

Biography: Assemblymember Luis A. Alejo



Luis A. Alejo was raised in Watsonville, a small agricultural town in the heart of California's Central Valley. Growing up with two parents working in the agriculture industry during the 1950s, Alejo was fortunate to witness the power of political activism at an early age. Cesar Chavez led the fight to gain workers' rights for thousands of farm laborers the Central Valley, and had a major impact in a generation of social movements. From an auspicious beginning, Alejo developed a sense of personal commitment to helping his community. In 2013, as California State Assemblymember for the 30th District, Alejo proved his commitment by authoring landmark legislation on behalf of the disadvantaged and underrepresented throughout California.

Like many Americans, Alejo found early opportunities through education. After watching his parents use education as a stepping stone to a better life, Alejo understood the value of academic success. Alejo's father, a Vietnam War era veteran, used the G.I. bill to pursue vocational training and later his teaching credential at San Jose State; his mother becoming a nurse once finishing school. After attending Watsonville High School and Gavilan Community College, Alejo transferred to the University of California at Berkeley.

At UC Berkeley, one of the nation's top universities, Alejo graduated with honors, receiving dual bachelor's degrees in political science and Chicano studies. After returning home to teach special need students and at-risk youth, Alejo continued his education at the University of California, Davis, School of Law, where he earned his Juris Doctorate (JD). While at UC Davis, Alejo was honored with the prestigious Martin Luther King Community Service Award, the Maggie Schelen Public Service Award, and the Lorenzo Patiño Community Service Award. As a result of his exceptional work, Alejo was accepted to Harvard University, finishing his academic career by obtaining his masters of education degree (Ed.M) in administration, planning and social policy.

After finishing his graduate and professional studies, Alejo began his legal career, championing the rights of working families as a staff attorney for California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation and the Monterey County Superior Court. Representing thousands of individuals who couldn't afford private attorneys, Alejo helped disadvantaged families face a myriad of legal problems. Encouraged by the opportunity to help others, Alejo eventually decided to take a chance at public office.

Alejo got his first taste of politics as a Jesse M. Unruh Fellow for the California State Assembly at the State Capital in Sacramento. During the 2002 legislative session, he drafted and staffed numerous bills and resolutions, and earned a reputation for being an effective and hardworking legislative staffer; knowledge of which he would bring to his first-term in the Assembly. Before being elected to the Assembly, Alejo served as the Mayor of Watsonville, as well as on the Watsonville Planning Commission, the Library Board, and the Santa Cruz County Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Commission.

Alejo was first elected to the Assembly in November 2010 to represent the 28th Assembly District, which consisted of San Benito County, the Salinas Valley, North Monterey County, South Santa Clara County and the city of Watsonville. In November of 2012, he was re-elected to the Assembly as the representative of the newly formed 30th Assembly District. Alejo's new district now contains a greater portion of the Monterey County coast and south Santa Clara County.

Currently, Assemblymember Alejo sits on four standing committees. Most notably, Alejo is the Chair of the Assembly Committee on Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials. Other committee assignments include Judiciary, Labor and Employment, and Local Government. During his first term in the State Assembly, Alejo focused on bringing jobs back to California as well as authoring legislation in the areas of education, healthcare, public safety, civil rights and public access to government. In his second term, Alejo built on his success by authoring, among others, two historic pieces of legislation in 2013.

Assembly Bill (AB) 60 – The Safe and Responsible Driver Act – gives undocumented immigrants the opportunity to apply for a driver's licenses. Once implemented, AB 60 will improve public safety by ensuring all drivers can be licensed and insured. Equally as important, AB 60 gives millions of Californians the peace of mind to make the necessary travels in order to work and support their families without fear of unnecessary consequences. In addition, Alejo managed to get AB 10 signed into law, raising the minimum wage in California to \$10 an hour, the highest in the nation. Income inequality has always been a pressing issue for Alejo, whose first bill as an Assemblymember proposed raising the minimum wage. AB 10 was the culmination of three years' work and helps ensure equality and respect for our state's minimum wage workers.

Alejo previously made national headlines in May 2012 when he became the first Assemblymember to propose in the Assembly Chambers during legislative session. He and his wife, Karina Cervantez Alejo, married on December 8, 2012. Karina, who was previously elected as a Councilmember, now serves as the Mayor for the City of Watsonville. Luis and Karina Alejo live in Watsonville with their two dogs, Diego and Frida.