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HAPPENING TODAY



WASHINGTON WATCH

Q&A: TECH ON THE HILL — Wiener plans to challenge House Speaker Emerita Rep. **Nancy Pelosi** whether she decides to seek another term in Congress or not, aiming to

launch a campaign against one of the most powerful Democrats in modern American politics at a time when the party has been grappling with a generational divide.

Wiener, who has served in the state Senate since 2016, is a central figure in tech policy and AI regulation in the state. He's [garnered support](#) from both industry and state leaders, and most recently got his first-in-the-nation [AI transparency bill, SB 53, signed into law by Gov. Gavin Newsom](#).

That measure was a compromise win after a [big swing and miss](#) by Wiener last year on AI safety that infuriated the tech industry. If he finds himself in Congress, it remains to be seen which approach Wiener would take on tech regulation — or if he would focus on the issue at all.

Wiener, if elected, could look to focus on more drilled-down AI safety issues like kids' chatbot safety or deepfakes, which [Republicans too have shown an appetite](#) to crack down on. Or he could continue his quest to break new ground on broad AI safety issues, even potentially replicating SB 53 at the national level. He would have his plate full, as pushing back against Trump's policies would also be at the top of his list as a leading San Francisco Democrat.

But Wiener would not be the only recognizable name in tech circles that Pelosi would face if she decides to run again. Challenging one of the most prominent Democrats was already an uphill battle for [tech centimillionaire Saikat Chakrabarti](#) — a progressive who worked on Rep. [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's](#) 2018 campaign — but his odds are even slimmer with Wiener now in the picture.

Chakrabarti, however, was seemingly unfazed by the news about Wiener's anticipated run and echoed in a statement his repeated push for "a new kind of leader who is not a part of the establishment," underscoring some of [his own campaign's focuses](#), like affordable housing and Medicare for all.

"That's my campaign, regardless of who else is in the race," he said.

Chakrabarti, who's worked at industry giants like Stripe and Bridgewater Associates (and even [interned at Apple](#)), discussed in an interview with Juliann what he sees as the future of progressivism. He also talked about AI and tech rules, and how his background in the industry shapes the way he views legislation.

Here's what he said:

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

How does your experience with Silicon Valley and tech inform your campaign now?

I kind of saw up front how these larger issues around inequality — the crazy cost of living in the city, the structural issues around health care — this stuff was not getting fixed by tech, it was outside the scope of tech being able to fix it. I didn't pretend to know what would fix it; I honestly left tech just kind of searching for answers.

I don't know if it's my time in tech that's led to me being this way, or if I'm this way, and that's why I got attracted to tech, but I do often like to look at problems from sort of a structural lens, from a systemic lens. The thing I'm trying to bring to the policy landscape ... is how do we actually create a progressivism that's also about building: building housing, building high-wage industries, and using state capacity to do that? Technology and innovation is certainly a big part of the stuff I'm talking about, but I believe we have to do it in a way where the benefits of technology and innovation go to the broad base of people, not just to a handful of people at the top.

Do you still feel that way about tech — that it doesn't address structural issues?

I think tech is part of the solution. I don't think any tech solution to health care is going to solve this insane, skyrocketed cost of health care, insane insurance system that we have. I think there's this other structural problem that is a policy problem, that's a government problem.

But of course, I think if there are ways for us to do data better in health, tech has a role to play there. I think there's a big role tech should be playing in how we even have effective governance.

I think this is different from whatever DOGE is trying to do. I'm talking about, how do you actually have government services that, when people interact with them, they have a good experience? So I think tech is absolutely part of the solution.

Newsom just passed into law SB 53. What do you think about the debate around California and states versus the federal government regulating AI?

When it comes to this sort of AI safety regulation, I absolutely believe that the bigger you go, the better. Yes, we need to do things at a federal level; I think we need to do things at an international level. I don't think it's going to be sufficient for any single state to regulate these companies because people are developing AI in other places, people are developing AI in China.

I see SB 53 as, it's better to get something out there than nothing. But I would like to see this turn into an international movement. ... We're not going to be able to get to a place where we're actually getting all the companies around the world to take safety seriously if it's just California doing it.

What about kids' safety and social media: what's the best way to regulate this?

When it comes to regulating children on social media or the use of AI, when it comes to interacting with children or how social media companies interact with children, California absolutely should and can regulate that because that's about protecting our people here in the state.

I love [AB 1043 \[on age verification\]](#). ... I love the idea of putting this stuff at a device level. I'd like to see it go further ... I think we need to go back to that model of having more data be stored locally if you're going to do identifying data, having actual guardrails around companies hoovering this stuff up and creating centralized databases of ID. I think it's a real opportunity for us, when we're doing this sort of regulatory stuff at a device level, to also put guardrails around information security and privacy.

The government shouldn't be afraid to talk about how to actually create the programmatic solutions here. I think currently, the government doesn't feel qualified to do it, but there's no reason why we can't be talking about standards and protocols for how to do this stuff. We should absolutely be regulating this stuff at a state and federal level.

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