

S.F. Mayor's Finance Office Aide Named Interim Replacement for Ed Jew

Heather Knight, Chronicle Staff Writer

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(09-25) 23:17 PDT San Francisco -- Carmen Chu, the 29-year-old policy wonk tapped by Mayor Gavin Newsom to fill suspended Supervisor Ed Jew's seat on the Board of Supervisors, was widely hailed Tuesday by her City Hall colleagues and others as smart, poised and likable.

Privately, though, some observers wondered how someone lacking political experience will hold up in the dog-eat-dog world of the city's legislative chambers.

Chu, who until Tuesday morning served as deputy director of the mayor's office of policy and finance, was the first to admit politics hasn't been her ambition.

"Monday when I woke up, I had no idea I'd be in this position," Chu said, noting the mayor offered her the job later that day. She slept on it, talked it over with her boyfriend and family, and told Newsom she accepted the offer Tuesday morning.

"Had I ever thought about running for office? I had not," she said. "Really, so many things have happened in the past 24 hours, I really do want to take one day at a time."

Chu, the middle of three daughters of Chinese immigrants, was born and raised in Los Angeles and worked in her parents' Chinese restaurant. In 2000, she earned a bachelor's degree in public policy from Occidental College, a private liberal arts college in Los Angeles. She graduated magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa.

Three years later, she earned a master's degree from UC Berkeley's Goldman School of Public Policy. While at Cal, she won a prestigious fellowship with the Public Policy and International Affairs Program, which aims to get people from underrepresented communities into leadership positions.

While earning her graduate degree, Chu worked as an intern in the Board of Supervisors' Office of the Legislative Analyst. She moved to San Francisco when she joined Newsom's administration in 2004 to work as a budget analyst and was promoted to her most recent position a year ago.

In a whirlwind that began after she agreed to accept the appointment as Jew's interim replacement, Chu was ushered by the mayor's aides into Newsom's office to be sworn in by midmorning Tuesday, introduced by the mayor at a news conference at 11:30 a.m., moved into Jew's old office and was serving at her first Board of Supervisors meeting by 2 p.m.

Supervisor Bevan Dufty offered to switch seats with her if she felt awkward about sitting in Jew's chair, but she declined.

She said she would work immediately to get to know the issues and the community in the Sunset and Parkside neighborhoods that make up her supervisorial district. In the news conference, she made her first political slip-up by saying, "I don't presume to know much about District 4."

"Beyond what you already know," Newsom quickly interjected.



In introducing Chu, Newsom said her lack of political experience is a plus in his book. "I wanted to avoid political theater," Newsom said. "I wanted a policy person ... someone who understands the inner workings of city government. There's no greater discipline than understanding a \$6.77 billion budget in terms of its nuances and its details. That's something that's going to give her a real leg up."

Chu fit a number of characteristics the mayor was looking for in an interim supervisor: She is a Chinese American who is likely to be loyal to him, is collegial with her new colleagues and doesn't belong to any particular political camp.

"She's a new, fresh face, unencumbered by political baggage," said Rose Pak, a heavy hitter at the Chinatown Chamber of Commerce and among the first to call for Jew's resignation. "Good credentials. Smart. And a woman to boot. I'm delighted."

Fifty-three percent of District 4 residents are Chinese. Chu speaks fluent Cantonese.

Newsom also was under pressure to appoint a woman. Groups including the San Francisco Women's Political Committee and the local chapter of the National Women's Political Caucus lobbied him to appoint a woman because only two other members of the 11-member board are women.

Chu is the youngest current member of the board but by no means the youngest ever. Newsom was 29 when he was appointed to the board by Mayor Willie Brown in 1997, and Supervisor Chris Daly was 28 when he was elected in 2000.

She was on the short list of many of the mayor's closest aides, and when other potential fill-ins - including Assessor Phil Ting; his wife, Susan Sun, who works for Assemblyman Mark Leno; and Anni Chung, chief executive of Self-Help for the Elderly, a Chinatown nonprofit organization - signaled they weren't interested, he asked Chu, knowledgeable sources said.

For a year and a half, Chu has owned a two-story, brown and camel-colored home on Ulloa Street with her boyfriend, Scott Hua, a firefighter in Station 12 on Stanyan Street - so her residency shouldn't be called into question, as Jew's has been. The couple have no children and one dog.

Neighbors described the couple as friendly and considerate. "As far as my husband is concerned, he really likes them," said Marlene Yee, who lives two houses down from them.

If Jew is permanently removed from office, Newsom could appoint her as the permanent replacement or pick somebody else.

That person would have to run in a special election to fulfill the remainder of Jew's term, which goes through 2010. If the permanent replacement is named by Oct. 8, he or she would run in a special election Feb. 5. Chu also would have to decide whether she wants to run or return to her position in the budget office.

There, she may be best known for overseeing the budget for Healthy San Francisco, the city's new universal health care program that aims to provide health care to the 82,000 residents who lack health insurance.

Mitch Katz, director of the city Public Health Department, said he has worked with Chu closely on Healthy San Francisco and praised her for being highly intelligent and easy to work with. Katz said a political newbie with rich policy experience is just what the board needs.

"The power is not in making bold proclamations - the power is in getting things done," he said. "It's making sure Muni runs on time, that schools improve, that the health system gets better and the budget is balanced. In that sense, being an insider to the workings of government is a big help."

Chronicle staff writers Jonathan Curiel and Cecilia M. Vega contributed to this report. E-mail Heather Knight at hknight@sfchronicle.com.

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