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Assembly District 23
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Summary of League of Women Voters 2024 Legislative Interview

What can we learn about open meetings from the pandemic?

I support a comprehensive analysis of the open meeting laws. The pandemic forced us to do things in different ways. Now, we're analyzing their benefits and downsides. Openness and accessibility are important. However, I don't think one solution fits every agency. I'm open to different rules and procedures for how some boards and agencies operate. It was good to allow for more remote participation of the public – however, that openness creates an opportunity for some people to cause chaos and disrupt the democratic process. That's why comprehensive study is important. We need to create transparency, accessibility, and guardrails.

Question 2: What legislation would you introduce or support to mitigate the health effects of climate change, particularly air pollution and extreme heat?

Climate change is a huge issue that affects every corner of California. We need to do a hundred different things. I wrote a bill that banned gas-powered leaf blowers, lawnmowers, and other small off-road engines, which emit huge amounts of smog-forming pollution and create negative health impacts for landscaping professionals. Another community of concern is our farm workers. Farm workers are affected by the heat and bad air days.

I just had a meeting about air filtration in schools and how important good air quality is for student learning. We also need to improve forest management to lower the intensity of fires.

Question 3: Housing underproduction has been identified as one of California's most significant problems. How can we make substantial progress in increasing housing and decreasing homelessness?

We must build more housing. This is the most contentious issue in my district. Lately, the state's role has been more heavy-handed than in previous decades.

The Bay Area has done a great job of creating jobs but not of building housing for those workers. We've reached a crisis point in terms of housing affordability. We aren't going to publicly subsidize our way out of this. We'll need market-rate housing. We need to use "carrots" and provide more funding for local governments to plan for housing, but we also need to use sticks if cities don't comply with their housing elements.

We need to do a better job of creating the workforce for the building industry. For a while, it was uncool to work with your hands. We need more people who work with their hands.

In terms of priorities, we need to reduce bureaucracy. For example, I gave a \$8 million check for a housing project in East Palo Alto with 11 or 13 different funding sources, three or four of which were different State agencies. Historically, the city needed to report back to each agency, often in different formats. I wrote a new law that says they only need to report to one State agency, which will then share the information with the others.

I also worked on a bill for a CEQA exemption for in-fill projects.

Question 4: Personal Priorities of Legislator

What other major issues must the legislature deal with in 2024?

What are your personal priorities?

I struggle with being interested in everything. I'll probably have three bills this year about regulating AI. The first has to do with a loophole in state law regarding the creation, possession, and dissemination of child sexual abuse material (child pornography) if created with AI. In 2019, I had two bills regulating deepfake technology in movies and elections. I want to ensure we don't make the same mistakes with AI that we made with social media by taking too long to recognize the risks to society of the new technology.

I will have a bill about teaching the responsible use of AI in our schools. This is a follow-up to my bill last year about media literacy in schools. We need to teach the next generation how to use AI responsibly and be aware of its pros and cons.

A huge priority for me is defending our democracy. I have authored probably 20 laws in this area. One was to create the "where's my ballot" system. Another was the first Office of Election Cybersecurity in the country. I will introduce a bill this year addressing the use of elections-related AI on social media platforms.

I am also a co-author of Gail Pellerin's recently introduced bill to ban the use of "materially deceptive election-related deep fakes" for four months before an election. This bill concerns off-line campaigning, such as mailers and TV ads.

Question 5: Local Issues

Local League Question(s) related to issues of local concern. Do you agree with Mayors Breed and Mahan that Proposition 47 should be revised because of increased retail thefts?

I don't know enough about the proposal (to revise Prop. 47) to know if I agree with it. I don't think there is such a direct connection between Prop 47 and the rise in retail theft. Now, a felony is \$950. A lot of retail theft is already over \$950, and the penalty for a misdemeanor is already up to a year in county jail. I think we need to go after the people higher up. Putting low-level offenders in jail for three years for stealing \$500 is bad policy.

There are additional things we can do. It makes sense to aggregate thefts (i.e., stealing from more than one store). Texas has the highest threshold in the nation: \$2,500. We have the 10th lowest threshold, at \$950. Our pre-Prop 47 threshold of \$400 was the second lowest in the country.

We also need to do a better job enforcing the laws we already have, like smash-and-grab for vehicles. Presently, there are technicalities, such as the car owner having to prove the door was locked, even if the window was smashed. This makes it harder for law enforcement to prosecute these cases. Senator Wiener has a bill this year (SB 905), which I am a coauthor of, to close this unnecessary loophole.

We also need more money for diversion programs and rehabilitation programs.

Any additional comments or observations:

We have a lot of challenges in California and my district, like the housing affordability crisis. Last year I got \$2.5 million in the state budget for farmworker housing in Half Moon Bay. And we have a \$60 billion deficit. Despite the difficult environment, I am optimistic that we can do important things this year. Now is a great time to exert more oversight to ensure the agencies are doing what we asked them to do and that taxpayers get value for their money. For example, I requested an audit of the VTA, which is scheduled to come out in a few months, to ensure that Santa Clara County residents are getting the high-quality service they deserve and are paying for.