Tucker

Carlson and, and all, and, and you know what? There might be people, people in the room that totally and completely agree with those folks, and I, and that is totally fine, but in my opinion, that is right wing extremism. That's what it is. And so you may say that I'm a police de-funder and all that, and there's no, there's no, no receipts and no evidence of that. But you have said that. And so this is fine. This is what happens when we run to run one of the largest counties in the entire nation with an \$8.1 billion budget. I can take, I can take the hits, I took the hits all during the primary, including racist ones, and I'm fine with that. Those did not come from you.

Amy Reichert ([00:59:18](#)):

I'm asking for an apology

Priya Sridhar ([00:59:18](#)):

Okay. I'm gonna stop you guys right there. Yeah, that's

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([00:59:22](#)):

Why this, this is why

Priya Sridhar ([00:59:23](#)):

We only have five minutes left. And honestly, what I'm hearing from both of you is that you guys wanna have a civil discussion and talk about issues. So let's end with a question that I think is in the spirit of that. I cover politics a lot, you guys know that. And I always, you know, like to see people who are open-minded. And so, Monica, we'll start with you for this one. I'd like to hear an example of a time that you changed your mind on an issue or a policy after you received more information. You might need a second to think about that, but just tell me about a time that you're thinking on a certain issue has evolved over time because you've received more information.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([01:00:04](#)):

That's a good one. You know what, let me let, let me talk about SB 10 a little bit. And this is, this is, as Amy said, this is controversial, right? 'cause We are seeing, you know, a major impacts in our communities and we have to acknowledge all sides of the issue. I think I, I am a person who believes that we have to start with the intent of a policy. The majority of our conversations have been about housing and they've been about homelessness. And we know that we need more housing for folks. That's something I think most of us can, can agree on. I think SSB 10 was an attempt to try to get there and understanding that, you know, some of our land use policies all, you know, have, we're structured in sort of a, a system that was exclusionary, right?

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([01:00:58](#)):

That that was a racist system, right? So we're trying to reconcile with all of that. And, and I understand, you know, some of SB ten's intent in doing that. I, I went to a meet and greet that a friend was, was having for me. And next door there was a, an apartment kind of building in the back of a home that had six units in it, and the units were going for \$3,500 a piece. And so for me, that is, is not necessarily a change in my principle and value, but just let's go back to the table and look at how we can you know, make whatever we build much more affordable for people. And I think that there needs to be a, a, a harder look at the, at the framework, right? Because it's not necessarily getting to where we want it to be, I think.

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([01:02:00](#)):

And so that is kind of a, sort of an evolving, I'm sure there are others because I do take in a lot of information and sometimes I won't take an early stance on an issue because I just know, you know, that these issues tend to be very, very complex. And so when I make my decision to avoid kind of going back on what I said when I make my decision, it's with a lot of the information at hand. And I've read through and just kind of gone through my own process to make what I think the best decision for whatever community that I am representing. So that's kind of one

Amy Reichert ([01:02:38](#)):

Where I'm like, okay,

Monica Montgomery Steppe ([01:02:40](#)):

Let's, we need to take a look at some of these decisions that we're making to ensure that they're getting the impact that we intended for them to, to get.

Priya Sridhar ([01:02:48](#)):

Thank you Monica. And we only have two minutes left, Amy, but I know that you can answer this question. You've got a little bit more time to think about it since Monica answered first. So give us your answer.

Amy Reichert ([01:02:59](#)):

In late 2020, that's when five people met on a lawn in Balboa Park, because what was happening in California was the rest of the country was safely reopening schools and small businesses, and California was going in the opposite direction. That group went on to become reopened San Diego. We are never anti-vax, just so you know, I've had every single vaccine. I just didn't think that people should be fired for not getting the covid shot. So this is something that I changed my mind about. In November of 2021, that's when a group of San Diego city workers came to us at reopen San Diego and they said, mayor Todd Gloria is gonna fire us three weeks before Christmas and not offer us the religious exemption process. So that's when we did respectful press conferences at City Hall. Now what happened was the city council went on to vote unanimously for an ordinance that would've kept people who didn't get the covid shot from volunteering for the city of San Diego, serving on a border commission holding employment and also holding elected office.

Amy Reichert ([01:04:22](#)):

That last one holding elected office, we found was wildly unconstitutional. So that small group of five people who were sitting on a lawn, we wound up filing a federal lawsuit. And this year the city of San Diego settled that lawsuit and repealed that ordinance. And yes, it was, it was wrong on many levels, including including the 1964 Civil Rights Act, title vii. And so I can stand up on this stage and I can say I have protected thousands of people's jobs over the past couple years, and I have been called all kinds of names and I can take it. I am just asking that from here on out that the name Calling Cease.

Priya Sridhar ([01:05:11](#)):

Thank you. My

Amy Reichert ([01:05:12](#)):

Previous opponent,

Priya Sridhar ([01:05:13](#)):

Amy, we was

Amy Reichert ([01:05:14](#)):

Also called a right-wing extremist.

Priya Sridhar ([01:05:17](#)):

I'm gonna stop you right there because we're outta time, unfortunately. But thank you for your response, and thank you both for participating and for the audience for all of your great questions.

Andrea Lopez-Villafaña ([01:05:33](#)):

Thank you, Amy and Monica, and thank you to Priya. I just have a quick announcement. The next panel in this room is what we know about Homelessness that starts at two 30 and our podcast has been moved to four o'clock. We'll be joined by California Attorney General Rob Banta and LA Times reporter, Liam Dillon. Thank you. Sorry, I just left it. Here you go. Okay.