

# 2022 General Election Candidate Questionnaire

## Congress – District 13

### John Duarte

#### **1. What are your qualifications?**

I'm a farmer and businessman. For three decades, I have built my family business, Duarte Nursery, into an industry-leading operation. Not only do I have to make sure I'm providing for my family, I also need to ensure my employees can provide for their families as well. When something goes wrong the buck always stops with me. As your next Congressman, I will carry that same weight with me every time I vote.

Beyond my qualifications as a businessman, I'm proud of my long history of community and industry advocacy. I have experience serving as part of a decision-making body as a former board member for the California Association of Winegrape Growers and the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau.

#### **2. What would be your top priorities?**

As your Congressman, I will drive an agenda of American abundance.

Water abundance. I will fight to fundamentally change how Washington approaches water policy. Central Valley politicians always say we need more water storage but provide no real action. The first thing I would do is call oversight hearings on the agencies that manage our Valley water to hold them to account for their ill-reasoned and harmful decisions. Second, I will fight to fully fund critical maintenance on our water facilities. Lack of proper upkeep has lost our precious surface water to percolation and evaporation for too long. Third, I will introduce legislation to raise the standards of evidence that agencies must meet when they attempt to seize the water we are owed in the name of the environmental priority of the day.

Energy abundance. I will support legislation to expand the extraction of carbon energy right here in America on private and public lands. I will promote American manufacturing policy that allows our private enterprise to develop the advanced energy sources of the future. I will vote to ease the environmental regulations that, ironically, hinder the building of alternative energy

projects. I will defend our businesses and working families from Washington's cynical calculation that the costs of our energy fantasies should be borne by those who can't fight back.

Opportunity abundance. I will fight back against federal policy that has made the dream of entrepreneurship unavailable to hardworking Valley families. I will protect your right to own and operate private property as you see fit. I will fight to end the taxation schemes that take money away from small businesses and force families to sell out to

institutional investors. I will fight to make housing affordable and plentiful for every family. I will strengthen the advances made in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act that have repatriated capital and increased treasury receipts while pushing back on radical policies like Build Back Better that discriminate against family businesses and closely-held companies.

### **3. How do you evaluate the impact to business when making voting decisions?**

Generally speaking, I oppose regulations on businesses unless they are absolutely crucial for the health and safety of employees and consumers. As a businessman, I know exactly how I've been impacted by legislation from the state and federal government. Far too often, they make my life and the lives of my employees harder with arbitrary rules and regulations and selective enforcement.

I will fight to make sure that regulation is logical and even-handed. Regulatory capture has paralyzed our economy and made institutional investors and national corporations winners, while holding back local businesses and freezing new entrepreneurs out from their chance at the American dream.

### **4. What are your plans to make government more transparent, responsive, and effective?**

As your Congressman, I will listen to the community. On my campaign, I knock on doors everyday to get the opinions of real Valley families on the most important issues, and I will always stay true to that philosophy. I will spend my spare time here, in the Valley, talking to Valley families and businesses about how we can build better policy. I'm running for Congress to serve our Valley, not to eat shrimp with DC lobbyists. When a critical vote comes up that affects the Valley, you can rest assured that you won't have to chase me down to share your thoughts; I'll make sure that I am there every step of the way listening to you about what is best for the Valley.

If I ran my business the way our politicians run our government, I would be ashamed. Politicians, like any good businessman, need to be informed, cautious, and most importantly transparent in their spending practices. I support more public, nonpartisan audits of government spending, and would encourage the press to cover the results. I also support making spending more transparent by putting all spending, in real-time, online and making it understandable to the everyday Americans our government is intended to serve. I expect the Supreme Court to hand down major rulings limiting the power of executive agencies. These rulings will give Congress

back its critical role in governing administrative law and create opportunities for members like myself to protect local business from government overreach.

**5. Is the organization for which you seek office operating with a balanced budget? If not, what are your plans to make the organization more sustainable?**

Our federal government is not operating with a balanced budget. We are spending away our children's futures and hindering our economic growth. As your Congressman, I will oppose the reckless spending that is driving prices through the roof and support policy that lowers taxes, eases regulatory burdens on local business, and directs investment to our community's critical infrastructure like dams, canals, and highways. If we stimulate economic growth and decrease our level of spending, we can pay off our debts within a generation

**Adam Gray**

**1. What are your qualifications?**

I was born and raised in the Valley and put myself through college working at my family's dairy supply. After school, I got a job in the State Legislature where I fought to eliminate the Tractor Tax on farm equipment. Eventually, I returned home to teach a class on the State Legislature at UC Merced. When the Great Recession hit, I chose to step up to help rebuild and strengthen the San Joaquin Valley which saw significantly higher foreclosure and unemployment rates than any other part of the state. I was elected to the State Legislature where I represent Merced County and Stanislaus County.

In the State Legislature, water has been my top priority. I have delivered more than \$3 billion to build new water storage and fix our aging canals and aqueducts. I have fought back the state water grab that would double the amount of water diverted from our farms and jeopardize the drinking water quality of some of the poorest communities in the state. I have also secured the necessary funding to establish a medical school at UC Merced, doubled operating hours of rural health clinics, raised school funding to record highs, secured millions of dollars to combat homelessness, and established the gang violence task force that locked up more than 50 cartel leaders and cut the homicide rate in half.

I am running for Congress to strengthen the Valley's voice in the halls of power. The interests and priorities of California's smaller rural communities are often overshadowed by the larger urban population centers. This has led to chronic underinvestment in many of the most disadvantaged communities in the state and nation. I am fighting to bring attention and change to these issues.

## **2. What would be your top priorities?**

My top priorities are water, health care access, the cost of living, and public safety.

I will work to significantly expand California's antiquated water infrastructure to support domestic food production as a critical aspect of our national security. That means more water

storage for farmers and better access to clean drinking water for everyone. Democrats and Republicans have both had control of the White House and Congress over the last four decades, but neither party has added a drop of additional water storage for California farmers. We need representatives who know how to work across the aisle to deliver results instead of relying on finger-pointing as their favorite public policy. I worked with Republicans and Democrats in the State Legislature to deliver more than \$3 billion for water storage and other water infrastructure improvements. I will continue to support bipartisan solutions in Congress.

The Central Valley has fewer doctors than any other part of the state. I will address this dangerous shortage by lifting federal funding caps on residency programs and directing additional resources to underserved regions. I will continue my work to create the UC Merced medical school, because we must recruit and train future doctors in the communities that need them most. The UC Merced medical school will enroll its first class of future doctors next year, but we must ensure we have enough residency slots to serve the next generation of Valley doctors.

To bring down the cost of living, I will support efforts to streamline supply chain bottlenecks at our ports and logistics networks and expand domestic energy production, so our economy is not dependent on foreign dictators.

Finally, I will always fight to fully fund our police and firefighters, so they have the resources they need to keep our neighborhoods, businesses, and schools safe.

## **3. How do you evaluate the impact to business when making voting decisions?**

The US Chamber of Commerce has repeatedly ranked California as the #1 "Judicial Hellhole" in the nation because California business owners are constantly harassed by frivolous Prop 65, ADA, and PAGA lawsuits among others. California has also received an F grade for our overall business friendliness, ease of starting a business, business regulations, labor regulations, tax regulations, licensing forms, and environmental regulations. California business owners already face an uphill battle as they try to compete without the benefit of a level playing field. I always consider California's current business climate when evaluating new pieces of legislation. Most importantly, I also listen to what local business owners are telling me about how new laws and regulations will impact their ability to run their businesses.

For example, AB 5 has decimated independent contractor jobs including exacerbating the supply chain crisis by disrupting employment in the trucking industry. The bill was rife with political favoritism and ignored the wishes of employers and employees alike. I was the only Democrat in the State Legislature to oppose the bill, and the problems it has caused since it was passed have only strengthened my resolve against the bill.

I teamed up with Republicans and Democrats from the Valley when local business owners reported a spike in frivolous ADA lawsuits. We wrote bills to shield small businesses from extortion and provide an opportunity to cure any valid violations before being subjected to litigation.

I also passed new laws to crack down on workers' compensation fraud and expanded business tax credits to reward business owners who create more jobs in California.

#### **4. What are your plans to make government more transparent, responsive, and effective?**

Accountability is a core principle of democracy. No decision should be made without the ability of the public to hold decision makers accountable. Some of the worst government actions come from systems that limit accountability such as the water grab from the State Water Board or the ban on gas powered cars from the Air Resources Board.

Too much power has been handed over to government agencies, commissions, and departments. Instead of acting as regulators that ensure compliance with the laws written by elected officials, these unaccountable bureaucrats increasingly write their own laws and enforce them without any outside input. Congress must do a better job of reining in excessive bureaucratic power and create accountability by conducting oversight hearings and augmenting budgets if necessary. The power to make decisions must be returned to the people who are directly accountable to the public.

Even when decision makers are directly elected, partisanship often leads elected officials to vote with their party instead of their district and constituents. Party leaders on both sides of the aisle are quick to punish those who don't toe the party line, and too many elected officials are quick to forget who put them on the job.

I have repeatedly bucked party leaders in my fight against the state water grab. I have been stripped of committee assignments and faced political repercussions, but I have refused to back down. It takes strong determination, but you must be willing to stand alone when it's the right thing to do.

#### **5. Is the organization for which you seek office operating with a balanced budget? If not, what are your plans to make the organization more sustainable?**

The last time Congress had a balanced budget was under President Clinton in 2001. President Bush returned the US to deficit spending in 2002 and no President, Democrat or Republican, has balanced the budget since that time.

Government expenditures that expand economic opportunities like infrastructure, education, and job creation are worthwhile investments, as are investments in services that support veterans, health care, and public safety.

Unfortunately, the US has sunk deeper into debt despite a prolonged period of record economic expansion. Without any reserves, Congress has few tools to weather a moderate to severe recession without imposing significant cuts on vital services like our schools.

California was in a similar situation when I was first elected to office during the latter parts of the Great Recession. Since then, I have fought to increase our financial reserves with every budget cycle. In just ten years, the state has gone from running a significant deficit to having nearly \$40 billion saved in reserve. These reserves mean that even a moderate recession will not result in major cuts to schools and other critical public services.

Congress must begin to build strong financial reserves to prepare for future recessions that we know will come. If a state like California can exercise this kind of budget discipline, Congress can and should do the same. I am endorsed by groups like the Blue Dogs and the NewDems who believe in responsible budgeting and the need to live within our means. I will fight to make federal spending sustainable and work to reduce waste and excess.