



## **Candidate Q&A: 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District – Sergio Alcubilla**

### **1. What is the biggest issue facing Hawaii, and what would you do about it?**

In 2018, 42% of households struggled to make ends meet and 33% of households fell within the definition of being Asset Limited, Income Constrained, yet Employed (ALICE), earning about the federal poverty level but could barely afford the most basic necessities. Four years and a pandemic later, the outlook for our local families has worsened.

With rising costs and lack of affordable housing, many have joined the mass exodus for the continent. I will continue to champion many of the provisions in the Build Back Better Act that failed to pass in Congress because those provisions directly invested in our most valuable resource — our people.

From affordable child care, free community college, to finally combating climate change, we lost out on one of the greatest investments in people and the planet because of elected leaders unwilling to stand up for their communities. Instead, working families are again paying the price for politicians being more responsive to corporate greed over community needs. We need more elected leaders who understand what it means to work more than one job and who understand the struggles that everyday people here in Hawaii and across the country are facing every day.

### **2. What can the U.S. Congress do about mass shootings in America? Would you support banning military-style assault weapons and establishing universal background checks? What other measures would you propose to reduce gun violence?**

As a parent, I fear dropping off my children at school in the morning and hearing of another mass shooting at an elementary school. As someone that has been directly impacted by gun violence, we need to do more to make sure our children are not paying the price for our constitutional right to bear arms. The recent mass shootings around the country from Texas to New York should never happen again and it is imperative that Congress finally have the courage to act.

Although Congress took substantial steps in finally passing legislation for enhanced background checks and resources for mental health services, this is simply not enough to end the culture of gun violence in this country.

Yes, I would support the banning of selling military-style assault weapons of war to the public and establishing universal background checks. For responsible gun owners, I would like to see the use of technology in further developing “smart” guns, which can be fired only by registered users along with regular licensing and insurance requirements.

In Congress, I will maintain that the right to bear arms will not outweigh our children’s right to live free from the fear of being shot in school.

**3. The Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol and the questions of whether the 2020 election was stolen have shown how seriously divided the nation is. Some say democracy itself is in trouble. How would you work to end the political polarization that divides both the Congress and the country?**

With the passing of congressional icons such as Rep. John Lewis and Hawaii’s own Rep. Patsy Mink, I believe Congress has lost its voices of conscience. Money in politics, corporate lobbying and the pay-to-play structure have corrupted our legislative institutions while racism and sexism are tearing our country apart. We must remind Congress of our nation’s conscience, that we can rise beyond the political divisions toward the calling to be the “beacon of hope” in this world.

As an immigrant to this country, I have not lost sight of what this country can be; that despite our checkered history, we aim to do better and to do right. As a settler to these islands, I hope to bridge these histories.

My leadership style is collaborative in nature, seeing value in the experience and ideas of others in finding common solutions. I will not compromise my own values and principles, but I do want to believe that those we elect as public servants are in it for the right reasons; motivated by the desire to help and serve the people in their communities. If not, we have the civic responsibility to vote them out and hold them accountable.

**4. Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, while currently financially sound, risk future funding concerns because of changing demographics. What would you propose to shore up the country’s major safety net programs?**

First, I would support H.R. 5723, Social Security 2100: A Sacred Trust introduced by Rep. Larson of Connecticut, which will provide a boost in benefits to all Social Security recipients for the first time since 1972 and targeted increases for the most vulnerable. This is funded by adjusting the wage cap, currently at \$147,000 so that income over \$400,000 is also subject to Social Security payroll taxes.

Second, it's time we transition to providing universal health care for all by passing the Medicare for All Act, which would guarantee health care to everyone as a human right by providing comprehensive benefits including primary care, vision, dental, prescription drugs, mental health, long-term services, and reproductive health care with no more co-pays, private insurance premiums or deductibles.

As the pandemic has shown us, health care connected to employment puts us all in a precarious situation and it's clear that our current system of Medicare and Medicaid needs an overhaul. It's time Congress stands up to the insurance lobbyists and the pharmaceutical industry and instead listens to the doctors, nurses and medical professionals asking to put the health of people first.

### **5. What is your position on the Senate filibuster?**

I support retiring the Senate filibuster. I understand the deliberative nature of the Senate but when a rule is exploited by either party simply for their own benefit and not to advance the best interests of the country, the rule needs to be re-examined.

When passage of common sense legislation such as voting rights or campaign finance reform dies simply because of partisan politics, the public needs to apply the "nuclear option" to the Senate itself and return to a simple majority away from its complicated and archaic rules.

### **6. Is the U.S. on the right path when it comes to mitigating climate change and growing renewable energy production? What specific things should Congress be considering?**

The Green New Deal Resolution is simply a starting point but it gives a roadmap for the United States to be on the right path when it comes to mitigating climate change and growing renewable energy production. The United States must accept the responsibility of leadership when it comes to environmental and climate justice. For Hawaii and for nations across the Pacific, it's imperative that the United States take this threat seriously.

With Sen. Manchin recently sinking any substantial action toward addressing climate change, it's even more imperative that our congressional delegation is united in supporting President Biden's efforts to now take executive action on climate change.

Specifically for Hawaii, investments in the emerging environmental technology industry will help diversify our economy while creating local, green, sustainable jobs. Instead of relying on expertise and workers on the continent, local companies hiring local workers can provide expertise in addressing environmental damage to island nations across the Pacific.

Finally, Congress should continue to provide federal incentives for the public to participate such as federal tax rebates on solar or avenues for the public to benefit by contributing to the state's power grid.

**7. The Jones Act requires that domestic freight transport on U.S. waterways be conducted by crews that are at least three-fourths American, and on vessels built in U.S. shipyards, and that are American-owned. What is your position on this law and its effects on Hawaii? Does it need to be amended or repealed?**

It is concerning that the Grassroots Institute of Hawaii backed by the libertarian Cato Institute continues to spread misinformation about the Jones Act with support from within our own congressional delegation. The Grassroots Institute attempts to weaken public support for the Jones Act (Merchant Marine Act of 1920) by wrongly claiming it's the reason for the high cost of living in Hawaii. In reality, the Jones Act supports the creation of nearly 13,000 jobs for Hawaii residents, delivering an estimated \$787 million in annual workforce income, and \$3.3 billion economic impact to the local economy.

A recent economic study also shows goods purchased from major retailers such as Costco, Home Depot, and Target found no significant difference in the price of consumer goods in Hawaii and California.

Now is not the time to believe that other countries will have our best interests in mind if given free rein on our domestic waterways. Multinational corporations and corporate greed have more to gain by not having to adhere to U.S. standards when it comes to worker safety and environmental impact. It is the public that loses if we sell out our own domestic shipping industry to foreign and corporate interests.

**8. The Biden administration says China is the greatest long-term threat to the U.S. and has been trying to expand its influence, especially in the Pacific. What can the U.S. do to build better relations with the Asia-Pacific region?**

Hawaii plays a critical role in the Pacific Rim in strengthening U.S. relationships with Asian and Pacific nations both diplomatically and economically. With local residents having personal ties in the Asia-Pacific region, Hawaii has given the U.S. an advantage. I believe the best way for the U.S. to compete with China's rising influence in the region is by strengthening economic ties and promoting cultural understanding and respect through Hawaii.

Second, how the U.S. treats the countries under the treaty of the Compact of Free Association (COFA) is a starting point. For decades, these countries have had to bear the consequences of nuclear weapons testing while residents from these countries face exploitation and discrimination in Hawaii. The U.S. should not only invest in cleaning up this environmental damage but renegotiate the treaty in good faith.

Finally, with China and the U.S. being the top two carbon-emitting countries, the U.S. can provide environmental leadership in the region by building up the green technology economy. By committing to remediating polluted soil and water and addressing climate change and rising sea levels, the U.S. can distinguish itself from China as a leader in this area.

**9. The Red Hill fuel crisis illustrated not only how critical the military's role is in Hawaii but also the serious problems it sometimes causes. It is also a central component of the local economy. What would you do to ensure the military behaves responsibly in the islands?**

The military must take responsibility for its environmental impact here in Hawaii and we must demand a better return on our military leases. I support the recommendations of the Honolulu Board of Water Supply and I stand with the Sierra Club of Hawaii and our community in calling for the Red Hill tanks to be decommissioned and defueled with a sense of urgency. As a matter of public health and safety, the recent leaks and lapses by the Navy have shown that the risks are far too great and the lack of transparency has eroded public trust in the process.

As part of the federal delegation, it is our responsibility to hold the military accountable. We can no longer be a rubber stamp for the military and it is this culture of always kowtowing to their demands that has led us to this current crisis. As the military leases will soon be up for renewal, this is an opportunity to balance our relationship and ensure that Hawaii is treated with dignity and respect and as more than the military's gas station in the Pacific.

**10. The coronavirus pandemic has exposed numerous flaws in Hawaii's structure and systems, from outdated technology to economic disparity. If you could take this moment to reinvent Hawaii, to build on what we've learned and create a better state, a better way of doing things, what would you do? Please share One Big Idea you have for Hawaii. Be innovative, but be specific.**

The chance for the land and its people to heal and rest from the constant exploitation and commercialization of tourism is something that many will miss. The waters and beaches had a chance to renew, the air felt cleaner with less cars, and people could drive from one side of the island to the other without having to worry about overcrowded roads or competing for personal space.

My One Big Idea, although more symbolic in nature, is the "Return of Hawaii" where for one day or weekend a year, the land and people can take a break to rest and renew from tourism and the military.

Commercial flights from the continent would be grounded, stores closed, environmentally sensitive areas given a chance to heal, and public access would be allowed to beaches on military property. Throughout its history, the U.S. is always looking at what it can "take" from Hawaii rather than what it can give back. For one federally backed holiday, the U.S. returns Hawaii. It could be the start of a much-needed conversation.