

SAN FRANCISCO'S ART AGNOS, ONE OF THE FEW HONEST MAYOR'S SAN FRANCISCO EVER HAD

Arthur Christ Agnos (born Arthouros Agnos - September 1, 1938) is an American politician. He served as the 39th mayor of San Francisco, California from 1988 to 1992 and as the Regional Head of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development from 1993 to 2001.

Agnos was born Arthouros Agnos in [Springfield, Massachusetts](#), to [Greek](#) immigrants. He earned a Bachelor of Arts [degree](#) from [Bates College](#) and a Master of [Social Work](#) from [Florida State University](#). He moved to [San Francisco](#) in 1966 and went to work at the [San Francisco Housing Authority](#) as a social worker with senior populations.

On December 13, 1973, Agnos, who was then a member of the California Commission on Aging, was attending a meeting in the largely black public housing project in the San Francisco neighborhood of [Potrero Hill](#), to discuss building a publicly funded health clinic in the area. After the meeting concluded, he was shot twice in the chest at point-blank range. His life was saved only by the downward trajectory of the bullets, and by his own account he lost a year of his life to recuperation.^[1] This was one attack of the [Zebra murders](#) and attempted murders in the city from October 1973 to April 1974. The 15 known killings and attempted murders were perpetrated by an offshoot group

of the [Nation of Islam](#), in which "points" were earned by killing a white person.^[2]

Early political career

Agnos was asked by California State Assemblyman [Leo McCarthy](#) to join his staff in January 1968. McCarthy was elected Speaker of the Assembly in 1974 and Agnos became his Chief of Staff. During this period, Agnos helped obtain the first California state funding for community-based mental-health services serving the lesbian and gay community, helped pass nursing-home reform, and worked for preservation of farm land.

In 1976, Agnos was elected to the California State Assembly, defeating [Harvey Milk](#) in the Democratic primary in the 16th District, which at the time covered the eastern neighborhoods of San Francisco.^[3] He served as the Chair of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee and as chair of the health subcommittee of the Assembly Ways and Means Committee. Agnos also served as co-chair of the Joint Committee on South East Asian Refugees.

Agnos authored legislation that received national attention for innovative approaches to challenges in health care, welfare, and civil rights, among other areas.^[citation needed] He authored California's model welfare reform, GAIN, that matched work requirements with funding for job training, education, and child care.^[4] Agnos also authored much of California's response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, working directly with President Reagan's Surgeon General, [C. Everett](#)

[Koop](#), M.D., and the President of the National Academy of Sciences, [David Baltimore](#), M.D.^[5]

Although Agnos arranged for the nation's first Joint Legislative Session on the AIDS/HIV epidemic with Koop and Baltimore, the comprehensive approach to the epidemic failed to muster a majority of votes when the governor failed to support the measure.^[citation needed]

Since then, nearly all aspects of Agnos' proposals have become law and policy in California. Agnos also authored laws that provide support for family caregivers, fair child-support payments with a calculation that remains known as the Agnos calculator, safeguards against brain damage in the boxing ring, and legislation to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation.^[6]

Mayor of San Francisco

In 1987, Agnos ran for mayor to replace [Dianne Feinstein](#), who was [term-limited](#). Agnos came from behind^[citation needed] to defeat Supervisor John Molinari, garnering 70 percent of the vote. Agnos took San Francisco in a different direction, agreeing to a consent decree opposed by Feinstein that opened the way for hiring and promotion of African-Americans and women in the fire department. He changed the priorities for the Redevelopment Commission from creating economic and business opportunities to focus on housing, resulting in the largest increase in affordable housing in twenty years.^[citation needed] He disbanded the police unit that had engaged in spying on demonstrations. He empowered the Commission on the Status of Women

with subpoena powers and independence and named more minorities and lesbians and gay men to top city commissions and department directors than ever before. He was the first mayor to ride in the annual LGBT Freedom Parade. During his term, the city won top bond ratings, ended deficit spending, and endorsed comparable worth and domestic partners, including health insurance for city workers. [\[citation needed\]](#) Following the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989, Agnos refused to move homeless people forced from shelters until new housing was available, which led to a nine-month presence in Civic Center, changing the earlier policy of simply moving homeless from one place to another. In 1991, Agnos lost his re-election bid to the former police chief who promised to put the city "back on track" and who was strongly supported by the firefighters and others opposed to Agnos's policy initiatives.

Roger Boas, ran against Agnos and later pleaded guilty to statutory rape involving sex with teenage prostitutes. He was sentenced to a six-month garbage cleanup program and fined \$100,000.

Superior Court Judge Timothy Reardon termed Boas's actions 'reprehensible' as he passed sentence on the car dealer, who formerly served as a Democratic state chairman, a city supervisor and chief administrative officer to Mayor Dianne Feinstein.

The sentence included an order that the \$100,000 be used for a city program to counsel juvenile offenders; a six-month jail term, to be served in the Sheriff's Work Alternative Program, or SWAP; six months of community service and

three years of probation.

Boas, 67, who came in third among 11 candidates in the November 1987 mayoral race, pleaded guilty on Oct. 20 to seven counts of statutory rape involving girls as young as 14 who worked in a two-story townhouse brothel in the Mission District. He was accused of visiting the brothel for 2 years, including the night before the mayoral election.

Boas said he was delighted by the sex with the young victims and for his own actions, said John Carbone, assistant district attorney. The defendant also promised he would try to be a better citizen, Carbone said.

In the SWAP program Boas, under the direction of Sheriff Michael Hennessey, will report for work each day, don an orange prisoner's uniform and participate with a work crew picking up garbage on city streets and cleaning graffiti from buildings, Carbone said.

The SWAP program also includes painting buses and doing some clerical filing in city offices, a spokesman said.

'He is now a convicted felon, seven times over,' Carbone said. 'So long as he performs satisfactorily in the work alternative program he won't spend nights in jail. Should he not be able to continue, he can be sent to prison without a trial.' Boas originally was charged with 19 felony counts, of which 12 were dropped in exchange for his plea. He has been free on bail. He was indicted long with 14 others, including the brothel owner, Patrick 'Dale' Roberts, San Francisco Police Officer Patrick Miyagishima and jeweler John Azevedo.

One of the young prostitutes identified Boas as a customer she knew as 'George' after spotting his picture on a large city billboard during his mayoral campaign.

John Molinari had his daughter removed by the police for abuse according to published San Francisco Police reports. Molinari is said to have had old-school southern Italian business connections. Molinari now operates as a real estate investor in San Francisco having lost his job as San Francisco traffic administrator and Golden Gate Bridge boss. Molinari was financed by David Rockefeller via Rockefeller's "Bag Man": James Bronkema and the dark conduits of the Coblenz law firm. While some thought John Molinari had hired the man that shot Agnos, others did not think so.

Agnos' liberalism ran counter to other conservative interests. As mayor, Agnos and his family became the first to ride in the Lesbian Gay Freedom Day Parade, appointed minorities, lesbians and gays to high city posts, and ended the city's opposition to a court-ordered consent decree to hire and promote minorities and women in the fire department which a federal judge opined was "out of control" due to racism when Agnos took office.^[7] Agnos ended a police department policy seen as permitting spying on local political organizations and ended the Department's Tactical Squad that critics blamed for abusing citizens. Agnos also strengthened civilian oversight of the Police Department.^[citation needed]

Agnos is best known^[citation needed] for leading the city through the recovery of the [Loma Prieta earthquake](#), the worst since

1906, and the decision to tear down the [Embarcadero Freeway \(SR 480\)](#), a double-decker freeway along the city's Embarcadero that was a wall between the waterfront and the city. His decision was strongly opposed by the Chamber of Commerce and the Chinatown community, who found the freeway a convenience for business purposes, and nearly 25,000 signatures were collected to put a measure on the ballot to repeal the decision to tear down the freeway. Once Agnos obtained federal funding, that opposition melted away.^[8] A 6–5 vote at the city's Board of Supervisors paved the way to tear down the freeway, which led to the start of a decades-long effort to open up the San Francisco waterfront into what is widely considered one of the best outcomes from the earthquake.^[citation needed] However, Agnos's 1991 opponent used the decision to play to Chinatown's sentiments and indicated he opposed tearing down the freeway. In 1991, Chinatown played a significant role in his failure to win re-election. Agnos lost in a 51.5%–48.5% election by a few thousand votes, almost the same as the Chinatown vote.

In recent years,^[when?] Agnos's decision has been looked to by city leaders and elected officials in Seattle and Toronto, Canada, where Agnos' Embarcadero result is considered a potential model for replacing elevated freeways in urban areas.^[9] Under Agnos, the waterfront transit system gained an uninterrupted streetcar line with historic trolley cars running from Fisherman's Wharf in the north to Mission Bay in the south.^[10] Agnos added to the waterfront by laying plans for the city's first public access pier, Pier 7, to allow pedestrians to walk out into the Bay. Today, San Francisco

has dedicated a new public pier, Pier 14, to honor Agnos for his leadership in opening the city's waterfront.^[11]

Agnos' San Francisco struggled with homelessness, a challenge that faced a number of cities in the late 1980s. Agnos convened a task force of providers, homeless advocates, city agency representatives and others to develop an approach that hoped to end the reliance on overnight shelters in favor of programs to help homeless individuals and families become self-reliant. The plan, *Beyond Shelter*, won national recognition and awards.^[12]

The 1989 earthquake resulted in the loss of more than 1,000 low-rent housing units, including units housing those recovering from homelessness. Agnos championed changes in earthquake recovery programs from the federal and state government and from the Red Cross that provided funds to build new facilities and housing to implement the *Beyond Shelter* program and to restore arts programs and facilities. In 1993, the results were named a Finalist in the [Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence](#).

During the nine months that it took to renovate and open the *Beyond Shelter* multiservice centers, Agnos allowed homeless individuals to camp in the park in front of City Hall, saying that the alternative was to drive them into neighborhoods and that, as long as they were in front of City Hall, city leaders would be confronted daily with the urgency of the crisis. Critics dubbed the result "Camp Agnos" and called on him to use police force to remove them, which Agnos refused to do.^[citation needed]

Agnos remained committed to a program of expanding affordable, low-cost^[clarification needed] housing in San Francisco. The city increased funding to repair and rehabilitate public housing by 300 percent, changing the vacancy rate from ten percent to one percent. He increased other affordable^[clarification needed] housing production from 342 units when he took office to 2,240 units, winning San Francisco's first national recognition from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for Excellence in Rental Rehabilitation and a Special Achievement Award.

Agnos signed a law establishing domestic partner recognition for lesbian and gay couples that had been vetoed by his predecessor, which then became a target of repeal efforts.^[13] In 1989, voters narrowly repealed domestic partner recognition. Agnos moved forward with a Family Policy Task Force that recommended broad changes to San Francisco policy and law, including health insurance for domestic partners of city workers. In 1991, the city formally adopted domestic partner health insurance rights for the city's 20,000 employees, the largest employer to do so at that time.^[14] In 1991, San Francisco voters approved a new domestic partners recognition law for the city.^[citation needed]

Agnos served as Chair of the US Conference of Mayors AIDS Task Force, where he organized the lobbying effort that resulted in passage of the Ryan White Care bill.^[15] He implemented the policies he advocated as a state legislator, including a 98 percent increase in the city's AIDS budget. He created the Mayors Task Force on the AIDS/HIV Epidemic staffed by Dr. Don Francis, a national leader on AIDS/HIV and

credited with leading the effort to eradicate smallpox worldwide.^[16]

During his tenure, Agnos also undertook major improvements to the city's infrastructure. As first lady of San Francisco, Agnos's wife Sherry co-chaired the bond campaigns for public school renovations and a new Main Library at Civic Center, and Agnos designated that the existing Main Library become the new home for the Asian Art Museum that had been in Golden Gate Park. In 1990, Sherry Agnos also raised funds and oversaw the construction of the \$2 million Jelani House that has become a most successful drug rehabilitation facility for pregnant addicted women. Agnos ended the nation's longest stalled public works project at Yerba Buena to develop a cultural hub that includes the Museum of Modern Art, [Yerba Buena Center](#), and [Yerba Buena Gardens](#).^[17] Agnos also proposed a waterfront site for a new [San Francisco Giants](#) ballpark, but the proposal narrowly lost in November 1989 weeks after the Loma Prieta earthquake absorbed public attention. Later the Giants ballpark was sited at the location Agnos designated and built to the same overall design by the architects and developers he selected originally.

Post-mayoral career

During the [Clinton administration](#), Agnos served as Regional Director of the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) for California, Arizona, Nevada, and Hawaii. Agnos also served as Acting FHA Commissioner and Acting Assistant Secretary for Housing, as well as Director of the Special Actions Office.

Agnos led HUD's effort to uplift San Francisco's Visitacion Valley, blighted by twin 20-story high-rises supported by HUD and which were unsafe for the residents and the community. Agnos created a partnership with the city, the residents, local community leaders, and HUD that led to the demolishing of Geneva Towers in 1998 and a new resident-led housing development of townhouses and apartments.

Agnos also crafted a HUD partnership for teacher housing in San Francisco and communities with excess land set aside for schools. Under the program, HUD financing supported construction and rental assistance for housing dedicated for teachers. San Jose, California, has a similar program now in effect.

Agnos worked with city leaders throughout the region to create the first funding for homeless coordination between neighboring cities to address concerns that services were not well matched with those in need.

Agnos also led an effort to combat [predatory lending](#) aimed at minority homeowners and to repeal "racial covenants" barring non-whites from living or staying overnight in many California communities. [\[citation needed\]](#)

Agnos worked with his mentor former California Assembly Speaker and Lt. Governor Leo T. McCarthy to establish the [Leo T. McCarthy Center for Public Service and the Common Good](#) at the [University of San Francisco](#). He has frequently been called upon by the US State Department, the National Democratic Institute, the Asia Foundation, and other international bodies to provide leadership development on

democracy building, including in the Russian Far East, the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Zaire, Sierra Leone, Angola, Korea, and as one of the first officials to arrive in Bethlehem to offer disaster assistance after the Palestinian-Israeli army siege of the Church of the Nativity ended on May 10, 2002. He also is frequently sought as a speaker on disaster preparedness and recovery.

In 2007, Agnos was appointed as receiver for the troubled [San Francisco Housing Authority](#). The Housing Authority sued to block the court order, and the matter went before the California Court of Appeals.^[18] The city still failed to act for two years, while appealing Agnos' appointment. By April 2009, the *SF Chronicle* reported that continued inaction while Agnos' appointment remained in court "seemed to jolt City Hall into action. Agnos never took control of the agency; instead, Fortner resigned under pressure from Newsom, who appointed Mirian Saez, director of operations at Treasure Island, to run the agency on an interim basis before hiring Alvarez. Under Saez and then Alvarez, the agency sold off properties to satisfy the judgments."^[19]

Agnos' most recent projects also include advising the founders of Open House, the first senior housing planned for elderly gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in San Francisco as well as a project working with young families seeking to improve neighborhood schools in their neighborhood of Potrero Hill in San Francisco,^[20] and he has worked as a consultant with Minnesota-based Cargill and Arizona-based DMB Associates on their controversial plan to develop a bay salt pond in Redwood City.^[21]

Agnos has become involved with restricting the building of new housing in San Francisco. He strongly opposed the 8 Washington condominium project in 2013, in support of "No Wall on the Waterfront".^[22] Agnos also was a prominent advocate for Proposition B, a precedent-setting measure approved by a wide margin by voters in June 2014 that required developments along the waterfront to win voter approval if the plan called for a height that exceeded the height limits established in the Waterfront Land Use plan first approved by voters in 1990 and implemented in 1997.^[23] He is also involved with attempts to block the redevelopment of the San Francisco Flower Mart.^[24]

On the afternoon of November 6, 1987, the Friday after the election, a crisp and cool San Francisco day without a sunbeam of hope piercing the dark electoral cloud gathered over his head, Supervisor John Molinari was secluded in his second floor City Hall office, receiving no visitors but the intimate and the anointed. Molinari's new campaign manager, Jack Davis, knocked on the door and went in without waiting, as was his custom. He stopped short at the scene inside. John Molinari was seated behind his desk in what seemed to be a state of shock. In a supplicant pose before the supervisor was the Reverend Cecil Williams with his arms outstretched in prayerful entreaty. The black pastor gave Davis the annoyed glance of one who is interrupted during a sacramental process. Molinari waved the campaign manager off. Davis closed the door softly. The moment had the sanctity of the confessional. Indeed, it was a bizarre religious tableau of the type not seen in American politics since the conniving Kissinger knelt with the besotted Nixon in the bunker hours of Watergate.

The Reverend Williams, playing the rat to Molinari's mole—even his friends call Molinari the "Mole"—told him that he was jumping ship to join Art Agnos, who had just come within a few thousand votes of burying the Mole, the former front-runner, in his own campaign mistakes. And Williams had the chutzpah to urge the Mole to quit the race while Agnos was soaring ahead. Molinari, who had just slam-dunked \$1.4 million of his friends' money down the political sewer, was stupefied; the smiling clergyman wanted to turn the election into a coronation. Williams is the boss of Glide Memorial United Methodist Church, the Notre Dame of the Tenderloin. He is also one of the face cards of San Francisco politics.

A savvy ecclesiastic who receives \$800,000 a year from the city to feed the hungry in his Tenderloin tabernacle, Williams was a premature supporter of Molinari. That was back in the good old days when Jack took an early lead in the polls after raising over a million dollars from garbagemen (the supervisor's grandfather was a pioneer San Francisco scavenger), real estate developers and others doing business with the city and county of San Francisco. When Molinari came in a distant second in the November 3 primary, Williams was quick to apprehend an apparent change in divine will; God, after all, is on the side of the winners. The mercurial minister was the first of many longtime Molinari supporters to jump ship, citing what he saw as the candidate's move to the right; many of the others deserting were men of capital who simply could not afford to back a loser.

The shock effect of Agnos's dramatic showing against the previously heavily favored Molinari affected many in the city, not the least Agnos himself. "Feinstein is going to go to pieces," he said. "She won't be able to handle re-entering ordinary life without the policemen and the limos on hand. You can't imagine the incredible power it gives you being mayor but you've got to be able to handle the power. I'm tough. I'll be able to handle it. I'll stand on the steps of City Hall like Feinstein never did and let the ordinary people come up to me and ask me questions, call me an ass----. The power won't get to me." Agnos told me that the night Williams did his routine in Molinari's office. Agnos seemed adrenalated and his eyes were glistening with the otherworldly look of a messiah. He was in the state of political rapture that once moved his fellow Democrat Lyndon Johnson, high from peacemaking, to boast, "I've got doves coming out my armpits."

I know these things because I was a candidate for mayor; not a journalistic observer, but a participant. I crossed the line dividing citizen and politician and entered the twisted world of San Francisco electoral politics, analogous in every way to the Twilight Zone. It is a world closer to the double dealing of the Middle East than to the values of middle America—a world where money is regent and the commitments that count are the ones that ring the cash register. And yet it's an amazingly personal world where the loyalties and hatreds that shape the campaign come from real, or imagined, hurts of years past. Just say no, I reply, when people ask me why anyone would run for mayor.

My decision to run had a lot to do with being born and raised in this town and thinking that the vision of the old city was being dirtied and chiseled by the politicians. There was a pervasive feeling, shared by many, that San Francisco deserved better than it was being offered in this election, or, perversely, that it was getting just what it deserved. I thought the city was getting short-sheeted, and that in the last free-for-all election we will see in many a year, some idiot had better jump in there and give the politicians what for. As it turned out, I was that idiot.

Yet this mayoral race, for all of its nightmarish big-bucks elements, has brought a few real changes. Who would have imagined a year ago that the election of 1987 would see:

The nationally-hyped Feinstein regnant go out with a whimper, the city busted financially and Madame Mayor unable to deliver for either Molinari or the Giants stadium, her two final lost causes.

Herb Caen losing it by putting his healthy cynicism aside and his 50 years of power on the line for a dice-playing buddy named Jack "Millionari" Molinari. Meantime, the young columnist for the afternoon paper went for Agnos, making Mr. San Francisco look like Mr. Milpitas.

Political control of San Francisco shifting from the Feinstein/Molinari lazy bucks, let-'em-build-skyrises clique to the Sacramento moneybags machine headed by Assembly Speaker Willie Brown, the new power behind the Agnos throne.

The entrance fee for any serious run for mayor of San Francisco becoming a cool million bucks.

Running for mayor of San Francisco was an exhilarating, exhausting, dreadful, extremely informative and sometimes hilarious experience. At a party thrown by a left-wing Valencia Street bookstore, a worker at McAuley Neuropsychiatric Institute came up to me and said he had great news. He had polled six people at the hospital and all six had said they were going to vote for me as the candidate who cared most for the poor and the homeless. That was encouraging, I said. Were these six of his co-workers? No, he said, crestfallen, they were inmates.

When you don't have a million bucks like your rivals, you have to think up gimmicks to draw attention to your candidacy. That's why we developed the official "Hinckle for Mayor" condoms. They were produced in faraway Thailand and packaged in Tempe, Arizona (sorry, no union bug), in covers cleverly resembling traditional campaign matchbooks. We gave away thousands for educational purposes here in the AIDS capital of the country.

Good news travels. During a stuffy black-tie fundraiser at the Players Club in New York, I gave one of the campaign matchbook/condoms to Tom Wolfe, the writer. Tom used to live in San Francisco and thought this great sport. He bounded across the room to former New York Mayor John Lindsay and handed him the little package, saying this was from his candidate for mayor. Lindsay began to slip it politely into his pocket, as one would with matches. Wolfe said, "Wait a minute, Your Honor, these aren't regular matches, these are from San Francisco." Lindsay looked down and opened the cover. His

tanned chin dropped in horror. [*The San Francisco Chronicle*](#) called Agnos a "longtime practical joker".^[25] Agnos is married to Sherry Hankins and has two sons.^[26]

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