

Connie Chan is corrupt — and Pelosi's endorsement — is nothing to celebrate

By Matt Smith

During my 30 years as a journalist, I've heard plenty of people deny, defend and explain away corruption. But only once did I ever see a San Francisco public official explicitly praise misconduct by a government official.

This was 2011, when I was investigating [overtime fraud in the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department's Park Patrol](#), and one ranger supervisor, Thomas Thom, seemed uniquely brazen. He'd already had a previous policing career marked by taking gratuities, kicking a suspect's head and lying to investigators.

Once employed by San Francisco, Thom became known as the "phantom supervisor" because, several of his underlings told me, he was often absent during his shifts due to what records said were simultaneous full-time jobs with the state fair police in Sacramento and then the state lottery police, while ostensibly working for San Francisco.

I didn't envy Connie Chan, then the Recreation and Parks Department's spokeswoman, who was going to be saddled with the task of defending that mess. To my surprise, she did it with relish, admonishing me for my reporting, asking how dare I tarnish the reputation of a hard-working Asian American city employee who was only trying to provide for his family.

Chan, I was later alarmed to learn, gained a seat on the Board of Supervisors in part by positioning herself as a corruption fighter, dishing weak-sauce scandals to the press.

On Wednesday, I was even more appalled to learn she advanced to a runoff against state Sen. Scott Wiener to replace Rep. Nancy Pelosi in Congress. For this dismal state of affairs, we can blame Pelosi, who, in an apparent fit of pique against Wiener, endorsed Chan.

The endorsement is a sad epilogue to a monumental career. But it may be fitting. Pelosi, like Chan, has experience with defending the indefensible. For years, she resisted bringing bills to the House floor that would have limited financial trading by members of Congress, stating that her colleagues should be allowed to participate in the “free market economy.”

Pelosi has, of course, achieved great things, not least of which was to usher the Affordable Care Act into law under President Obama.

Back home, however, Pelosi tended to less visible tasks, such as helping provide what ended up being at least \$1 billion in public funds to prepare the former Hunters Point Naval Shipyard for what turned out to be the basis for profits of a private company connected to former Mayor Willie Brown.

Chan has promoted herself during her campaign to succeed Pelosi as having “worked for the people,” but hasn’t spent much time touting herself as a good government candidate.

Instead, she’s positioned herself as a “progressive,” savoring endorsements from Pelosi and groups like the San Francisco branch of the Progressive Democrats of America, as well as labor groups such as the San Francisco Building Trades Council.

Even so, there’s more to being an effective member of the House than picking the “progressive” lane and gathering endorsements. Chan’s opponent, Wiener, is one of our state’s most effective legislators. After decades in which

Sacramento was known as the place where housing legislation went to die, Wiener arrived and pushed through housing bills with teeth, requiring communities to do their part in addressing our housing shortage.

Chan, by contrast, is a NIMBY. That alone should be enough to keep San Franciscans from voting for her. But I also keep going back to her 2011 outlandish defense of Thom and the misconduct I described in my Park Patrol article.

The best way to honor the best of Pelosi is to send to Washington another legislator who knows how to get results, rather than someone the speaker emeritus endorsed during a career moment I hope we'll eventually forget.

Matt Smith has been a journalist for three decades, half of which time was spent as a San Francisco city columnist.