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Interview with: Madison Nguyen

Interviewed by: Danelle Moon

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Moon:

Hi this Danelle Moon. Today's date is December 18, 2008 and today I am continuing my conversation with Madison Nguyen; one of the members of the San Jose City Council so we will begin our follow-up conversation.

Madison thank you again for seeing me a second time and allowing some follow-up questions on your interview from the last time we spoke. I think we had left off talking about the role of women in politics and how you look at your role in politics as a Vietnamese woman. I am interested in getting your perspective on where you think women are going in the political framework and then how ethnic minorities, not just women, integrate into that process and what virtues or values do they bring to that process.

Nguyen:

Absolutely. I think that the role of women having the opportunity to move up the political ladder or becoming more engaged in the political process has improved

tremendously. I would say probably in the last 5-6 years or so. Obviously, we have great leaders like Hillary Clinton who is leading the chart on both the national and international levels. That trickles down to women who want to engage in the political process at the state and local levels. We have wonderful women here in Silicon Valley who represent various positions on the school board, city council, supervisors and state assembly. I think that's great. So now, especially now, it's a great time for a woman to become more involved. And I think that as we start to see women emerge, in different political arenas, it's very encouraging for young people; for young women especially someone like myself to look at the journey that a lot of these women have gone through and look at the sacrifices they have made. You look at the challenges that they face and you take a little bit of that and try to incorporate that into your own life, your own political life. I think now it's just a good a time as any time to encourage women to be more politically engaged.

Moon:

Right. I think that's a really important point. And when you came to the class to talk about your experience I think you were very inspiring to all of the students.

Nguyen:

Thank you.

Moon:

So that was very cool and it was good for them to be able to see a young woman in politics and to be able to speak to some of the issues. I think your immigrant story in particular is really important. And in particular in this environment where we are such a diverse community and we have a lot of immigrants; first and second and third generation

students coming out of the Vietnamese community, East Asia, other countries. So I think that was really a great lesson. Now when we were talking last time, it was before the election. I'm just wondering what your reflections are on the success of the Obama campaign and where do you think we are going politically?

Nguyen:

Oh, well obviously, like a lot of Democrats in the valley or throughout the nation, I'm very ecstatic—the fact that Obama is now the President-elect. I think he ran a great campaign, a great grassroots effort on behalf of his campaign. I was and still am a big Hillary fan. I think that she has contributed tremendously in all facets of our society. So it's great that he appointed her as Secretary of State. I think it's a great move on his part to be able to bridge that so-called “rival” or “opposition” or “the opposing side”, rivals. I think it's great to bring her to the team given her international experience and her previous political experience.

I couldn't be more happy seeing an African-American president at this time. I think the change that he has been promoting in his campaign for the last eighteen really show well I can't speak for other people, but for myself, is that this is the kind of change that we have been craving for in a very long time. It is so great to look pass these notions of race, these notions of minority, these notions of how politics aligns itself with people who are more affluent, who are more connected to different parts of the world. And here you have a candidate, Obama, who grew up in a biracial family with very humble beginnings and so that gives people hope. At least it gives me hope that one day if I want to run for U.S. Senator that there is an opportunity there for me. And that's all you really need to

know in your mind. That there is hope and there is opportunity. You can work really hard to get to that place. So that in itself, even without having a lot of money or material things or the network around you, at least you know that there is a potential that it could happen. And that's a good feeling. So to have the Commander-In-Chief, your President, someone that you look up to coming from that kind of background— I think it's a great thing for a lot of young people.

Moon:

I think it is too and definitely it has brought a lot of hope to a lot of people and obviously by his success too. Now looking at where he is right now in terms of putting his team of cabinets together and all of that, there's been some criticism from the Hispanic community because he hasn't really made the leap of appointing ethnic cabinet members outside of Richardson. So I was just curious if you had any thoughts on his process of making these decisions on putting together his cabinet and looking at it as being a representation of the Clinton cabinet or the Washington insiders. Do you have any perspective on that?

Nguyen:

I do. And my perspective more or less coincides or aligns with the fact that there is going to be a lot of expectations from him and a lot of demands. And being the first colored President— you are going to be judged in so many different ways. Everyone has a different opinion about different things. You know, the mere fact that he appointed Richardson also made a lot of people within the Asian-American community very unsatisfied simply because of Richardson's involvement with the Mr. Lee's case a while back with the spy issue. We received a lot of emails going back and forth and I've been

reading a lot of blogs about how different various groups in the Asian-American community are unsatisfied with Obama's decision.

And so that alone created friction within the different ethnic groups. So here you are trying to promote diversity in his own cabinet and you are already getting hit from other minority groups. So you know it's tough. I think that the fact that he doesn't have a lot of experience in different areas—I think it's critical that he brings people who have this kind of expertise into his administration. Give him a chance. Let's see if these people—what I really appreciate and value about the Obama campaign and now his administration operates is that even though he is being perceived as someone who lacks experience in different areas, what he is able to do is to pull really good people together. It's good to have a good team together working for you. Running this country, it's not an easy thing to do. It's a very very very difficult task and that's the crucial part. The critical part is having good people who have different areas of expertise in different departments to help you lead this country. And I have faith that he can do that.

Moon:

I think you can see it in a similar light as the F.D.R. brain trust in putting together all of these really smart people to help address the economic depression of that time and trying to end it going into the war and everything else that came out of that era. So hopefully he'll be able to take some of the lessons from the New Deal and F.D.R.'s position on that without maybe packing the courts I'm not sure. I think it's very exciting. It's a very exciting time to be in Politics. So have you ever thought about once you—if you were to leave office or have you thought about teaching a class in Politics?

Nguyen:

Yes I have. I will probably teach a class on social political identity, something like that. Something that sort of brings in the perspective or the framework of Sociology in Politics. I think that they really go hand-in-hand. And regardless of what people say, “You can really merge the two. disciplines” I think that there is an opportunity for us to do that because as a Sociologist and I am sitting in this seat as an elected official, I see myself actually practicing different theories deriving from different sociological frameworks that I have learned—bringing that into the kind of work that I do more so than political theory. Maybe because I am operating at the local level and the kind of issues that I deal with on an everyday basis is very factual and it is very practical. And it takes in a lot of human emotions. Again, I am not at the state level or the national level so I don’t know if it will change once I get there , but I think at this local level there is more sociological frameworks that are being applied to the work that I do.

Moon:

Yes, I can see how—Actually I can see how History, PoliSci, Sociology, and Psychology really they all fit together as a social science looking at the political framework so that would be very interesting to see you teach at San Jose State. Now we were talking a lot about some of the dilemmas that you’ve faced in the last year in particular with the naming of the business district in District 7 and so I was wondering what the update is on your progress for your campaign?

Nguyen:

Well, we are doing very well. We just had a fundraising event last night here in downtown San Jose, at one of the downtown restaurants. The event was put together by a

group co-hosted by the Mayor and my Council colleagues. It was a great turn out. People said really great things, really nice things. I'm really happy with the way things are going. We have a campaign that is under way. We have volunteers right now working at the campaign office. We have people out walking in the neighborhoods. We have people making phone calls, putting up lawn signs. So a full operation has been underway for a while now. I feel very confident that we will be able to pull through this. But of course, it's going to take a lot of hard work. I am spending my holidays campaigning every single day; except for Christmas and New Year's because we really don't want to bother people on those days. I am not looking at having a holiday celebration this year.

What I talked about last night at the event was that it could be a blessing in disguise if I wanted to look at this in a positive way. That's just who I am. I like to look at things in a very positive manner because that's how I operate. I can't operate when I am completely stressed out and I can't operate when I am being so pessimistic—it's just not in me. And so what I said last night at the event with my opening remarks was that this whole controversy could be a blessing in disguise for me in so many different ways. Because one, it reconnected me with the voters in District 7. I have the opportunity to go out there and talk to them again. And talk about all the different things that I have done for the District in the last three years. It gives me a really good opportunity to meet new people in so many ways. People have contributed quite a bit to the campaign. So that in itself shows that people are very politically engaged in this issue. Whereas for me, all this time

I thought it was just a District 7 issue. But it's not— it's really becoming a citywide, countywide, and statewide issue.

I was up in Sacramento about two weeks ago. I talked to about 14 Assembly members. All 14 Assembly members knew exactly what's going on with this business District designation in San Jose and the recall—which to my surprise because I didn't realize that the news made it all the way up to Sacramento. We are planning to have an APA— some of the APA elected officials up in Sacramento are working to put together a fund raising event for me in Sacramento, sometime probably in mid-January. So the outreach is just starting to become more broadened than just here in San Jose. I think that it is a great thing because regardless of what happens with the results, the outcome of the election on March 3rd, I'd like to remain and continue my work in public service. And whether it is being an elected official or working for an elected official or doing some kind of work in that capacity, that's something that I could look forward to. So making this kind of network and friends is really good at this point.

Moon:

It also could serve as kind of a bounce—you can piggy back on that and go towards your next re-election campaign if the recall is successful I think that would be part of time to gather your next campaign as well. So well I wish you all the best on that. I'm sure that voters will make the right decision and keep you in office.

Nguyen:

I hope so, too.

Moon:

How does your family deal with all of these controversies?

Nguyen:

I'm not sure we talked about this the last time but if we did, just remind me so that we don't have to go through it again. About two or three weeks ago I had a press conference to kick off the campaign. The press conference was to introduce this new DVD compiles all the things that I have done for the District: building seven hundred affordable homes, creating more than one thousand jobs for residents in District 7, creating a couple of new parks, street improvements, you know all kinds of great things that we have done. And so they're all showcased in this one DVD. The press conference was to release that DVD but my dad made a surprise visit during that press conference. And that was the first time that he actually made a public appearance. And so when he—we didn't realize it until a couple of hours before when he told me that he was going to be there. And I thought "ok he's just coming to chime in the celebration that we are going to kick-off this campaign." But what he did, which was really emotional, was that when it was his turn to speak he came up and he talked about how he was very sad that this whole thing was happening to his own daughter. And he was speaking as a father, just kind of looking out for his daughter and wanting to protect his daughter because—simply because she wants to devote herself to being a public servant and doing public service work that she has to go through all this turmoil and made all these sacrifices. And the fact that people keep wanting to put out this rumor that I'm somehow connected with the Communist government—it's just not true. And so he made it really clear that our family is nowhere in any shape or form, is connected to the Vietnamese government.

As a matter of fact, that's the reason why we left Vietnam. When he left the country, he brought with him an original Vietnamese flag; a South Vietnamese flag. And it has a hole in it and everything, it's really authentic. I was really moved and I thought everyone, a hundred people in the audience were just completely moved by it. You could imagine he was a former soldier in the South Vietnamese army. And so to bring that flag with him when he escaped and imagine if he was caught—he would be in jail for the rest of his life. But he took that risk because he believed that if he was going to lose his homeland, his beloved country, he wanted to take his flag with him to keep a momentum so that he felt connected to the country somehow. And so hearing that story, seeing him go up and spoke his true feelings, was almost like—he didn't force himself to go up and do that—in a way, I just felt like because of what has happened in the last year and a half, it forced him to come out and do something that I know that he didn't really wanted to because he kept his flag from all of us for a long, long time.

He concluded his statement with a very emotional statement. He said, "I feel that this flag is something that I value for a very long time and now I want to pass it on to my daughter hoping that this will erase all these rumors that she's somehow connected with the Communist government—she isn't. So she has this flag with her for the rest of her life to show that she just wants to serve. So give her an opportunity to serve and give her time to learn, she is young." It was just very nice and so I thought "wow those are the kinds of things that I didn't realize that I have had to go through just because I wanted to serve the public." So people make different sacrifices in different ways and these are the kinds of things that I have to endure for a long time being a Vietnamese elected official serving a

very large Vietnamese constituent. The demands and the expectations might vary and might be different from the mainstream community. To a certain extent it is a lot harder to bear because it's something that I don't see all the time. I don't talk about it in my daily conversations with my friends because it's part of my culture but it's not part of my present day living environment. So when you see this kind of thing it's just very moving.

Moon:

Well that's a really warm story and so how did the audience react?

Nguyen:

People were just crying. A lot of women in the audience had tears flowing. My dad barely graduated from high school so he doesn't often exude confidence in being a public speaker. He spoke from the heart. People in the audience were very moved by his speech. This controversy was not only about me, but it also brought together people who cared deeply about me, as well.

Moon:

You mentioned the whole conflict over accusing you of being a Communist. Now is this a common sort of problem for Vietnamese elected officials?

Nguyen:

Yes. I see it all the time. People accusing each other of being Communist. Because the statement itself resonates so well with members in the Vietnamese community. Once you're being labeled as a Communist, as it has been in my case all the accomplishments that I have done didn't really matter anymore. Even if there is no evidence, the damage

has been done. I am shocked at how strong of a resonance it plays in the minds of Vietnamese-Americans.

Moon:

So the attacks are really within inside the community not coming from the outside landscape of—

Nguyen:

Oh absolutely. I don't think any non-Vietnamese would care whether or not you or someone is connected to the Communist government. As a matter of fact, when I talked to my non-Vietnamese friends about this topic, they would respond, "Well Madison, you studied History, you know during the 1940s 1945 when U.S. Senator McCarthy started putting people on the black list because he thought they were somehow connected with the Russian Communist government," I mean, it is so absurd, right?

Moon:

I know that is very interesting. I wonder at what point that kind of connection to the Chinese Communism and the problems in Vietnam will subside.

Nguyen:

I think it will take time. We obviously don't see that as much in the Chinese-American community anymore simply because they have been here a lot longer and I think that as time progresses we're starting to see that people are recognizing that that's part of a past history and this is— we are living in a very contemporary period. For Vietnamese-Americans or the Vietnamese community it's going to take time before people start to realize that that was then and this is now. I don't think there's much you can do except to wait for time to pass by. But you know there is also another thing for me and it's more

than just waiting for time to pass you by. I often question why my generation cannot do anything to change this— because I feel that as a Sociologist, we must forgive in order to move forward. If people could just think about that - yes, people make mistakes, elected officials make mistakes, normal people make mistakes, and if these mistakes are not at a point where they cause travesties or dramatic results then you have to learn to forgive. And that's what we learn here in America. And that's one of the greatest things that I love about this country. That people give you the flexibility to forgive yourself and to learn from your mistakes and move on. I feel that in my community it is a little bit harder to come and to ask for forgiveness and I wish that it would change.

Moon:

So the community is not as forgiving as it seems about its own members on various issues and the particular one seems to be a hard one for everybody. Well I think it's really interesting the study of different ethnic groups and how they enter into politics. And so I think the work that you have been doing is very very interesting and so what do Vietnamese or Asian-Americans bring to the political table?

Nguyen:

The apparent thing is that because we have such a diverse—many diverse groups here in San Jose, it's always good to get their perspective so that when we make policies or draft ordinances that these policies actually resonate with everybody and not just the majority. There isn't really a majority group here in San Jose which I think is a great thing. And being able to bring new ideas to the table is a great thing. And that is why we always encourage more people of color to run for political office so that they can represent; so that there community can be represented in a fair and equal way, if anything. I think that

having a presence of people from different ethnic backgrounds on the City Council or any public venue it gives people in the community this feeling that, “Hey, one of us is up there.” So when issues that matter to us are being discussed, these people who represent these different diverse groups can convey that message to the rest of their colleagues. That, in itself, is very pertinent and very important. But it’s really up to the individual elected official to draft policies or come up with policies that are meaningful and are beneficial to their community. But I think the mere presence of having different faces on the City Council is a great thing. Like this coming class of City Council members, people are going to see a lot of different faces there. I am Vietnamese-American, Ash Kalra is Indo-American, Kansen Chu is Chinese-American. We also have two Italians, one Latino— that’s great. So people in the community are starting to feel like, “Wow we are being represented.”

Moon:

—Which is a far cry from what it was in the 70’s. One of the things at San Jose State was the— one of the big pushes in our campus right now is to address diversity on campus. And what they found through some of the studies that they did, while we have a very diverse student body, we don’t have an integrated student body and so the different sub-ethnic groups just stick to each other and so we don’t see a lot of intermingling with the students within this diverse body. So I was just curious maybe both from the political perspective and then the sociologist how we can integrate these kinds of— so it’s more of a biracial sort of experience versus just this is my group and I don’t go to this group because I am not Vietnamese or because I am Jewish or whatever.

Nguyen:

You know that is an issue that happens everywhere throughout the community, not just at an academic institution. We see different ethnic groups in our community that just like to be among themselves. What I always want to encourage is that it's great that you have a specific cultural group or specific ethnic group but it's more stronger if you take your group and you merged with other groups in the community so that they both can promote the kind of process that you want to see happen. I think it also has to come from the leadership, meaning that the officers who lead the group, they need to sit down and join officers from other groups and come up with a couple of priorities that they think are critical to move their causes forward. When people come before us and they speak before the San Jose City Council meeting, there is strength in numbers. When people come and they say I represent A organization, I represent B organization, I represent C organization, we pay attention. And so that's why we always try to promote that there is strength in numbers and if you can come together and work together to represent the various causes that's when you can get the attention of the politicians.

Moon:

I think it's a real challenge to try and get the kind of interracial sort of relationships so that's something that San Jose State is trying to work on developing, which I think is a big endeavor. Now thinking in terms of the Vietnamese community, what are the issues that are important to that community?

Nguyen:

It depends. It depends on which group you talk to and when I say which group I mean age group. Also the different political organizations and the different friendship organizations. That's why the community is just so, it's divisive at times and yet they

can also come together so strongly at times. Especially when there is a common cause. For example, this was something that happened, it happened back in 2003. I don't know if you recall in 2003, a San Jose police officer shot a relatively young Vietnamese woman in her own kitchen. And so for the first time, I was able to—I was on the School Board at the time, the only Vietnamese elected official in the valley. I was able to mobilize different people from different ethnic groups, different political organizations, friendship organizations, cultural organizations together to hold a rally to march down to San Jose City Council as well as the police department, to demand an apology from the Chief of Police. And so for the first time you saw people from all walks of life coming together, regardless of their political agenda, regardless of how they felt about each other, they came together for a common cause.

So it depends on the type of cause and then of course you ask what are the different issues? Well to the seniors, affordable housing is a big issue. They live on a fixed income and they want something relatively cheap so that they can live out the rest of their lives without having to worry too much. Among young people: education and environmental issues. Those are really important. People always think that maybe perhaps people in the ethnic minority groups don't really care so much about environmental issues but I don't think that's true. When we attend different cultural events and stuff like that, we always talk about how we can contribute to better our environment. For young people that is really important, to all people job economic development is very crucial. Job creation is something that people always like to talk about because you need a job in order to have stability in your life. And so it all depends.

And I think that the Vietnamese community is no different from any other communities when it comes to issues that they care about. At the end of the day we want to be able to live a comfortable lifestyle. We want to be able to have a job, have a good family, and so issues that relate to our daily needs are the issues that matter to them the most.

Moon:

Now in thinking in terms of the post-election, where did the Vietnamese community—or did they share a similar belief on Prop. 8? Was that something that was an issue for that community?

Nguyen:

You know, it's really interesting because I am a big proponent of no on Prop. 8. I think that everybody should be given the opportunity to marry anyone they love or they feel that's critical for their life. But because of the Obama-McCain situation they were more focused on that. So you see a lot of older Vietnamese supporting for McCain and you see the young generation going for Obama. You witness this rift between parents and their children. The Vietnamese newspaper printed several articles about this situation. These papers reported how parents were just having really a hard time convincing their children to vote for McCain. And at the same time, children are trying to convince their parents to vote for Obama because he represents a new hope and change. And eventually for the Vietnamese who were former soldiers or still have this tie or connection with the homeland, they think that McCain is a hero. And so that was the big focus; more so on Prop. 8.

Moon:

Because you can see very specific ethnic communities who supported proposition 8 like the Hispanic community which was largely about the Catholic Church or the Mormons were very involved in that whole campaign as well and Evangelical Christians. But I was just curious if there was like, looking at the historiographical process of where the Vietnamese have come from in their beliefs system, if that was a different—

Nguyen:

That was something that I was really interested in and so I was trying to talk to a lot of people while I was campaigning about this issue but people didn't really have strong opinion about it and they really didn't want to talk about it, either. They were just more or less wanted to fight about Obama and McCain and that conversation pretty much dominated most of the time.

Moon:

Well I think that whole issue over Prop. 8 is not over with by any means. One of the things that we've been doing in this class, the class with Women and Politics is to look at how the Constitution, in particularly fourteenth Amendment, has been used to promote different levels of civil rights and this is kind of like the next step of pushing the interpretation of the law on marriage. The students all had some really interesting perspectives on just looking at that proposition and I think most of them were against it that were in my class, but it's a small class. But I thought that was a really interesting process in looking at that and given the division between different ethnic groups on that and then as you say, the Vietnamese community not really focusing on that. So would you say that they majority of the Vietnamese have been more Republican oriented because of their business alliances?

Nguyen:

It was like that. I think that today—I would say that it is half and half. I would say that comfortably that it is half and half. And so you are starting to see a lot of young people getting involved and actually pay attention to what is going on with current affairs. More young people are registering as Democrat than Republican. So in essence, with Proposition 8 you probably would, I'm just guessing here, but my assumption is that, the older folks would probably be more inclined to vote Yes on 8 and the younger folks would be more inclined to vote No on 8.

Moon:

Well I know that the studies that have been done on the Hispanic population after the first generation they tend, if they become politically active, they tend to become—they tend to register as Republican. And that in the last several elections, you've seen kind of that transformation changing where you see new Democrats coming out of the Cuban-Americans are an example, probably the most straitening example of where Republicans had a strong hold but with this new larger span of Latin Americans coming in and the whole process of how they looked at the voting is very different. So I was just curious if there was a similar sort of pattern with the Asian-Americans in specifically the Vietnamese. It's hard to pin that exactly.

Nguyen:

Yeah, it's really hard and as someone who comes from the academic circle, I hate to talk about something that we haven't done enough research on. This is all just speculation.

Moon:

Well and also I think that it is easy to suggest that people are all the same. I mean they did that with the women's vote certainly, "oh all women are going to vote on this issue or that women don't have different opinions on some of these things." That's not really the smartest way to look at or analyzing what people are actually doing. Anyway, so I think that is all very interesting and I'm wondering, just going back, I think we talked about this a little bit what you're hoping to do in the future. And maybe you can just remind me what some of the things are that you are hoping to do.

Nguyen:

Sure. Future as in elected official or like 10 years from now?

Moon:

Yeah.

Nguyen:

Ok. Well you know if we beat this recall, then I want to continue to focus on public safety issues. That is a top priority for me. Unfortunately two weeks ago the City of San Jose fell from number three to number four as the fourth big safe cities in the United States. As Chair of the public safety committee, I would really like to bring it back to number one which we had for about six years. And it is very critical, especially during this hard economic time, crimes/gang activities tend to escalate more than when times are good. So we are looking at the potential of two more years of these really tough economic times. The potential of crimes increasing and escalating is something that I'm comfortable to say that will happen, we will see that. And then of course because of the District that I represent, which most families come from the lower social-medium income bracket, job creation is a big deal—it's really a big deal. As long as we can continue to

bring jobs to the district so that people don't have to drive far to find employment, that's definitely a priority for me. And of course the need for affordable homes is always there. And every time we have a ground breaking event to build two-hundred homes, we have two-thousand applicants. I mean it's just amazing and so the need is always there. Those are the kinds of things that I want to continue to work on because the need comes from the people that I represent.

I also wanted to pick up some citywide initiatives. Initiatives that relate to green technology. I think that's really where the direction of not just for this country, but for the state and for the city, and so I want to work more on citywide initiatives that relate to green technology. And that's a pretty big platform of work on for the next four years as a council member. Now whether or not I want to move beyond that I am not really sure at this point. I think it has been very daunting for me; my passion in public service will always be there. But I think that there is always opportunity to continue that passion in other areas of work so we will see how it goes.

Moon:

I think the grassroots work that you did at the beginning of your political career, like using the grassroots initiative which is exactly what Obama did with his platform, which I think is a fabulous way to build community. And so I think it would be very entrusting to see leadership in developing those grassroots movements at the local level and particularly with the students because they really need to become active in a variety of different ways and I think those types of programs just really, and the environmental issues are important and are really great initiatives. And I am always trying to think of

how can we get students to be more engaged? And to become more engaged not only with the political process but with their community. And I think it's really grassroots activism.

Nguyen:

Oh absolutely. You know with our event last night, we had several students from San Jose State University who came to volunteer. And they were just really amazed at the things that I said, the things that other council members had said, the direction that we would like the city to move forward. I think one of the best ways to engage young folks, especially college students, is to provide internship; different opportunities of internship. And here at our office, whenever we have an intern, I would give them a specific policy to work on. Something that they are very passionate about. And at the end of their internship, they would present a policy paper on something. And so here they have the opportunity to be academically engaged. You know, work on something that they are really passionate about, and have the opportunity to meet people in that area of work, because as a college student you might not have that opportunity to work with an elected official because we see different people everyday. Also, I think the benefit of picking up the phone and say that you call from the council member's office, people will take your phone call, and they will provide you with the necessary research and materials that you need. They get to see, if they are lucky, they get to see their policy in action because one of the things that I like to do is to bring their policy forward and maybe bring it to the Rules committee or bring it to your city council and discuss that and see whether or not we can adopt that. One of the things that I was able to derive from the policy work that was done by one of our interns was to initiate a citywide "no smoking" policy in public

parks. And now it became a law or an ordinance here in the city. So I think that is really empowering for that one particular student and now he or she can go on to other things that she is passionate about. And so I think we— I always look at myself as a potential role model for young people and giving them ample opportunities to explore their interests and their passion and doing it first-hand and have the opportunity to work with someone that gives them that opportunity. And we will continue to do that.

Moon:

Yeah that is a great opportunity for a student and a real life experience that will pertain to their job pursuits later on as well.

Nguyen:

And so this kind of job encompasses so many different facets of the interdisciplinary framework that we tend to push students toward. Whether you are a student majoring in Sociology or Political Science, you can see that aspect being played out. For a student who wants to go into public service, they see the action when they are eighteen, nineteen, or twenty, to see if this is something they want to do for a long time, or not. Sometimes it might be more encouraging. Other times it might be more discouraging. But at least it gives them a taste of what it is like.

Moon:

I think that is a great opportunity and that's a good thing to have this joint relationship between the university and the city. One of the other areas with the green initiative goals— there's a huge initiative on-campus at San Jose State on green initiatives too. So that would be another great opportunity to collaborate with the faculty who are working on those projects. One of the persons in Communications, here name is Anne Marie

Todd I think is her last name. And that would be very cool to see some of that and getting the students involved in being part of that initiative. I think you are doing great work. I'm sure that you will get past this whole campaign business and I wish you the best of luck on that.

Nguyen:

Thank you very much. I really appreciate that.

Moon:

I really have enjoyed getting to know you a little bit. Next year I am going to be teaching with the new class on Women and Politics and so I would certainly be happy to invite you to come back. And I think you are a great role model for students whether they want to go directly into Politics or several of my students are Political Science majors and so I think it was very compelling for them to hear you and then they met Linda Chavez as well. Just get that kind of perspective of how—

Nguyen:

I think that more or less, I hope that the perspective and my experience and my life history will provide students a framework, an opportunity to understand that you don't have to go into Politics to be successful. You can use these frameworks and apply them into anything you want to go into. Because at the end of the day, the core values and the core principles are similar in whatever you want to do with your life. And so that is something that we need to remind young people that as long as you are willing to work hard, as long as you are willing to commit yourself to certain causes that are important to you, and as long as you are willing to go out there and learn and explore, give yourself

that opportunity, you will be successful in any arena that you want to engage in and it doesn't have to be politics.

Moon:

Right. I always try to emphasize that being a political person doesn't necessarily mean being an office holder, but it means being concerned about the political environment and participating in it, indirectly whether it is by voting, you can say that is a direct way. Or indirectly by being part of an organization that is trying to pursue different types of policies that will affect the larger population. I think that is a good lesson for students to learn.

Nguyen:

Yeah. You know sometimes when I go out to the community, I go to so many events and I would run into a former student. And lately, I've been running into a lot of former students and obviously I don't remember all the students that were in the class. And I taught a really big class. At the end I think I had about no less than sixty-five students each quarter and it is intense and you don't remember everyone's face and I wish I did. It is so touching when students come up to me and say, "You know I've learned so much in your class, not so much about the content of what you taught, but it's just the every day conversation that we had in class and the fact that you spoke so candidly about your life experience." So you know it is very touching to be able to touch people in that way and that they take that and apply it to whatever they are doing. They are able to become successful because of that. And so, I'm not sure about you, but for me as a teacher, there is nothing more satisfying than to hear that from one of your former students.

Moon:

Yeah, it's great to get that kind of response because sometimes you wonder if you're doing ok or not.

Nguyen:

I'm just glad that as long as they don't fall asleep in the class I am doing something right.

Moon:

Yeah falling asleep in the class is not good. So in those large classrooms you probably have people falling asleep. Well anyway, thank you so much and I will be in touch with you closer to the beginning of the Fall of next year. In the meantime I will give you this. Edit it however you like and then I'll take it back and we will re-do it. I can provide you with a full copy of everything.

Nguyen:

You can give me the second part of this too and then I will look it over. But I will- how soon do you need this back?

Moon:

No- We are going to be off. We close on Saturday so I won't see the students working on anything probably really major. So I will get this transcribed in early January and then I will give that back to you to look at.

Nguyen:

You know a couple of days ago, I was talking to a professor at San Jose State, Linguistics professor who came to talk about the whole business of definition of landscape; signs, banners, and all that stuff. And we talked about that for maybe eight or seven minutes and then we went into— he just wanted to hear my personal thoughts in all of these things because that is not being conveyed in the news articles or anything like that. And

so we went on for forty-five minutes and talked about that. Right before he left he was just like, “Have you ever thought about writing a book about all of this?” And I was like “Oh my gosh, no.” I think enough has been written already but I think it’s really interesting. So this kind of thing, can I keep it? Perhaps one day when I have time to sit down I can reflect back. That will be very helpful to have.

Moon:

I can also, if you want a copy of the interview itself I can provide you with that on a CD-ROM of that as well.

Nguyen:

Okay.

Moon:

But I really appreciate your time because I know it’s valuable to you.

[recording ends]