

Personality/Profile article example

His hair is long, but not so long as the scraggly gray beard covering part of a T-shirt that reads, "People are entitled to know what's in their food. We want labeling on genetically modified food."

Standing in the Board of Supervisors chamber in San Francisco's City Hall, Jim Dorenkott isn't your ordinary political aide. Then again, Dorenkott's boss, Board President, Matt Gonzalez, isn't your ordinary politician.

After all, how many other leaders in American government proudly cite Marx as a defining influence? Or switched from a major party (Democratic) to a minor one (Green) between a general election and a runoff? Or think that San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom-you know, the one who got all that national attention for allowing gay marriages-really needs to become more progressive?

Sure, this is San Francisco, where conservatives have about as much success as a pitcher throwing a fastball to Barry Bonds. But even against this liberal backdrop, Gonzalez stands out, his unabashed support for workers, immigrants and minorities making him the latest darling of the left.

And he's not about to apologize for it.

"I'm perfectly comfortable with the label of progressive or discussing Marxism or something like that," he says. "I'm not a Marxist or a communist or anything like that. But I do see incredible shortcomings in American democracy."

His devotion to progressive causes helped him garner 47 percent of the vote in a mayoral runoff election against Newsom in December and nearly allowed him to become the first Green Party mayor of a major U.S. city. His supporters cite his unwavering commitment to that in which he believes as one of his great strengths.

"He's someone who believes in equal justice for all," says Victor Marquez, vice president of the nonprofit San Francisco Tomorrow, which lobbies on environmental and space-planning issues and endorsed Gonzalez in the mayoral race. "He's someone who's not afraid to tell the truth and speak the truth."

It's an approach Gonzalez, born in Texas in 1965, says he learned from his days in college at Columbia University in New York and law school at Stanford.

At Columbia, the egalitarian political theories of Karl Marx spoke to him. At Stanford, he says he studied case after case in which the judges interpreted laws in favor of large corporations at the expense of ordinary people.

"What's not being spoken about is the other reality," he says. "You've got judges who have donor lists during their campaigns who are heavily influenced by certain interest."

After graduating from Stanford in 1990, Gonzalez became a public defender. He failed in 1999 in his first attempt to become a supervisor but came back in 2000 and defeated Juanita Owens for the District 5 position, despite switching parties between the November general election and the December runoff.

He says he decided to make the switch after attending a rally outside a U.S. Senate debate in San Francisco. The major parties had kept the Green Party candidate from participating and exclusion that incensed Gonzalez and, he says, revealed some of the inconsistencies in the Democrat's message.

"For me it kind of all came together," he says, "And I realized I didn't want to be a member of a party that didn't want to debate other parties."

So while he firmly backs Newsom, widely seen as an extremely progressive democrat, for allowing gay marriages, he also notes the mayor's opposition to raising the city's minimum wage to \$8.50 as a sign that he doesn't support San Francisco's working class. Gonzalez also opposes Newsom's "Care Not Cash" policy, which aims to provide more housing for the homeless while giving them less money.

For their part, Newsom supporters say they respect Gonzalez but also recognize the need to compromise and appease different interests.

"Obviously...it was a very heated race," says Mishana Hosseinioun, who works in the mayor's press office. "[Newsom] is trying his very best to do what is best for everyone."

Hosseinioun adds that the mayor is trying to reach out to Gonzalez supporters by supporting gay marriage and convening a 33-person panel that will develop a plan to end chronic homelessness in the city within 10 years.

It's those sorts of progressive actions that convince Gonzalez his campaign for mayor and his progressive values still are having an impact.

And it's Gonzalez's dedication to standing by those values that makes volunteering as an unofficial third aide worthwhile, Dorenkott says. "It's just kind of an honor to be serving this guy."