Marc Berman, Assembly District 23
February 6, 2026

Interview Location: Palo Alto District Office

Leagues represented:

 - Li Zhang - Los Altos-Mountain View Area

 - Katie Zoglin - Los Altos-Mountain View Area

 - Claudia Hevel - Los Altos-Mountain View Area

 - Tom Pavel - San Jose/Santa Clara

 - Kathleen Jones - North & Central San Mateo County

 - Linda Henigin - Palo Alto

 - Tom Enger - South San Mateo County

 - Liz Kniss - Palo Alto

Q1: Legislature's Priorities

Berman was first elected in 2016 and started in the Assembly concurrent with the first Trump term. Then, as now, the top priorities of the Legislature seem to be around protecting the residents of California from harm by Trump administration policies. He also noted that these challenges are much harder this time around, since the Trump administration is better organized and more effective, while the CA budget is much tighter now.

 More specifically, the HR1 changes to Medicare are expected to cause a large number of people to lose coverage due to onerous paperwork requirements. In addition, these changes may cause a large influx of community college students (since enrolling is one way to satisfy the new work requirements). These HR1 changes threaten to reverse the progress CA has made in reducing the percentage of residents without any health care coverage. In addition, he expects action in the next weeks to add $90M to help plug the hole created by the defunding of reproductive health care. The present budget already supplies $140M, but the need is much higher.

Berman characterized this year's budget challenge as mainly trying to maintain current programs, rather than any significant spending on new programs. The year's tax revenue

actually looks better than the worst of previous projections, but the prospects for future years also indicate shortfalls. Therefore, he expects money to go into reserves for those future years. In particular, a big concern is that if AI is truly over-hyped, then a popping of the AI bubble could lead to major drops in capital gains revenue.

Q2: Personal Legislative Priorities

Berman described his approach as covering a diverse set of areas, concentrating on a few areas where he leads committees (education and elections) and then plugging holes in areas that he sees as not being addressed by any other legislator. There is also a new limit of 35 bills per legislator per 2-year cycle that has led him to be more selective. He shared a list of current priorities that are still under development (and some of which are **not yet public**):

1. Electrification incentives

The idea is to provide a voluntary incentive for homeowners who want to convert their houses from gas to electricity. Utilities would use money allocated for replacing/modernizing gas supply lines (which can exceed $20k and is paid off by all ratepayers over approximately 55 years) and apply a portion of that money as an incentive for the homeowner instead of upgrading the gas line. This bill is being developed with Earthjustice and NRDC. There may be a similar bill from Senator Becker, but Berman was not aware of Senator Becker's plans.

2. Gun bill

Berman is working with the Giffords Law Center on a bill to allow the State DOJ to revoke operating permissions for gun dealers with a history of violating state regulations. Currently, the enforcement actions available against such dealers are too weak.

3. Suicide prevention training

Working with the State Commission for Behavioral Health, Berman is pursuing a bill to expand a program that provides suicide prevention training statewide to teachers, administrators, and parents. This is particularly relevant to the Palo Alto school district.

4. AI chatbots and election interference

Although some of the major AI LLM products contain express prohibitions on answering queries about elections, there is no broader regulation preventing AI chatbots from telling people whom to vote for. Berman does not yet have a specific proposal but sees this as an area that needs guardrails or disclosures.

Q3: Local Questions

1. Voter registration / AB 1116

Claudia asked about this bill, which creates an online voter registration system. However, there is a problem in registering students when they do not have both a CA driver license and a social security number to supply in the form. Berman said he would look into that issue. Furthermore, the status of the bill is that he is working through concerns raised by the Secretary of State. Berman noted that he would like to hear ideas on elections legislation.

2. AI

Tom P referenced last year's AB-2655 and asked how Berman sees the landscape of different remaining AI challenges and what areas he hopes to address next. His approach reflects his broader legislative strategy, in which he leaves some of the bigger issues to colleagues who have them well-covered (citing the SB-53 bill by Weiner) and focuses on some niches that are needing coverage. As an example, he cited his efforts on education in media literacy (AB-873 in 2023). The point is that regardless of the latest AI capabilities, training on how to be critical consumers of information will be more and more relevant in the future.

3. Education

Katie's question revolved around disparities in educational outcomes around the Bay Area and the state, and how we can make progress at improving outcomes in general. Berman cited a bill passed last year for Science of Reading reforms in curriculum (phonics vs. memorization) that came with $200M in funding for teacher training. The idea was to focus on reading as it is foundational for learning all other disciplines. Berman expressed general frustration at implementation of prior bills around Media Literacy and AI Literacy, noting that state agencies can often drag their heels and take far longer than is reasonable to implement new laws.

On the funding side, he recently met with a San Mateo County K-12 group to explore ideas for addressing the large disparities in funding between different districts in the county. Some ideas included tweaking the state Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) to include Cost of Living

Adjustments (COLA) for high-cost areas (such as the Bay Area). Unfortunately, this does not seem to have sufficient support in the legislature as there are not enough representatives from high-cost districts. Berman also suggested and he supports potential changes to Prop 13 to separate residential and commercial roles, but this would require a ballot measure.

4. Immigration

Kathleen asked what the legislature can do in reaction to Trump administration actions on immigration enforcement to protect vulnerable communities. Berman cited that the state did a lot of preparations nine years ago with the first Trump administration, such as passing laws prohibiting coordination between state or local agencies and federal immigration authorities. In addition, the state allocated $50M last year for legal assistance, both to the state DOJ and to local organizations for legal defense against administration overreach. The state also passed laws requiring ID and prohibiting masking of all law enforcement officers, but this is currently being challenged in the courts (and Berman was not optimistic about the prospects of success). There is also a recent effort to prohibit state resources (such as buildings and parking lots) from being used by ICE, along with a bill to prohibit anyone who has worked for ICE from working for the state and a bill to prohibit companies from renting cars to ICE. While supportive of the ideas, Berman was not sure how big the impacts would be or if they were constitutional.

5. Protecting elections

In response to a question about how to protect future elections, Berman thought the focus would be on challenging any issues in the courts. He also cited the CA Office of Election Cybersecurity (in the Secretary of State's department) which was created in 2018 by his bill (AB 3075). This office works to help the various county Registrar of Voters offices with any cybersecurity issues.

6. Climate

Tom E asked about climate issues. Similar to the approach on AI, Berman is working to plug small holes that complement broader efforts advanced by other lawmakers. He described the

bill on electrification incentives earlier, and he passed a bill (AB 1346) on banning small engines (for leaf blowers and the like). He also passed a bill (AB 1167) last year to prevent utilities from using ratepayer money for lobbying.

7. Housing

In Berman's view, there has been a lot done in the legislature to streamline the approval process for permission to build more housing, but the next principal challenge is around reducing the costs of building housing. He is looking at rules around prefab units and ADUs, but there wasn't time to discuss this in much detail.