

Josh Becker, Senate District 13

February 5, 2026

Summary of League of Women Voters 2025 Legislative Interview

Participating Leagues: South San Mateo County (Tom Enger), North and Central San Mateo County (Kathleen Jones), Palo Alto (Lisa Ratner, Tim Persyn, Hilary

Glann, Linda Henigan, Mary Nemerov, Hannah Lu), LosAltos/Mountain View (Li Zhang), Sunnyvale (MarieAnn Shovlin), San Jose/Santa CLara (Patty Bove, Nancy Bremeau), South West Santa Clara County (Patty Tennant)

Question 1: What major issues do you think the legislature must deal with in 2026?

We have a lot to deal with. He's chairing Natural Resources and Human Resources Committees.

Energy: we passed a significant energy package. It's just a start.

The bill will take time to fully manifest, such as public funding of infrastructure.

We need to make more progress on utility rates and advancing clean energy goals. We are standing up to the Trump administration.

Wildfires: we need to focus on prevention, mitigation and insurance affordability.

Focus on utility rates because people are paying a large percentage of their income on these.

Global Climate Change talks - He represented our country in the absence of our President

Housing: We passed bills on streamlining that needed to happen. Developers are allowed to build what they want, but the financing doesn't pencil out.

We need to actually get housing built. We need to focus on funding. We desperately need more dollars for affordable housing in particular.

We passed a climate and education bond. We need to get the housing bond passed.

Transportation: agencies are teetering on the edge of insolvency.

BART will dramatically cut service. The Bay Area Caucus recommended a \$950 million loan for regional transportation needs. It's absolutely critical that the bond passes in order to maintain service.

Question 2: What are your personal legislative priorities?

Wildfires, Energy, Criminal Justice, Childcare

Of his 15 bills, 9 will be on wildfire and energy. He will continue to be very active on energy.

He will chair Human Services and sees childcare as a critical issue. He gave an example of opening the largest child care facility in San Mateo county, paying \$30 an hour. He anticipates having a bill focused on childcare to make the system work.

He authored Bill 254, a major California utilities reform bill to address the cost of electricity for climate goals and billions of dollars in electricity rate reform. He will have a follow-on bill to address the cost of electricity.

He authored a number of criminal justice bills. He noted one about prison phone calls. A billion minutes of free phone calls for prisoners in Solano County prison have happened.

It's connecting families. There is an exploitive system of text messaging and photos where 50% of the cost goes to prisons. He will try to reform that. Also passed a bill on egregiously high canteen item pricing. He will be moderating on Feb. 19 at the Commonwealth Club a discussion of a book on the justice system.

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Four areas for criminal justice reform:

School to prison pipeline

Prison conditions reform

Sentencing reform

Re-entry

We make reentry too hard. Care jobs are hard to get with any black mark on their record, and we need folks in care jobs. People need credit for their work

He received a Youth Justice Award from the Pacific Center. He did a bill with them addressing youth justice reform on detention. He sponsored a bill for free community college in San Mateo. Over 30K kids have benefitted. This was a pilot and we need to make it permanent. He noted other prison reform bills to give prisoners credit for their employment during incarceration.

Local Question 1: Data centers.

How can we minimize the environmental impacts of data centers to the communities in which they are located, not drive up electricity rates for general rate payers, and keep data centers in California?

Several proposals have been forth including imposing a special electricity tariff for large load consumers. Meanwhile, the city of San Jose has made its own data center deal with PG&E.

Follow-up Question: What are your thoughts about data center regulation?

Data centers are neither good nor bad; it's how we implement them.

We have excess grid capacity most of the time. Only about 40 hours a year are constrained. We went from 65% grid utilization to about 45% utilization. We can have beneficial load growth that brings down the cost for everyone. We need data centers to pay upfront to justify the upgrades needed. They have to curtail their use during the constrained hours by contract. There are water issues too - Diane Papan is working on that. Constrained hours occur during massive heat waves.

Local Question 2: Immigration and AI

LWV California believes that state-level action is essential to hold ICE accountable for its actions within our state and is reviewing new legislation recently introduced. Do you support a No Kings bill which would give Californians a right to sue federal agents in state court for violating constitutional rights? What other legislation should be considered to protect peaceful ICE observers from being threatened or killed by armed ICE agents?

No Kings Bill - It passed the senate. He thinks it will pass the assembly. This is a civil remedy. He is concerned that our area could be next. It's going to be very challenging to stand up for our civil rights.

SB 361, the Delete Act, went into effect this year. 215,000 signed in to delete their information from data brokers. There is a new bill to delete information from businesses that aren't data brokers. It does not affect facial recognition.

Follow-up Question: In Minnesota ICE is using AI-powered facial recognition devices to track the home location of peaceful observers of ICE conduct. You've written that you want to ensure AI works for people, not just profits. Your bill (SB468) requires a business deploying a high-risk AI system that processes personal information to protect that information. Does that bill protect the privacy of peaceful protesters from AI intrusion? What are your thoughts on a bill that would do so?

He's trying to keep facial recognition data from going to the feds. We had a bill which tried to put limits on information going to the police. Mountain View has

said they are going to stop using FLOCK cameras because they didn't want that information used to track immigration status. He reiterated that the Delete Act went into effect this year and urged people to sign up for the service.

Local Question 3: Affordable Housing Finance and Equity

The lack of funding for low- and moderate-income housing is a major roadblock to an adequate supply of affordable housing. Using low-income housing tax credits and state bonds takes years to assemble and costs nearly twice as much per unit than comparable market rate units. We need alternatives to the current system. Would you consider a bill classifying housing as "infrastructure in the public interest" to qualify for loans from the state Infrastructure Bank, as you did with SB 254 for "clean energy projects" in 2025. Do you have other ideas about alternatives to the current financing system?

Had not heard about that or considered it. He would like to learn more. Please send information to his staff about this. We need to pass the affordable housing bond. There are new middle-income loans in Bob Hertzberg's bill. The Governor didn't fund low income housing tax credits in the budget. The Legislature has to fight for it. It takes much too long to accumulate the layers of funding for low income housing. We've tried to align the funding agencies. The Bay Area Caucus, Buffy Wicks, is leading on this. We need to reauthorize Cap and Trade funding for affordable housing sustainable communities.

He's open to any ideas.

Follow up question: Property taxes are about 18% of operating costs for multi-family developments. Would you be in favor of property tax abatements for low and moderate income housing to lower operating costs and encourage building of workforce housing?

Yes, he would be. I passed a bill limiting fees for housing near transit. He supports things that take the burden off affordable housing to make it cheaper to build.

Local Question 4 : Climate Resilience

What is being done to mitigate the climate risks of wildfires and sea level rise?

Sea level rise: He got funding for sea level rise and climate. Two bills will be addressing these topics this year, including \$110 million for coastal resilience and

sea level rise. He will be fighting to make sure the Bay Area gets its share.. As chair of Natural Resources, it will be a big focus. The way the bond was written, it takes too long to get the money. He wants to move the money along faster with an exemption. Cut the “green tape” to get things done faster.

Wildfire: an 8 point plan around wildfire mitigation is on his website. The plan includes:

Hazardous fuel reduction – a bill on prescribed burns to prevent the large conflagrations from starting. For early detection, I fought for cameras and aerial resources. We have aircraft prepositioned 20 minutes from any fire. We bought up all the helicopters that suppress fire. Calfire never was year-round; now it is. LA wildfires were in January. We dramatically increased the human resources in CalFire as well. See his website.

This year he'll focus on Santa Cruz mountains conservancy; home hardening; and county wildfire fighting.

Follow-up question: What can be done to increase the availability of fire insurance for wildfires? Some homeowners find that insurance coverage is being denied for damages flowing from environmental hazards such as smoke- from wildfires. Do we need new insurance coverage regulations to make sure coverage is fair to homeowners?

Insurance relates to all these things. He has a bill to handle liability reform. We currently pay through our utility bills. We have to bring insurers back to CA. We did a lot to stabilize the insurance situation, but need to do more. Did SB 10 help? The Insurance industry killed his bill. We need to incentivize people to harden their homes, and then have them benefit from that. A report on Liability Reform is coming.

Local Question 5: Education

What are your thoughts on changing the way public education is financed in California to make it more equitable for poorer districts? Do you support basing school district funding on enrollment rather than attendance? Do you support redistributing money raised by basic aid districts to other districts to more equalize per pupil funding?

If we had a regional cost adjustment for LCFF, that would make sure funding was more equitable. The problem is that in my district, we have no non-basic-aid districts overall.

We should share the wealth, we are donors. If you had a regional cost adjustment for LCFF, you wouldn't have tweener districts that are underfunded. Ravenswood should be funded at a higher level. Even our basic aid districts aren't funded properly. We get the same funding as Bakersfield or CA near Oregon. More money would go to schools rather than special districts (fire districts) if we had cost adjustments. Counties get excess LCFF money at the end of the year. The money goes to fire districts, but they are overfunded. He supports basing funding on enrollment rather than attendance. LCFF was meant to equalize funding.

Local Question 6: What measures would you recommend to correct the continuing state budget deficit problems?

The Legislature had a recent budget workshop. The state Budget increased from about \$200B to \$300B, with healthcare the major problem. We need to make cuts and also get more revenue. Our costs have gone up - 40% to education, raising our per pupil spending. The number of pupils has gone down. People left public schools during COVID. Healthcare has seen a massive increase. Some countries spend 12% of their GDP. We spend 20-25% of our GDP on healthcare and aren't happy. We have a bad system in the US that has to be fixed. We can only do so much here in CA. We enacted full coverage for undocumented immigrants and spent more than we thought we would. It speaks to the health issues of working age immigrants.

Our revenues have gone up above estimates because of the positive economy we have now. The billionaire tax measure is poorly written. He thinks it's negative because we already have a progressive income tax that works. Don't screw it up by taxing unrealized gains. We could move to a different tax system but we haven't. We are very dependent on the income tax.

Ways we can raise revenue: big companies have employees on public assistance:

1) Walmart has employees on Medi-Cal; The companies could pay for health care costs, a \$4-6 billion item.

2) We don't tax services like digital goods, accounting and legal services

3) Prop 13 split-roll system - we need to reform that. Draeger's pays way more than Trader Joe's. The Governor never raised taxes in his time in office.

Not all choices are politically feasible. The governor doesn't want to raise taxes. In the next three years we will have substantial deficits. We are looking at revenue increases and cuts.

Local Question 7: What were your take-aways from attending COP30?

People were glad we were there, since our federal government wasn't. Just showing up made a big difference to the world, that CA was there. I was there, the governor was there. We had a message of progress. I'm launching a Good News climate blog. Australia is going to 0% coal in 7 years. Ethiopia doesn't allow any importation of fossil fuel cars and motorcycles. Lots of good news despite what the Trump admin is doing.

There's a lot of momentum. I saw things we can bring back here. A Danish parliamentarian talked about using data to streamline permitting. We could tax first class and private aviation to fund sustainable aviation fuel. Airline emissions will be an increasingly large portion of our emissions. 50% of the oil that's extracted in a damaging way from the Amazon comes to California. He will explore how we get off oil from the Amazon.