



Life in Brief

Hometown: Claremont/Pasadena, CA

Current Residence: Santa Barbara, CA

Education:

- BS, Columbia College, 2006
- JD, Yale Law School, 2010

Family:

- Married to UC Santa Barbara Professor Rachael King
- One young child, expecting second

Work History:

- Founder, Be a Hero PAC, 2018-present
- Senior Organizer, Center for Popular Democracy, 2012-present
- Judicial Clerk, Judge Shira Scheindlin of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, 2010-unknown
- Liman Fellow, Make the Road New York, dates unknown
- Communications Director, Victoria Wells Wulsin for Congress (D-OH), 2006

Past and Present Boards and Advisory Roles:

- Co-chair, Health Care Voter
- Director, Fed Up Campaign
- Director, Local Progress
- Board Member, Universities Allied for Essential Medicines

Quick Summary

Progressive activist whose public sharing of his physical decline from ALS and viral social media presence have galvanized Democratic politicians on health care reform

- Career in progressive activism on issues like gay rights, reforming the federal reserve, and expanding health care access
- Diagnosed with ALS in 2016 at the age of 32; subsequent struggles with quality of life and costs prompted health care activism
- Achieved national prominence after video of him confronting former Senator Jeff Flake (R-AZ) about the 2017 GOP tax bill went viral
- Skilled grassroots organizer that has harnessed power of new media to advance his causes
- De-facto face of activist movement supporting Medicare for All who is respected and cited by nationally prominent progressive Democrats on health care

Approach and Motivations

Guided by principles of social and economic justice

- Motivated by what he describes as guilt over the opportunities he had early in life—including middle-class upbringing and Ivy League education—that others did not have
- Influenced by Occupy Wall Street protests illustrating economic inequality
- Policy principles reflect belief that government should intervene to ensure equality and maintain quality of life

Transparent about struggle with ALS

- Open about the fact that ALS will take his life, and has used his personal experience of financial strain and deteriorating physical appearance to illustrate his arguments in support of a single payer health care system for the US, specifically Medicare for All

Policy Positions and Areas of Focus

Focused on broad array of social and economic justice early in career; since ALS diagnosis, has been a vocal proponent of Medicare for All

Medicare for All (MFA) – Central issue animating him

- Uses imminent mortality due to ALS to illustrate his support for MFA
- Believes MFA will save taxpayers significant sums of money because there will be no premiums, deductibles, and co-pays
- Argues MFA is the only solution for making American health care system affordable and efficient because it would eliminate for-profit model of private insurance and streamline system to reduce administrative waste
- Cites experience with paying high out-of-pocket costs for home care despite having a private health care plan as example of flaw in private insurance system

Federal Reserve Reform – Led project advocating for the Fed to adopt pro-worker policies

- Head of “Fed Up”, which pushes the Fed to enact policies benefiting low income people
- Believes the Fed should purchase state and municipal bonds to create zero interest rate lending to cities and states to help them reduce debts and invest in public works
- Argued that the process to select Fed presidents is illegitimate. Suggested reforms to increase public engagement, such as posting a public schedule for the selection process, soliciting questions from the public, and holding public forums to discuss monetary policy

Guaranteed Employment – Key passion second only to health care

- Proposes public works projects as a replacement for unemployment benefits and a means of alleviating systemic poverty
- Highlights cost efficiency through eliminating unemployment insurance and many welfare programs

Core Communities

Well regarded by major liberal activists and left-leaning media

Left-leaning Media – Frequent guest on left-leaning outlets

- Created interview podcast, Uncovered: Health Conversations, with Crooked Media, founded by Obama alumni Jon Lovett, Jon Favreau, and Tommy Vietor
- Has been interviewed by Crooked Media podcast hosts several times
- MSNBC’s Chris Hayes has highlighted his story many times and expressed support for his advocacy on Medicare for All
- Ryan Grim, D.C. Bureau Chief of the Intercept helped start the Ady Barkan reporting fellowship

Progressive Activism Community – Advocacy career has garnered progressive allies

- Linda Sarsour, organizer of the Women’s March, is a close partner and longtime friend
- NYC Councilman Brad Lander is a longtime friend who helped him found and build Local Progress
- Helen Brosnan is a close friend who helped form Be a Hero PAC before joining Elizabeth Warren’s presidential campaign
- Ben Wikler, Washington Director of Moveon.org, worked with him early in his career in organizing
- Connections to progressive groups he’s worked for or been on the board of, including Universities Allied for Essential Medicines, the Center for Popular Democracy, and Health Care Voter

Core Communities Cont.

Progressive Democrats – High-profile activism and advocacy made him key influencer to party's rising stars on the left

- Formed close bond to Sen. Bernie Sanders, who joined him on his “Be a Hero Tour” in 2018 and considers him “a True American Hero”
- Sen. Elizabeth Warren has amplified his story in her presidential campaign, referencing him on multiple occasions
- Met Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez advocating for Medicare for All and formed friendship, prompting her to write the foreword of his book
- Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN) has [praised](#) his health care activism. He defended her criticism of pro-Israel lobbying group AIPAC in a column for [The Nation](#)

Selected Publications

Primarily focuses on health care policy discussions and uses his ALS as an example

Books – Wrote memoir about his life and impact he hopes to have

- *Eyes to the Wind: A Memoir of Love and Death, Hope and Resistance*, 2019

Articles and Opinion Pieces – Uses national platform to advocate for his policy goals

- [“How my dying body could help give yours a future,”](#) *Time*, September 2019
- [“The government should guarantee everyone a good job,”](#) *The Nation*, April 2018

Podcasts – Started health care podcast in run-up to 2020 elections

- Interviewed several 2020 democratic presidential candidates for his podcast, [Uncovered: Health Care Conversations with Ady Barkan](#), where they discuss personal experiences with navigating the American health care system

Financial Donations

Minimal donations to progressive candidates and PACs

State – Candidate

- \$100 – Bill de Blasio for Mayor

State – PAC

\$400 – Working Families Party, Inc.

Media Appearances

Favors new media like viral videos and podcasts. Speaks through computer-generated voice

New Media – Deft at garnering support from left-leaning new media

- [NowThis News](#): Several viral videos through NowThis platform illustrating his deteriorating physical condition and discussing his support for Medicare for All, October 2019
- [Pod Save America](#): Spoke about importance of health care and jobs guarantee, April 2018

Cable Television – Discussed his health care views on major networks

- [CNN](#): Interviewed after confronting Sen. Jeff Flake about the importance of Medicare/Medicaid benefits to him as his ALS progresses, December 2017
- [MSNBC](#): Interviewed about the GOP tax bill's cuts to Medicaid, December 2017

Speaking Engagements

Testified before Congress in his capacity as a healthcare activist and ALS patient

- Spoke at House Rules Committee hearing in support of Medicare for All before, highlighting his personal experience dealing with the high costs of care since being diagnosed with ALS, April 2019

Profiles Others Have Written

Profiles focus primarily on how he uses his ALS diagnosis to influence policy discussions

Arthur Allen: [The Most Powerful Activist in America is Dying](#), *Politico Magazine*, March 2019

Jenny Singer: Barkan – [Giving His Last Breath to Democracy](#), *Forward*, October 2018

Info From Formative Years

Early life growing up in academic family fueled his interest in social and political issues

- Raised by immigrant parents in secular Jewish household where they talked about news and global affairs frequently
- As a teenager, helped put out campaign signs opposing 2000 ban on gay marriage in California
- Traces interest in activism and public speaking is traced back-to high school, where he was involved in speech and debate, and theater.
- Wrote column for the school newspaper covering world affairs and press freedoms
- As a teenager, helped put out campaign signs opposing 2000 ban on gay marriage in California
- Motivated to become a lawyer for the poor and disadvantaged after reading “To Kill a Mockingbird” as a kid

Family Background

- Child of immigrant parents
- Mother, Diana L. Kormos-Buchwald, is originally from Romania and is a Professor of History at CalTech
- Father, Jed Buchwald, is originally from Israel and also a Professor of History at CalTech
- Grandmother on father’s side, Dina Abramov, was born in Palestine
- Grew up in secular Jewish household
- Married to Rachael King, an Associate Professor of English at UC-Santa Barbara
- Met wife at Columbia University