

1           The empowerment principle is the same whether you  
2 accomplish it in the courtroom or whether you accomplish it  
3 at the ballot box and in public hearings. You still are  
4 empowering the minority voice and the result is greater  
5 social justice than if you'd never allowed them to speak at  
6 all. Thank you.

7           CHAIR COE: Okay, thank you, Ms. Gulartie. Thank  
8 you for being here this morning.

9           MS. GULARTIE: Thank you.

10          CHAIR COE: Our next interview is scheduled to  
11 start at 10:45, so we will be in recess until 10:44.

12          (Off the record at 10:15 a.m.)

13          (On the record at 10:44 a.m.)

14          CHAIR COE: Okay, I'd like to reconvene the  
15 meeting at 10:44.

16          I'd like to welcome Mrs. Ahmad to the table for  
17 her interview, and turn the time over to Mr. Dawson for the  
18 five standard questions, please.

19          MR. DAWSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

20          Ms. Ahmad, I'm going to ask you five standard  
21 questions that the Panel has asked each of the applicants  
22 to respond to. Are you ready, ma'am?

23          MS. AHMAD: Yes.

24          MR. DAWSON: Thank you. First question. What  
25 skills and attributes should all Commissioners possess?

1           What skills or competencies should the Commission  
2 possess collectively?

3           Of the skills, attributes and competencies that  
4 each Commissioner should possess, which do you possess?

5           In summary, how will you contribute to the  
6 success of the Commission?

7           MS. AHMAD: Well, first of all, thank you so much  
8 for having me here today. It's quite a journey to get to  
9 this point, so I appreciate that.

10           To answer your question, the Commission  
11 collectively should possess the ability to be independent  
12 from political influences, competent in a variety of  
13 analytical skills, such as understanding basic statistics,  
14 and data interpreting, and applying relevant laws and  
15 regulations, the basics of mapping and spatial reasoning.  
16 Lessons learned from experiences that display authentic  
17 community engagement and appreciation for the diversity in  
18 California, including but not limited to racial, ethnic,  
19 genders, sexual orientation, economic and geographic  
20 diversity.

21           Commissioners should also evidence their  
22 interests and expertise in the importance of California's  
23 democratic processes, such as voting, and elections,  
24 redistricting, the goals of redistricting and the purposes.  
25 The history of gerrymandering broadly, California's role in

1 gerrymandering and, more recently, California's leading  
2 role in ending gerrymandering and partisan redistricting.

3           The Commission should also possess skills needed  
4 to interact with a diverse community across California,  
5 such as language diversity, knowledge of resources for  
6 community members, and the ability to reassure and advocate  
7 for the process of redistricting under the Voters FIRST  
8 Act.

9           I personally possess a variety of these skills  
10 and attributes. I've earned my master's degree from UC  
11 Berkeley in epidemiology and biostatistics. During my  
12 academic training I learned the importance of social  
13 epidemiology and how systems and structures in our  
14 environment can impact health, including our political  
15 systems.

16           Earlier this year I enrolled in a community  
17 college course to further enhance my understanding of  
18 spatial reasoning and mapping best practices. The course  
19 focuses on using ArcGIS, understanding map design,  
20 dissecting topographic and Isoline maps, and creating  
21 qualitative and quantitative thematic maps, which are often  
22 used for population-based indicators such as voting  
23 patterns and population density.

24           I've spent quite some time traveling up and down  
25 California and I -- for my volunteer work and leisure

1 commitments. But it wasn't until I started traveling  
2 outside of California that I truly began to appreciate what  
3 we have here at home. The vast diversity in backgrounds,  
4 cultures, foods, language, music and upbringing is what  
5 makes our state the golden state of America.

6 In terms of skills, interacting with diverse  
7 communities. I've had ample experience through my  
8 volunteer and public service work interacting with diverse  
9 and some of our most vulnerable and underserved  
10 populations.

11 For example, as a manager of a Second Harvest  
12 Food Bank site I served an economically underserved  
13 neighborhood in East San Jose. I organized hundreds of  
14 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables that would be  
15 delivered to a local elementary school, and worked with  
16 volunteer mothers from the community to distribute this  
17 food.

18 I developed a relationship with the mothers of  
19 the community, who made up the largest proportion of my  
20 volunteer group on any given distribution day. The mothers  
21 of the community often coached me on my Spanish-speaking  
22 skills, and we all laughed together as I stumbled upon  
23 incorrect conjugations of various words.

24 Now, as a public servant at Santa Clara County  
25 Public Health Department I've increased my area of service

1 to jurisdictions within the county, particularly in the  
2 realm of tobacco control. As a public health issue that  
3 impacts communities of color and low socioeconomic  
4 neighborhoods at disproportionate rates, I work to  
5 understand and disseminate the most up to date research and  
6 impacts of use of tobacco products.

7 I'm also fluent in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, and I'm  
8 continuing to learn my Spanish skills conversationally.

9 In summary, I will contribute to the success of  
10 the Commission by bringing all of my lived and professional  
11 experiences as considerations and input into the planning  
12 and executing of a cohesive and inclusive Commission to  
13 ensure that our Californian communities feel heard and  
14 represented.

15 MR. DAWSON: Thank you. Question two. Work on  
16 the Commission requires members of different political  
17 backgrounds to work together. Since the 2010 Commission  
18 was selected and formed, the American political  
19 conversation has become increasingly polarized, whether in  
20 the press, on social media, and even in our own families.

21 What characteristics do you possess, and what  
22 characteristics should your fellow Commissioners possess,  
23 that will protect against hyperpartisanship?

24 What will you do to ensure that the work of the  
25 Commission is not seen as polarized or hyperpartisan and

1 avoid perceptions of political bias and conflict?

2 MS. AHMAD: The characteristics that I possess  
3 that will contribute to alleviating the increasingly  
4 polarized political conversation are the important, yet  
5 very underappreciated skills of active listening, open  
6 mindedness, and understanding. Oftentimes listening to  
7 someone who may have differing opinions or views than  
8 yourself can create an avenue of mutual understanding  
9 between previously misunderstood parties. I think it's  
10 important to listen to listen, instead of listening to  
11 respond.

12 Keeping an open mind will also prove to be  
13 helpful. In my own family there are some very strong  
14 opposing political viewpoints, but one thing we can all  
15 agree on is the importance of ensuring every person has  
16 equitable access to the basic human needs. It's just the  
17 avenue to get to that goal that creates the sense of  
18 partisanship.

19 I'm sure that there will be times that the  
20 Commissioners will have differing viewpoints as to how to  
21 approach a situation or tackle an obstacle. However, I  
22 will bring an open mind, evaluate the circumstances, look  
23 at the data, and give my informed opinion and suggestion on  
24 how to move forward. And I would expect nothing less from  
25 my fellow Commissioners as well.

1           If other Commissioners have a better idea than my  
2 own, I will gladly step aside and support the best idea  
3 because in the end we all have the same goal.

4           To make sure that the work of the Commission is  
5 not seen as polarized or hyperpartisan, I'll make sure that  
6 I play my role in following the guidance of Bagley-Keene  
7 and work to ensure that the public is well informed of all  
8 the steps that the Commission takes. In doing so, similar  
9 to this application process, the public will be able to  
10 make assessments on their own and bring forth any issues or  
11 concerns for consideration to the Commission.

12           On similar fee, I have some experience in my  
13 current position to show my understanding of similar laws  
14 and regulations in the applicability of the Brown Act to  
15 ensure that the public has ample opportunities to share  
16 their opinions and/or concerns over issues that may impact  
17 them.

18           For example, when working on tobacco control  
19 policies and policies that are being discussed at the board  
20 of supervisors' meetings, my team and I work to send out  
21 informational letters to retailers and those businesses  
22 that may be impacted by such policies. Oftentimes these  
23 business owners and retailers will provide public comment  
24 and make their voices heard at these meetings.

25           It is with these experiences that I'm confident

1 that the Commission will not be seen as hyperpartisan or  
2 polarized.

3 MR. DAWSON: Thank you. Question three. What is  
4 the greatest problem the Commission could encounter, and  
5 what actions would you take to avoid or respond to this  
6 problem?

7 MS. AHMAD: I think the greatest problem that the  
8 Commission will encounter is elevating this important work  
9 within the context of our lived reality. We are for sure  
10 in unprecedented times in our politics, but now we are also  
11 living through a pandemic. The Commission will have to  
12 work to meet legislative deadlines, outreach to  
13 communities, and travel up and down California while  
14 maintaining new and fast changing guidelines and  
15 recommendations from the California Department of Public  
16 Health, the CDC, and local government agencies in the  
17 communities that we visit.

18 We're already seeing the impact of this pandemic  
19 on outreach for the Census and the urgency for competing  
20 priorities in our communities. And when the Commission  
21 convenes in August, they will have to assess fully what the  
22 context in California looks like.

23 To respond to this problem, I would recommend  
24 that we start Commission work by assessing the complete  
25 social and economic picture of Californian communities to



1 ensure that our work can be framed in the context of our  
2 new lived reality. We'll have to ask ourselves questions  
3 like how will we outreach to communities? Will we hold  
4 online meetings? How will we ensure that communities of  
5 interest have access to these online meetings?

6           Completing a full evaluation of where  
7 Californians are at the inception of the Commission can  
8 play a role in alleviating some of the concerns that  
9 communities may have going into this important work.

10           MR. DAWSON: Thank you. Question four. If you  
11 are selected, you will be one of 14 members of the  
12 Commission which is charged with working together to create  
13 maps of the new districts. Please describe a situation  
14 where you had to work collaboratively with others on a  
15 project to achieve a common goal.

16           Tell us the goal of the project, what your role  
17 in the group was, and how the group worked through any  
18 conflicts that arose.

19           What lessons would you take from this group  
20 experience to the Commission if selected?

21           MS. AHMAD: Well, the most recent example that  
22 comes to mind is when I was activated for a number of days  
23 to report to the Medical Joint Health Operations Center at  
24 Santa Clara County Public Health Department. The goal of  
25 the Public Information Officer's team, which is the team

1 that I served on, is to share the most up to date and  
2 accurate information regarding COVID-19. I specifically  
3 worked on responding to public inquiries, directing emails  
4 to the call center if necessary, and developing a  
5 presentation for the board of supervisors' meeting.

6 The group was working long hours and the sense of  
7 urgency to gather information, get it approved, and  
8 disseminated was nothing like I've ever experienced in my  
9 professional career thus far.

10 The types of conflicts that arose were more along  
11 the lines of deadlines and timelines. Since there is and  
12 continues to be an urgency to disseminate up to date and  
13 accurate information, multiple avenues as to how to achieve  
14 this goal were often presented. We discussed the options  
15 as a group at our daily check-ins, and discussed the pros  
16 and cons of any given approach.

17 Given the diversity in experiences of the group,  
18 we were able to come to creative solutions that would best  
19 address the growing concerns in our community.

20 There are several key lessons from this  
21 experience that I will carry with me on my future  
22 commitments, including the Commission if I were selected.

23 One, as a government employee and as an extension  
24 of the State of California via the Commission, it's of  
25 utmost importance to continuously remind oneself of our

1 purpose. I went into public service to help people and to  
2 help those communities that are disproportionately impacted  
3 by our social, economic, and political structures and  
4 systems.

5 While serving at the operations center, I was  
6 often reminded of this when engaging with a member of the  
7 public or when interacting with other team members on this  
8 very important and critical public health issue.

9 Second, no one wins if one group member loses.  
10 And what I mean by this is that when we're working towards  
11 a common goal it's absolutely critical that every member of  
12 the team has a clear understanding of the goal and purpose.  
13 Without this we lose efficiency, cohesiveness, and quality  
14 of the end product. It's okay to take the time to make  
15 sure everyone understands and it's also okay to stand up  
16 and say that you don't understand.

17 Third, communication is key. Reiterating  
18 statements, rewording questions back to the asker, thinking  
19 openly and loudly can all serve as agents to efficient and  
20 high quality work. This can also get team members thinking  
21 in different ways and potentially produce an idea that  
22 would otherwise be left unheard.

23 I fully intend on taking these reminders and  
24 lessons learned with me, if I were called upon to serve  
25 California via this Commission.

1           MR. DAWSON: Thank you. Question five. A  
2 considerable amount of the Commission's work will involve  
3 meeting with people from all over California who come from  
4 very different backgrounds and a wide variety of  
5 perspectives.

6           If you are selected as a Commissioner, what  
7 skills and attributes will make you effective at  
8 interacting with people from different backgrounds and who  
9 have a variety of perspectives?

10           What experiences have you had that will help you  
11 be effective at understanding and appreciating people and  
12 communities of different backgrounds and who have a variety  
13 of perspectives?

14           MS. AHMAD: Sure. Some skills and attributes  
15 that would make me effective at interacting with people  
16 with different backgrounds are the skills of knowing when  
17 and how to show empathy, active listening, public speaking,  
18 and cultural humility.

19           For example, as a lecturer for an undergraduate  
20 epidemiology course at San Jose State University I  
21 exercised all of these skills. Each semester I taught  
22 about 30 students. My students were from a variety of  
23 racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, gender identity, political,  
24 geographic, age, and developmental ability backgrounds.

25           I was tasked with the goal of measuring the

1 retention of learning outcomes among my students. Each  
2 class I made sure to set aside time at the beginning to  
3 check in with my students. There were times when I would  
4 spend a few minutes opening the course and other times when  
5 much longer discussions had to be had, given the current  
6 events happening in my students' lives.

7           Taking this time to make sure that I was even  
8 toned and supportive of all my students, regardless of  
9 their backgrounds was absolutely imperative to their  
10 success in my course.

11           I had students for whom English was a second  
12 language. I've had students with learning barriers.  
13 Students who came to class after working two jobs.  
14 Students who drove from Elk Grove to get to class. Other  
15 students who walked five minutes to get to class. There  
16 were students who were just getting by in class and  
17 students who were excelling beyond expectation for the  
18 course.

19           My students taught me the importance of  
20 unconditional support and challenged me to unlock a new  
21 level of professionalism.

22           These experiences will allow me to be effective  
23 at understanding and appreciating communities of different  
24 backgrounds in my work with the Commission.

25           MR. DAWSON: Thank you. All right, at this point

1 we will go Panel questions. Each Panel Member will have 20  
2 minutes to ask his or her questions. And we will begin  
3 with the Chair, Mr. Coe.

4 CHAIR COE: Thank you, Mr. Dawson. Good morning,  
5 Ms. Ahmad. Thank you for being here.

6 You mentioned that you're taking a course in  
7 mapping and spatial reasoning?

8 MS. AHMAD: Uh-hum.

9 CHAIR COE: Where was that through?

10 MS. AHMAD: I'm taking it through Foothill  
11 Community College.

12 CHAIR COE: Okay. And is that ongoing or have  
13 you completed it?

14 MS. AHMAD: It will be finished next week.

15 CHAIR COE: Next week, okay. Since you're right  
16 at the tail end of it, have you garnered things from that  
17 class that you think would be particularly helpful to work  
18 on this Commission? And if so, what would those be?

19 MS. AHMAD: Yes. I think one of the biggest  
20 things I've learned in the class is the display of data in  
21 a unique way, namely maps. As a researcher by training, I  
22 often make tables, and charts, and those sorts of things.  
23 But this class has taught me that there is a different way  
24 to present data. There's a way that we can detect patterns  
25 in unique ways and I think that will be very important to

1 the work of the Commission considering that these maps are  
2 maps. And they're based on geography, they're based on  
3 clusters of humans, and I think that will be really helpful  
4 towards the work of the Commission.

5 I actually signed up for the course specifically  
6 because of this process.

7 CHAIR COE: You mentioned finding patterns in the  
8 data.

9 MS. AHMAD: Uh-hum.

10 CHAIR COE: Are you guys using Census data as  
11 part of that or what type of data are you looking for  
12 patterns in?

13 MS. AHMAD: So, the use of data is open to the  
14 students. Students can source whichever data that they  
15 feel they're interested in. I personally have used Census  
16 data and Census Tract data, namely looking at Santa Clara  
17 County area, just because I'm familiar with that  
18 jurisdictional layout, but using Census data, demographics,  
19 and such.

20 CHAIR COE: Okay, thank you.

21 MS. AHMAD: Uh-hum.

22 CHAIR COE: In your application you mentioned  
23 that you were a mentor for -- I'm not sure if it was an  
24 organization, a group called Getting Into Graduate School.

25 MS. AHMAD: Uh-hum.

1           CHAIR COE: Can you tell us a little bit about  
2 what Getting Into Graduate School did or does?

3           MS. AHMAD: Yes. So, the program, Getting Into  
4 Graduate School, also called GIGS, is a program at UC  
5 Berkeley. And students are chosen, graduate students are  
6 chosen to be mentors during their time while in their  
7 academic study. So, I'm no longer a mentor for that  
8 program since I have graduated.

9           But that program is designed to help  
10 undergraduate students pursue graduate school. And  
11 primarily, those students who are underrepresented in  
12 graduate school. So, students of color, students with  
13 physical or mental disabilities, students with a history of  
14 not having access to education.

15           So, I was paired up with my mentee, who was  
16 really interested in going to medical school. She's a  
17 first generation college student. She didn't have  
18 resources at home to pursue that avenue. So, my goal and  
19 my purpose in that program was to sort of guide her in  
20 different programs that are available, different  
21 scholarship opportunities that she can look into. Kind of  
22 guide her in the skills of informational interviewing and  
23 networking, those sorts of things. And she eventually  
24 ended up going to graduate school.

25           CHAIR COE: So, in your role, you're assigned a



1 single mentee --

2 MS. AHMAD: Uh-hum.

3 CHAIR COE: -- in their goal to reach graduate  
4 school?

5 MS. AHMAD: Yes, yes. So, there are some folks  
6 who were assigned multiple, depending on the need. And  
7 that particular year that I signed up to be a GIGS mentor I  
8 was assigned one mentee.

9 CHAIR COE: So, just one for the year? Did you  
10 only have one in your role there?

11 MS. AHMAD: Uh-hum. Yes, yes.

12 CHAIR COE: Okay. Is there anything that you  
13 learned from that process that you think would be helpful  
14 to this Commission?

15 MS. AHMAD: I think something that I learned from  
16 that process that I can apply to this Commission would be  
17 just the idea of storytelling. Listening to my mentee talk  
18 about her experiences, talk about her struggles, and her  
19 vision, and her goals for the future really gave me a sense  
20 of motivation, a sense of urgency to go out and help her  
21 find these resources to get to where she wants to go.

22 I think that can be transferred directly to the  
23 work of the Commission as we will be going out to different  
24 communities. And these communities will have a vision of  
25 what they want California to look like. And I feel like it

1 would be our responsibility as a Commission to translate  
2 that vision into reality for them.

3 CHAIR COE: Okay, thank you. In your  
4 impartiality essay and a little bit earlier you referenced  
5 your role with the Santa Clara County Public Health  
6 Department. And in your essay specifically, describe your  
7 participation in public meetings to gather the insight of  
8 community members and other stakeholders.

9 Can you provide us with an example of a time that  
10 you were provided with information from community members  
11 during these meetings that caused you to maybe change your  
12 approach or change your mind on a particular issue?

13 MS. AHMAD: So, I can speak to tobacco control,  
14 since that's my day-to-day job, and in the context of why I  
15 attended some of these public meetings.

16 The most recent example that comes to mind was  
17 attending a City of San Jose priority setting session with  
18 their city council, in which different issues were being  
19 voted on to be prioritized within the city. And one of  
20 those issues is flavored tobacco use.

21 There was quite a few folks who showed up for  
22 either side of the issue. And listening to these stories,  
23 listening to folks who would be impacted by such a policy  
24 really opened my eyes that we, as public servants, have to  
25 take into consideration everyone's opinions and viewpoints.

1 Tobacco control, believe it or not, is still a  
2 very contested issue. The facts are out there. The  
3 research is out there. There's no more research needed to  
4 determine that tobacco control -- or, tobacco use is  
5 harmful to folks' health.

6 So, it just really sparked an interest in myself  
7 to kind of figure out what creative solutions can we have  
8 when such policies may impact someone's livelihood. And as  
9 a government agency and folks who work for the people, it's  
10 our responsibility to do that.

11 CHAIR COE: In your essays and a little earlier  
12 you were referencing the diverse groups of people that you  
13 have worked with in one capacity or another. What is it  
14 that you have learned from the perspectives of these  
15 different groups of people that would assist you on this  
16 Commission?

17 MS. AHMAD: I think one of the biggest things  
18 I've learned, in addition to everything I've mentioned, is  
19 that I'm not always right. And it's a really humbling  
20 thought to carry with myself. As someone who's had the  
21 privilege and honor to be a product of California's public  
22 school systems, from K through 12, to community college, to  
23 the CSU, to the UC system, we are taught that, you know, we  
24 are educated, that we have a toolbox of knowledge.

25 However, that's one type of knowledge. Listening

1 to diverse populations has taught me that letters behind  
2 your name doesn't necessarily mean that you know what's  
3 best for a community.

4 And going into this work I think that's the idea  
5 that I will carry with me first and foremost is that, yes,  
6 this Commission was compiled around some skill sets that  
7 were desired to do the actual work, but we are not the  
8 experts. The community is the experts. The community will  
9 tell us where their populations of interests are and what  
10 issues that they're facing, where they would like to see  
11 change. And it would be our responsibility to take that  
12 information wholeheartedly and open-mindedly.

13 CHAIR COE: So, speaking of communities, one of  
14 the biggest roles the Commission is going to play in their  
15 work is to identify communities of interest throughout the  
16 state. And some of those communities are easier to find  
17 than others.

18 MS. AHMAD: Uh-hum.

19 CHAIR COE: How would you have the Commission go  
20 about identifying communities of interest, particularly  
21 those that may be harder to identify and locate?

22 MS. AHMAD: So, that job just got exponentially  
23 harder given our current climate. I think where we need to  
24 go to find communities of interest are those nontraditional  
25 avenues. So, we need to go faith-based leaders. We need

1 to go to synagogues, we need to go to temples, churches,  
2 mosques. We need to go to where the people are.

3 So, day-to-day jobs, we need to go to grocery  
4 stores, we need to advertise community meetings at local  
5 libraries and community centers.

6 There's a concept in statistics of selection bias  
7 and the folks who are going to show up to our community  
8 meetings will show up. It's the folks who are not in the  
9 room that we need to be able to find and locate.

10 So, we have a starting point, which is the folks  
11 who will show up to the meetings. I would suggest that we  
12 ask the folks in the room which voices are missing? Which  
13 voices are not here? Which voices couldn't make it to this  
14 meeting for whatever reason and start from there.

15 CHAIR COE: So, once you've found the  
16 communities, some may not be comfortable for one reason or  
17 another actually coming and engaging with the Commission,  
18 and sharing their perspectives on various issues. How  
19 would you go about having those particular groups feel  
20 comfortable to open up and provide perspective to the  
21 Commission?

22 MS. AHMAD: So, I think we're going to have to  
23 get creative in this manner. And I think I have a sense of  
24 what you're alluding to. For folks who are not a hundred  
25 percent comfortable coming into this type of environment,

1 more likely than not they have a leader or a community  
2 leader, a community role model that is comfortable coming  
3 into such an environment, or who is familiar with this type  
4 of environment.

5 I would suggest that we tap into that person. We  
6 make sure that that person understands that our goal is to  
7 make sure everyone's voices are heard. And asking that  
8 person to play the role of community leader and make sure  
9 that we hear the voices that couldn't make it to the space.

10 CHAIR COE: So, hearing your talk and thinking  
11 about your educational background as an epidemiologist, and  
12 within the current context of life today, do you think that  
13 considering the way things are currently, the current  
14 situation, that if you were to serve on the Commission you  
15 would have a unique responsibility given your expertise, in  
16 how they go about the business?

17 MS. AHMAD: I think so. And I would hold that  
18 true to the rest of the Commissioners as well. As a public  
19 servant and as someone who's held community meetings,  
20 attended community meetings for a number of years, we never  
21 go into these community meetings with just our agenda item.  
22 We also come in with resources that community may need.  
23 Oftentimes the public doesn't know where to contact and  
24 what agency to contact for mental health services, or  
25 services for food, or those sorts of things.

1           So, I think my particular commitment to public  
2 health is going to play a unique role in this Commission,  
3 in the work moving forward. The way things are going is  
4 scary and I understand the public concern around it. And I  
5 think my role will have to also be able to communicate with  
6 the public that yes, there are some uncertainties moving  
7 forward. We are doing the best job. Folks are working  
8 around the clock. There are precautions that we've  
9 outlined. There are best practices that we know our local,  
10 and federal agencies, and state agencies as well are taking  
11 action. And kind of elevate that how this work can relate  
12 to potentially preventing or alleviating any future,  
13 similar situation. And I believe that this work is  
14 directly linked to that.

15           CHAIR COE: Okay, thank you. If you were to be  
16 appointed to the Commission, which aspects of that role do  
17 you think that you would enjoy the most and be very  
18 successful at? And, conversely, which aspects of the role  
19 do you think you might perhaps struggle with a little bit?

20           MS. AHMAD: I think the part that I would enjoy  
21 the most is listening to stories. I would love to go out  
22 into different communities, learning about California,  
23 learn how different things operate. Being from the Bay  
24 Area, I can call an Uber. I was listening to another  
25 interview last week, and he mentioned that there's only one

1 Uber and that kind of shocked me a little bit.

2 So, I think I would really enjoy moving around  
3 California and looking, and learning from different  
4 communities to see how other folks live. And recognize  
5 that these folks and these communities are a fabric of  
6 California and they're what make California California, and  
7 the best state in the country, in my opinion.

8 CHAIR COE: Okay, thank you. I don't have any  
9 additional questions.

10 Ms. Dickison?

11 VICE CHAIR DICKISON: Good morning, Ms. Ahmad.

12 MS. AHMAD: I didn't mention the thing that I  
13 would struggle with.

14 CHAIR COE: Oh, you're right about that. I  
15 apologize.

16 MS. AHMAD: Sorry. Similar to what we were  
17 talking about previously, I think what I would struggle  
18 with is elevating this work and the importance of this work  
19 in the context of our reality, and also being able to  
20 balance sensitivity. We will be going into communities  
21 that will still be facing the impacts of what is happening  
22 today. So, recognizing where we would have to step up and  
23 recognizing where we need to take a step back, and what  
24 role we're going to play in community healing moving  
25 forward.



1 CHAIR COE: Okay, thank you. Now, we'll turn the  
2 time over to Ms. Dickison.

3 VICE CHAIR DICKISON: Good morning, Ms. Ahmad.  
4 In your first essay you talked about your grandmother's  
5 experience. And you talk about how the journey led to  
6 mistrust in the political system and shed light on the  
7 corruption and greed that was entrenched in that.

8 How will your grandmother's experience -- how has  
9 that -- her experience influenced you?

10 MS. AHMAD: It's influenced me immensely. She --  
11 because of the political system from where she grew up, she  
12 never really had a home. The only home she knew, she was  
13 removed from.

14 So, when I think about her experience and I think  
15 about where I am as a California native, if someone were to  
16 come to my door and say you can't live in California  
17 anymore, I would be absolutely brokenhearted.

18 So, I think the years -- and my grandmother lived  
19 with me her whole life -- or, my whole life, I should say,  
20 since she came to the states. And I think what I took from  
21 the countless stories and obstacles that she's had to face  
22 is that we're not too different from her reality. There  
23 are still people out here in California who are fearful of  
24 whether they're still going to be here tomorrow. There are  
25 people who don't trust the government. There's people who

1 don't think we're doing the best that we can do.

2           And a part of my choosing to be a public servant  
3 was to correct that misperception. And I think being in  
4 the position that I am in now, I'm able to talk to my  
5 community and say, hey, I work for the government and this  
6 is what we're doing to help communities. And kind of  
7 alleviate some of that tension, some of that mistrust.

8           I don't know how the future will look like moving  
9 forward from current events. But I do know that I myself  
10 can play the role that I have been playing in kind of  
11 bridging that gap between community and government. And I  
12 would expect my fellow Commissioners, by virtue of being  
13 interested in this opportunity also would do that.

14           VICE CHAIR DICKISON: You also talked about your  
15 own experience as a first generation Muslim American woman  
16 of color living with multiple sclerosis. So, how has your  
17 own experience influenced your perspective on the needs of  
18 communities and their preference for a representative, and  
19 what role their representatives should play?

20           MS. AHMAD: I think my intersectional identities  
21 have definitely shed light on that. And it's been more of  
22 a stepwise approach to understanding this concept in my  
23 mind. So, I mean I was born this color, so I've always  
24 experienced living in this color. I was born a woman. I  
25 identify as a woman. So, those certain experiences have

1 followed me throughout life.

2           Some of these things are more recent. I'm  
3 recently practicing hijab. I was diagnosed with MS in  
4 2016. And just the differences in our culture that I have  
5 been sometimes fortunately, and sometimes unfortunately  
6 exposed to for folks who have different backgrounds.

7           And I can draw on one example specifically with  
8 MS. Under some guidance in the laws it's considered a  
9 disability, but clearly I walked in here. So, there are  
10 some nuances into how on paper I would be categorized  
11 versus how I live my life. And I think that this has shed  
12 a light in terms of what communities may need, if they're  
13 also experiencing something that may be invisible.

14           There are certain leadership qualities that  
15 they're looking for. There are certain folks who they  
16 would get behind, who would advocate for people who are  
17 experiencing things that may not be visible to the naked  
18 eye. I know that has definitely changed my perspective on  
19 who I would support and who is actually cognizant of the  
20 differing backgrounds of communities.

21           So, I expect that my learning will definitely  
22 continue throughout the years. I would hope so and I would  
23 want that moving forward. But to this date, my  
24 intersectional identities follow me and I will carry that  
25 into the work of the Commission to understand that I may

1 not know the whole picture just by looking at someone, and  
2 walking in with that mindset.

3 VICE CHAIR DICKISON: Thank you. You mentioned a  
4 while ago that you've traveled for your volunteer work, I  
5 believe you said.

6 MS. AHMAD: Uh-hum.

7 VICE CHAIR DICKISON: And that some of those  
8 experiences helped you appreciate California's diversity  
9 even more. Can you talk a little bit about what experience  
10 it was that made you appreciate California?

11 MS. AHMAD: So, it was actually when I travel  
12 outside of California. So, I visited internationally.  
13 I've been to Baksan, which is where my parents are from,  
14 and Malaysia. I've done some work with the Truth  
15 Initiative, which is a DC-based nonprofit, and their  
16 service area is the whole of the United States, in the  
17 realm of tobacco control. So, I traveled quite a bit with  
18 them to different states.

19 And it's the feeling of when the plane lands in  
20 San Jose Airport and I'm like, ah, I'm home. And that  
21 feeling became more and more apparent as I traveled across  
22 the country. California is just a unique place. We have  
23 so many different types of people here. We have different  
24 types of backgrounds, cultures, food, language, music. We  
25 are the state of innovation. We are the state of -- and we

1 birth new technology.

2 I haven't seen the progress that I would like to  
3 see in various social, economic, cultural areas that I have  
4 in California anywhere else. Yes, we have our issues. No  
5 state is issue free. But time and time again we're just  
6 ahead of the game.

7 And this process, this work proves that once  
8 again we're ahead of the game.

9 VICE CHAIR DICKISON: Thank you. So, you also  
10 talk about advocacy that you do for health equity, and  
11 you've talked about advocating for different groups. What  
12 do you see the role of the Commission in advocacy and in  
13 adjudication?

14 MS. AHMAD: So, in education, I can tackle that  
15 one first. I think the role of the Commission, in the  
16 context of our work we would be tasked with educating the  
17 public on the basics of gerrymandering. The basics of, you  
18 know, cracking and packing, and the concepts within drawing  
19 lines and how that would influence the individual person.

20 I think there's still a sense of confusion about  
21 what this all means, why this work is important, and why  
22 this work came to the people and left the Legislature. And  
23 I think we as a Commission would have to do our part in  
24 educating the public in this.

25 And I see multiple reasons as to why. One, just

1 so that our communities are educated and they're aware that  
2 this is how California does things and they can, you know,  
3 domino effect educate their people as well.

4 And then, also, as an avenue to think about the  
5 future. In ten years this is going to happen again and  
6 what a better time to advocate and educate the public about  
7 this process, than when we're completing the process. And  
8 so, I think those are some important areas that I would  
9 advocate and educate in.

10 VICE CHAIR DICKISON: So, based on your answer  
11 your -- that you believe the Commission's role in advocacy  
12 has to do with the process, advocating for the process?

13 MS. AHMAD: Yes, advocating for the process.  
14 Advocating for engagement from the public in the process,  
15 and trusting the process, and trusting the people that you  
16 all select for completing the project.

17 VICE CHAIR DICKISON: Okay, thank you. In your  
18 other relevant material you also talked about your  
19 participation will inspire people like you to be active in  
20 the government systems. And then, you also talked about  
21 that you intend to use social media to increase awareness  
22 of the Commission and its goals.

23 What do you think the appropriate amount of  
24 social media use for the Commission would be?

25 MS. AHMAD: I think, personally, I would leave my

1 opinions out of it. I think that's just a virtue of  
2 serving on the Commission is to leave personal opinions out  
3 of it. When I say using social media, I'm thinking more  
4 along the lines of advertising community meetings,  
5 communicating if there's cancellations, scheduling changes,  
6 advertising the websites in which we would be posting  
7 updated information, those sorts of things. So, less of  
8 like personal opinions and more of informational.

9 I do believe that there is a population that gets  
10 their information from social media and it would be a  
11 mistake if we weren't readily available and present on that  
12 platform.

13 VICE CHAIR DICKISON: Okay, thank you. Can you  
14 tell us about some of the different concerns in the  
15 communities within the Central Coast or Santa Clara County  
16 that you're aware of?

17 MS. AHMAD: Yeah. So, I actually have family out  
18 in Fresno and the Merced area, so I have some exposure to  
19 the inland. And then, Central Coast area should be South  
20 Bay. I think one of the biggest community concerns right  
21 now is probably the housing crisis, availability of  
22 affordable housing, access to that housing. There's also a  
23 concern of gentrification occurring. In the Bay, they're  
24 often referred to as transplants, so folks who came from  
25 elsewhere for job opportunities, primarily in the tech

1 industry, and the displacement that's occurring for  
2 communities that have been in the area for generations.  
3 That concern exists. But there's also an appreciation for  
4 the new technology, the new ways in which our innovation is  
5 bettering lives in our area as well. So, I think there is  
6 definitely, you know, some concerns, but there's also an  
7 appreciation for what's changed in our community.

8 Does that answer your question?

9 VICE CHAIR DICKISON: So, you also mentioned  
10 Fresno. So, thinking about housing in Santa Clara versus  
11 Fresno --

12 MS. AHMAD: Uh-hum.

13 VICE CHAIR DICKISON: -- do you think those  
14 concerns would be the same, would be different?

15 MS. AHMAD: I think -- this is just based off of  
16 the family that I have, so it's not inclusive of everyone  
17 in that area, in the Fresno Inland area. I think there are  
18 some similarities and there's also some differences in the  
19 concerns related to housing.

20 From the South Bay Area it's primarily even  
21 having access to housing, finding housing. And then an  
22 added layer on top of that would be the prices and the  
23 affordability of housing.

24 From what I've heard from my family in the  
25 Fresno/Merced area, there's more availability of housing,



1 but they have different socioeconomic issues that that  
2 community is dealing with that can impact overall  
3 attainment of housing.

4 MS. LE TELLIER: Five minutes.

5 VICE CHAIR DICKISON: Thank you.

6 So, just based on this conversation that we have  
7 just had, what do you believe are some of the influences  
8 that are -- that can influence someone's preference when  
9 they're looking for representation and how do you think  
10 that's going to differ in the various regions throughout  
11 the state?

12 MS. AHMAD: I think some of the things that would  
13 influence preference for folks' representation is -- or,  
14 are the issues that are present in their community.  
15 Oftentimes we all look for leaders who speak to us.  
16 They're speaking to the whole, but we want to feel like  
17 they're speaking to us and the issues that matter to us.

18 In terms of the second part of your question, you  
19 asked differences, right?

20 VICE CHAIR DICKISON: Yeah, how do you think  
21 that's going to differ for the various regions throughout  
22 the state?

23 MS. AHMAD: I think depending on what the issue  
24 is, the social issue within a given community, it's  
25 definitely going to differ. For the Bay Area, again it's

1 probably something around housing, livable wages, those  
2 sorts of issues.

3 For the Inland area, it might be something  
4 completely different related to access to water, access to  
5 agricultural goods. So, I expect it to differ amongst  
6 different communities and I'm looking forward to learning  
7 from the communities.

8 VICE CHAIR DICKISON: Okay. The first eight  
9 Commissioners are selected randomly and then they select  
10 the second -- or, the next six. What would you be looking  
11 for if you were one of the first eight and you were tasked  
12 with selecting the next six, what would you be looking for  
13 in those Commissioners?

14 MS. AHMAD: So, as an evaluator, my evaluator hat  
15 goes on. I would look at the pool of the eight randomly  
16 selected Commissioners. I would evaluate the skills and  
17 attributes that those eight have, identify where the gaps  
18 lie. And then, look at the remaining six spots to be for  
19 those folks who would fill those gaps. All the while  
20 considering the original criteria that the Voters FIRST Act  
21 outlined, so diversity in gender, diversity in  
22 socioeconomic status, diversity in racial ethnic  
23 backgrounds as well. So, that's where I would start.

24 VICE CHAIR DICKISON: Uh-hum. What would you  
25 ultimately like to see the Commission accomplish?

1 MS. AHMAD: I think ultimately I would love to  
2 see the Commission accomplish the goal of mapping fair and  
3 equitable maps that are created with the input of  
4 community. Maps that we can stand behind, and support, and  
5 confidently say that these maps represent California and we  
6 were able to get input from Californians for these maps.  
7 That would be the gold standard outcome for this work.

8 VICE CHAIR DICKISON: Thank you. I don't have  
9 further questions right now.

10 CHAIR COE: Thank you. Mr. Belnap?

11 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: Yeah, thank you for being  
12 here. How many years have you been with the Santa Clara  
13 County Public Health Department?

14 MS. AHMAD: I will be four years in August.

15 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: Okay. And what's your  
16 role?

17 MS. AHMAD: I am the research and evaluation lead  
18 for the Tobacco Free Communities Program.

19 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: Okay. So, what are some of  
20 the things that you've done in that role that demonstrate  
21 your ability to be impartial?

22 MS. AHMAD: Well, as a tobacco control advocate  
23 clearly I have a bias. Clearly there's a stand that I take  
24 when it comes to tobacco control issues.

25 However, being in a public serving role there is

1 still a sense of listening to community, and hearing  
2 community. So, every day is a balance between my own  
3 personal opinions on this issue and impartiality. I think  
4 that's something that we all have to carry as government  
5 employees.

6 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: So, your personal opinion  
7 on the issue is that people shouldn't smoke? Is that --

8 MS. AHMAD: Yes, my personal opinion is that  
9 tobacco should not exist.

10 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: Okay.

11 MS. AHMAD: Yeah.

12 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: And your job is to try to  
13 get tobacco use to go down?

14 MS. AHMAD: Yes. My job is more to educate and  
15 inform the public on the harms related to tobacco use. We  
16 respond to jurisdictions who come to the county level  
17 asking for either data or information related to use rates  
18 of different types of tobacco products in their  
19 communities.

20 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: Yeah. And that brings me  
21 back to so who in the community are you listening to where  
22 you're having to balance and be impartial, who -- what are  
23 you talking about?

24 MS. AHMAD: These are the people who would be  
25 impacted the most financially, which are retailers, and

1 clerks. These folks come to community meetings. They come  
2 to city council meetings and express their concerns about,  
3 you know, the current policies that may be on the table of,  
4 you know, prohibiting the sale of flavored tobacco  
5 products, or increasing the age to 21 to purchase tobacco  
6 products.

7 I think that there is validity in some of these  
8 arguments in which their livelihood will be impacted if  
9 such a policy goes through. So, practicing the  
10 impartiality of being able to listen to these comments,  
11 understand these comments, and look at the issue as complex  
12 as it is in our society clearly displays my ability to be  
13 impartial.

14 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: Don't you want their  
15 livelihoods to go away or at least that portion of their  
16 livelihoods, this selling of tobacco to go away?

17 MS. AHMAD: I mean I would -- ideally, I would  
18 like it that their livelihood is not impacted at all. That  
19 they find another alternative product like an apple, or  
20 fruits and vegetables, or those sorts of things that can  
21 supplement the loss that they may feel from the  
22 restrictions of selling tobacco products.

23 In California, we are hovering around a 10 to 11  
24 percent adult tobacco use rate of combustible cigarettes.  
25 We're at the all-time low in recorded history for our

1 state. In talking to clerks, which we do quite often,  
2 we've been yelled at many times. And the opposite of like,  
3 yes, keep up this work. All from clerks or owners of  
4 retail shops.

5 I think there is a place where we can come  
6 together and help our communities thrive without the use of  
7 tobacco products and without the sale of these harmful  
8 products.

9 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: Okay. So, looking over  
10 your -- thinking to your work experience, also your life  
11 experience, your volunteer experience, can you think of any  
12 other examples where you've had to exercise impartiality?

13 MS. AHMAD: Yes. So, as an instructor, I'll hone  
14 in on a very memorable example from my teaching days.  
15 There were two students who were in conflict with one  
16 another in a group project. And as the instructor, I  
17 cannot, and I could not find it in my heart to take one  
18 side over another because both students were feeling hurt  
19 and unheard.

20 So, my role was to listen to both of these  
21 students. So, what I did specifically was meet with each  
22 of these students individually to hear their side of the  
23 story. And then, based off of their stories I was able to  
24 identify where there was a very apparent miscommunication  
25 that occurred.

1           So, then I asked each of those students if it was  
2 okay to meet as a group, and they both agreed. So, the  
3 three of us, myself and my two students, we met as a group.  
4 And I highlighted that, you know, this whole issue came up  
5 because of XYZ that had occurred in the communication  
6 channel between you two. And in reality, there's no  
7 conflict here. You all just didn't receive the information  
8 the way the other person intended.

9           They didn't end up being best friends after the  
10 course, but they were able to successfully complete the  
11 group project, which I was really proud of them for.

12           PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: Okay. So, in your work you  
13 prepare evaluation reports. What's an evaluation report?

14           MS. AHMAD: So, it's a little different than the  
15 academic setting of a research report. So, an evaluation  
16 report, the intention is to look at a type of program, or  
17 policy and see if it's actually working.

18           So, in my specific role at the county, an example  
19 would be a smoke-free, multi-unit housing policy that had  
20 passed in Sunnyvale, California. So, my role was to look  
21 at the impacts of this policy. So, before the policy was  
22 adopted and enforced I hired volunteers to go out and do an  
23 impact assessment of different multi-unit housing  
24 complexes. So, gathering data on where there's tobacco  
25 litter, where there's signage before the policy was

1 enforced and adopted.

2 And then, once the policy had been in place for  
3 six months these same volunteers would go out to the same  
4 multi-unit housing complexes to measure the same  
5 indicators. And then, we would look at the pre/post to  
6 determine if the policy was having an impact.

7 Of course there's a lot of confounding factors  
8 that may play a role. There's culture that plays a role.  
9 There's weather of the time of measurement. There's, you  
10 know, political will at that time. So, there's a lot of  
11 different factors that would play a role in the outcome.  
12 But essentially the evaluation report would encompass all  
13 of these different things that could influence the outcome,  
14 as well as the actual evaluation of such a policy.

15 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: So, your job in that  
16 particular element of it is to analyze whether particular  
17 tobacco cessation policies are working or not or --

18 MS. AHMAD: Yes, uh-hum.

19 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: -- to what level they're  
20 working. Okay. You mentioned that you incorporate public  
21 input into those reports.

22 MS. AHMAD: Uh-hum.

23 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: Why is that necessary and  
24 then how do you obtain that public input?

25 MS. AHMAD: So, in our county we actually have a



1 Tobacco Free Community Coalition. And this coalition is  
2 made up of representatives from different CBOs, community-  
3 based organizations, as well as community residents.

4 So, prior to the submission of any report we  
5 would bring that report to these Tobacco Free Coalition  
6 meetings for input from the folks at the meetings. And  
7 sometimes, you know, it depends on the folks who show up  
8 for that particular meeting. Sometimes there's very little  
9 input. Sometimes there's things that I even hadn't thought  
10 of that need to be incorporated in the report. So, based  
11 off of the feedback I would take it back, make edits,  
12 revise, bring it back to the coalition for final input  
13 before submission to the state.

14 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: Okay, thank you.  
15 Submission to the state. Who does it go to?

16 MS. AHMAD: California Tobacco Control Program.

17 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: And is that with the  
18 Department of Public Health?

19 MS. AHMAD: Yes. Yeah.

20 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: Okay. All right, that was  
21 it, just curious.

22 The California Youth Advocacy Network, I saw you  
23 refer to that in your application. What is that group?

24 MS. AHMAD: So, it's a tobacco education and  
25 advocacy group based out of Sacramento. And they work with

1 college students to increase advocacy and awareness of  
2 tobacco related issues in California, specifically.

3           During my time with CYAN I was at San Jose State  
4 University. I worked with them to help adopt and educate  
5 our San Jose State community about the harms of tobacco  
6 control. I also had the opportunity to go out to Long  
7 Beach for the CSU Board of Trustees meeting to present to  
8 all of the presidents of the CSU system. And their overall  
9 objective is to continue to increase awareness and  
10 education about this issue in California, specifically.

11           PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: And are you a volunteer or  
12 are you representing Santa Clara Public Health Department?  
13 Like what's your role in that?

14           MS. AHMAD: Within CYN?

15           PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: Yeah, how did you get into  
16 the network?

17           MS. AHMAD: Oh, yeah.

18           PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: Is it through your work or  
19 through volunteer.

20           MS. AHMAD: So, this was pre my working days.

21           PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: Okay.

22           MS. AHMAD: This was when I was still an  
23 undergraduate student. I found an announcement for an  
24 internship opportunity at San Jose State University, so I  
25 applied for that internship opportunity. And through that

1 internship CYAN was -- I'm getting into the weeds of this.  
2 CYAN was contracted by Santa Clara County Public Health to  
3 do tobacco control-related projects in the county. So,  
4 that's how I found them.

5 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: Okay.

6 MS. AHMAD: Once my commitment with the  
7 internship ended, an opportunity opened up at CYAN to  
8 continue the work.

9 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: Okay. Are you still with  
10 CYAN?

11 MS. AHMAD: No, I'm not.

12 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: No, okay.

13 MS. AHMAD: I have aged out.

14 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: Okay. And you mentioned  
15 some of your travels. I didn't hear, I didn't catch them  
16 all. But how much did you travel as part of CYAN?

17 MS. AHMAD: Within California specifically?

18 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: Yeah, within California.

19 MS. AHMAD: So, I would travel to different  
20 college campuses. So, Sacramento, Fresno, Long Beach. I  
21 think we went to L.A. This was quite some time ago. And  
22 that was in -- all in the realm of tobacco control with  
23 CYAN.

24 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: And mostly folks in the  
25 college campus environment?

1 MS. AHMAD: Uh-hum, yes, it was college campuses.

2 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: All right, I want to return  
3 to a statement you made that I was interested in hearing  
4 more about. I think it might have been on the tail end of  
5 one of your answers to Mr. Coe's question. I want you to  
6 expand on how the Commission's work is linked to  
7 communities being prepared for public health crises?

8 MS. AHMAD: So, this Commission will be tasked  
9 with drawing these lines and all based off of the Census.  
10 And as I'm sure you all know, the implications of the  
11 Census and federal funding, and how that feeds into drawing  
12 these lines, and how that will directly feed into funding  
13 at the local level. And funding is being cited as one of  
14 the biggest barriers and obstacles in what we are seeing  
15 today. I should say lack thereof funding.

16 So, I think drawing that link between the work of  
17 the Commission and how this will directly impact our  
18 ability as public health officials to alleviate something  
19 in the future can help elevate the importance of this work  
20 in a community that may be very much so concerned with  
21 other things.

22 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: Yeah.

23 MS. AHMAD: Yeah.

24 PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: All right, thank you. I  
25 have no further questions.

1 CHAIR COE: Okay, Mr. Dawson.

2 MR. DAWSON: Thank you, Mr. Coe.

3 Ms. Ahmad, just sort of following up on Mr.  
4 Belnap's question. It brought to mind a question for me.  
5 As you know, the Census work is about to begin. What  
6 impact, if any, do you think that the COVID-19 situation  
7 might have on the Census work?

8 MS. AHMAD: So, I have been monitoring just my  
9 own social media channels. And I tend to -- isolate one  
10 social media channel for all my like political stuff. And  
11 two weeks ago I was seeing a lot of Census outreach and now  
12 that's been varied. And COVID-19-related news stories and  
13 headlines.

14 I think because the Census is online and folks  
15 are home there should be an extra incentive to just, you  
16 know, complete it.

17 However, given, you know, the back and forth  
18 about the Census at the federal level and what we saw  
19 earlier related to certain types of questions being  
20 included, there may still be a fear from that aspect in  
21 taking the Census.

22 I think we're in an uphill battle. A battle  
23 that, you know, as public servants we've seen many times  
24 before. So, I'm not afraid of that. But there's  
25 definitely going to be a lot of work to educate and inform

1 communities that although we're in the midst of a pandemic,  
2 we still have to take the Census. It's of utmost  
3 importance for the future of our state and of our local  
4 communities.

5 MR. DAWSON: So, you talked a little bit about  
6 the possibility of distrust of government institutions and  
7 programs, and you talked about your grandmother's  
8 experience. Does the Commission have a role in improving  
9 public trust in government institutions?

10 MS. AHMAD: I think the Commission does, as we  
11 are extensions of the government. I think our work is  
12 dependent, if not led by communities of interest and  
13 communities across California. If the Commission were an  
14 all-star commission, we'd go out in a community and there's  
15 no trust from that community and nobody shows up, or nobody  
16 provides public comment it makes our work significantly  
17 harder.

18 So, I think we would have a role in kind of  
19 building that bridge between us as the Commission and the  
20 community, and help understand -- help folks understand  
21 that the whole reason this Commission exists is because the  
22 people wanted it to exist. And kind of highlighting that  
23 although we are an entity of the government, we're an  
24 extension of the government, by far, you know, the best one  
25 in the country, we are here because you asked us to be

1 here. And I think that's what we need to highlight moving  
2 forward.

3 MR. DAWSON: Do you mind if I ask you, how did  
4 you get interested in tobacco as a public health concern in  
5 the first place?

6 MS. AHMAD: It was an accident. Tobacco control  
7 found me. And this was back when I was still at community  
8 college. I didn't really get involved much. I think I was  
9 a political science tutor for two quarters at De Anza. But  
10 aside from that, I didn't really know what we're supposed  
11 to do after high school. And I ended up at community  
12 college because that's what my friends were doing. My  
13 parents don't have a college education. My brother, older  
14 brother dropped out. So, I was the first in my family to  
15 go on this adventure.

16 And I made a promise to myself that if I am one  
17 of the ones chosen to be accepted to San Jose State, I  
18 would make most of that opportunity. And within that was  
19 to apply for different internships.

20 And when I applied for the tobacco control  
21 internship at San Jose State, I learned more about the  
22 topic, got really invested in it. And since then, doors  
23 have just been opening in that area and I'm super blessed  
24 for that.

25 MR. DAWSON: Okay, thank you. I wanted to ask

1 you a couple questions. In your essay on impartiality you  
2 talk about going to public meetings as representing the  
3 health department. You say: Oftentimes at community  
4 meetings there are folks present who express political  
5 ideas and affiliations I personally disagree with.  
6 However, we're gathered at these community meetings with a  
7 common goal. The common goal serves as a reminder of the  
8 purpose of the meeting.

9 I'm not really sure, what is the common goal of  
10 the meeting?

11 MS. AHMAD: So, it depends on which meeting. So,  
12 if it's a community meeting where we have different  
13 community-based organizations or just community members  
14 come out, when -- in our particular program we would ask  
15 the group what is the goal of this meeting, what is the  
16 purpose. And really try to authenticate a community-driven  
17 effort.

18 So, in those particular meetings folks might say,  
19 you know, I've been experiencing an uptick in smoke  
20 drifting into my apartment and I want this meeting to focus  
21 on that issue and how we can address that issue. So,  
22 that's just an example of that type of setting.

23 When it comes to city council meetings or board  
24 of supervisor meetings obviously those are predetermined.  
25 And in those cases it's listening to public comments from



1 the community members related to the issue that I work in  
2 and being able to digest all of those comments.

3 And more recently I've been really exploring this  
4 idea of how public comments are what the communities and  
5 public are concerned about. And if they're concerned about  
6 it maybe there's gaps in research, and maybe there's areas  
7 that we can improve on to answer those questions or  
8 concerns before folks even come to the microphone.

9 MR. DAWSON: You talked about being yelled at by  
10 clerks. I assume in a store. Have you ever been yelled at  
11 in a public meeting?

12 MS. AHMAD: No, I have not.

13 MR. DAWSON: And if you were to be yelled at in a  
14 public meeting, how would you handle that?

15 MS. AHMAD: I think we're in a very unique time  
16 where there's lots of training material online about how to  
17 handle yourself in a public meeting and as a government  
18 employee. So, I think I would walk in with the  
19 understanding that the person who is yelling at me through  
20 this microphone is really upset, and they're really upset  
21 about something. And I'm choosing to be in this seat where  
22 I have made a commitment to help this individual.

23 So, I think the first step would just be  
24 recognizing and helping that person recognize that I'm  
25 listening and you will be heard by me. And then, moving

1 forward from there. Oftentimes that moment is out of fear,  
2 or out of concern for something deeper than what we just  
3 see on the surface level. And everyone deserves to be  
4 heard, even if their tone is a little bit more elevated.

5 MR. DAWSON: Thank you. One final question. In  
6 one of your responses to one of the standard questions, you  
7 used a term that caught my ear, cultural humility.

8 MS. AHMAD: Uh-hum.

9 MR. DAWSON: I was wondering if you could define  
10 that term and expand on how that would inform your work on  
11 the Commission, if you're selected?

12 MS. AHMAD: Yeah, so cultural humility is a  
13 concept in which one recognizes different cultures and how  
14 different cultures interact and interplay in our  
15 communities, and in our systems.

16 So, I think where I would take that concept into  
17 the different communities is in the realm of understanding  
18 that I'm not going to be a familiar face to everyone in the  
19 room. My cultural practices, the way I choose to live my  
20 life is not going to be identical to everyone else in the  
21 room and vice-versa.

22 MR. DAWSON: Uh-hum.

23 MS. AHMAD: So, understanding that, you know,  
24 folks have different approaches, different ways to handle  
25 things, to communicate is going to be really imperative as

1 we move forward.

2           So, for example some cultures don't handshake.  
3 They'll put their hand on their heart and kind of bow. So,  
4 understanding that that's not in any way, shape or form  
5 being disrespectful to someone whose culture is to  
6 handshake, and understanding those differences going into  
7 these very diverse communities is going to be very helpful.  
8 Now, everyone's culture in regards to handshakes should be  
9 elbows.

10           MR. DAWSON: Okay. We have 16 minutes left in  
11 the 90-minute period. Do any of the Panel Members have any  
12 follow-up questions?

13           CHAIR COE: Ms. Dickison?

14           VICE CHAIR DICKISON: I do not.

15           CHAIR COE: Mr. Belnap?

16           PANEL MEMBER BELNAP: I do not.

17           CHAIR COE: I have no follow-up questions.

18           MR. DAWSON: Okay. Ms. Ahmad, at this point I  
19 would like to ask you if you'd like to make a closing  
20 statement?

21           MS. AHMAD: Sure. So, I heard about this  
22 opportunity to apply through the radio. And when I heard  
23 it, the way the advertisement was framed, as in Shape  
24 California's Future, it really caught my eye. And that's  
25 because California's future is actually my future. It's a

1 future that hopefully one day I may raise children in.  
2 It's the future that my parents will age in. It's the  
3 future that my friends, family, neighbors are going to live  
4 and thrive in. So, I'm just very humbled and honored that  
5 I've made it this far in this process. And it would be an  
6 absolute honor to serve California in this manner. So,  
7 thank you.

8 MR. DAWSON: Thank you.

9 CHAIR COE: Okay, thank you, Ms. Ahmad for being  
10 here today.

11 Our next interview is scheduled to begin at 1:15  
12 p.m., so we'll be in recess until 1:14.

13 (Off the record at 12:00 p.m.)

14 (On the record at 1:14 p.m.)

15 CHAIR COE: I'd like to bring this meeting back  
16 to order.

17 At this time I'd like to welcome Mr. Steven  
18 Boilard to the table for his interview. I'd like to turn  
19 the time over to Mr. Dawson for the five standard  
20 questions, please.

21 MR. DAWSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

22 Mr. Boilard, I'm going to ask you five standard  
23 questions that the Panel has asked each applicant to  
24 respond to. Are you ready, sir?

25 MR. BOILARD: Yes.