

March 7, 2025

TO: The San Francisco Board of Supervisors:

FROM: Deborah C. Gordon

Executive Director (Emeritus), Preventive Defense Project, Stanford University
Council Member and Mayor, Woodside, CA 2001-2018

RE: Reference for Joshua Wagner – San Francisco Veterans Affairs Commission

I write to unconditionally recommend Joshua Wagner for selection as a member of the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Commission.

I first met Josh when he came to Stanford University after graduating from the Naval Academy in 2012 to pursue a Master of Science Degree in Aeronautics and Astronautics. He applied for and was accepted as a research assistant to the Preventive Defense Program (PDP) where I was the Executive Director. PDP was a program directed by William J. Perry, 19th Secretary of Defense, to move national security strategy from deterrence to prevention. Much like the goal of preventive medicine to prevent disease before disease takes hold, the goal of Preventive Defense was to prevent conflict before it escalates to war.

Josh distinguished himself academically from the start. But in his roll as a research assistant supporting our work, he stood above the rest. I was impressed with his depth of knowledge, his curiosity, his ability to understand complex geopolitical situations, and his thoughtful engagement discussing policy options for current global challenges with colleagues and students alike. He effectively balanced his academic life, research responsibilities, and navy responsibilities and excelled at all three.

After he graduated, he served in the U.S. Navy. He again distinguished himself this time as a pilot, an instructor, a leader and a mentor. His CV speaks for itself. I have kept in touch as I do with many of the military fellows who came through Stanford. All the time he was serving in the Navy he was going above and beyond to serve other communities wherever in the world he found himself. As he began to think about his post-military career, he reached out to me and other Stanford colleagues for input. He was leaning toward the high-tech entrepreneurial environment that he was introduced to while at Stanford as most of the military fellows are. He did find a position where he could build a career in the tech sector. He and his wife decided to make San Francisco their home where his wife had developed a photography business during all the years of overseas deployment and his new position allowed working remotely. But he still felt compelled to serve his community and country.

He reached out to me for suggestions. As a Woodside Town Council member for 17 years, mayor, CCAG chair and director, and member of numerous commissions and boards, I know the challenges and the joys of local engagement. I also know that participation and collaboration makes for a successful community. I suggested he explore volunteer opportunities in San Francisco. He found the Veterans Affairs Commission. I cannot think of a better place for him to serve.

His career in the Navy is certainly important preparation for understanding the challenges facing veterans. But more important, I believe, is that he is a compassionate and thoughtful man. He listens. And I have seen that demonstrated in his interactions with my adult special needs granddaughter. They share a love of flying and he engages with her as a friend talking about different kinds of planes, answering her questions and asking for her input.

In sum, Josh has demonstrated the ability to perform at the highest level of scholarship as well as to lead and develop others serving his country. He is also team player who cares about the success of the community – whatever that community may be. He has the highest integrity and is one on whom I can depend. I cannot recommend Josh more highly for selection to the Veterans Affairs Commission. I am happy he has chosen the Bay Area to make home. We will all be the better for it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Deborah C. Gordon', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Deborah C. Gordon

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