

Josh Becker, Senate District 13
January 30, 2025
Summary of League of Women Voters 2025 Legislative Interview

Participating Leagues: Palo Alto, LA/MV, San Jose/SC, CU/Sunnyvale, S. San Mateo County, SWSCCounty

Question 1: What are the legislator's priorities this year?

Answer: Major state issues include recovery from the Los Angeles wildfires and local wildfire preparedness. On Feb. 18, Sen. Becker will hold a town hall fire preparedness meeting. Last year, he authored bills that increased state firefighting forces and proposed a wildfire strategy plan.

Senator Becker is the Chair of the Senate Energy Committee. He will focus on reducing energy costs to keep them affordable. He's excited about the bill that will create a regional grid with our neighboring states. This bill will allow us to use renewable power in an integrated grid so we are not forced to import energy and export renewables. This will provide more resiliency and potentially save CA \$700M a year. The goal will be to keep climate goals while reining in energy rates. This task will not be easy.

He's also focusing on carbon removal (versus carbon capture). Our goal is to remove 75M metric tons of carbon by 2045.

Last session, he also authored a bill to ensure that no one is denied healthcare based on an AI decision. Physician decisions cannot be based on algorithms, and physicians with good track records will not use algorithms to require prior authorization.

Generally, tech policy and AI are significant focus areas. He authored four AI bills last year, which will be implemented this year. These include the Delete Act, effective January 2026, and Transparency for AI, which deals with AI-created images on social media. This year, he intends to follow up with bills on chatbots and increase transparency. He is looking at bills about data brokers selling personal information, flagging images generated by AI, and transparency around chatbots.

Criminal justice is another area he will focus on. He would be happy to discuss which issues he will tackle. Also, there's a big focus on starting the clean-up in LA after the fires. The home insurance market is in crisis, and we must focus there. The location of the electrical infrastructure must also be evaluated.

Homelessness is a priority. California has more unsheltered people than any other state. Last year, he authored the Interim Housing Act, which promoted the use of modular housing at a much lower cost and a faster rate than traditional interim housing. The bill allowed localities to

use interim housing building standards rather than state or local building codes. He is preparing a bill that looks at how to allow entitled empty commercial property to be transferred to residential use. He supports low-cost tiny homes programs; he submitted a bill for shelter. There is a need for rational housing policy and more action on the housing front.

Question 2. What are the Legislature's Major Issues?

Answer: Affordability of Energy. Safe cleaning up of the Los Angeles fires needs to be a priority. Some of the costs will be recouped from the federal government. The Senate passed a \$25 million bill to fund lawsuits challenging new, unconstitutional federal policies, but the Assembly has not yet passed it.

The insurance crisis will be a major focus. We'll be working on it all year. If Southern California Edison is responsible, it will pay. If not, the public will pay, and the insurance system needs to be overhauled. We also need to address the issue of issuance rate transparency.

It is hard to know what other legislators will do because the bill deadline has not been reached yet.

Follow-up question: The education community is concerned about using Prop 2 funds for wildfire cleanup, which would mean less money intended for schools.

Answer: Senator Becker has not heard of education bond fund monies being raided for the LA fire. For now, neither the recently passed climate bond nor the Prop 2 education bond will be used to fund LA wildfire recovery.

Follow-up question: Some consumer watchdogs are concerned that the new insurance rules will eliminate the rate-setting transparency required by Prop. 108.

Answer: The insurance commissioner adopted rules allowing companies to use forward-looking modeling, including the effects of climate change, in rate setting. People would rather have insurance than not, so the commissioner needs to approve the rate. Once insurance coverage returns, we can then look at fixing any problems.

Local question 1: How is SB24, the 2022 Plastic Pollution Prevention and Packaging Producer Responsibility Act, which includes banning single-use bags by January 1, 2026, working?

Answer: He doesn't know and will follow up on this topic.

Local question 2: Lack of funding for affordable housing is the major roadblock to increasing its supply. Should the state adopt the funding model you mentioned in last year's legislative interview: the social housing model in Montgomery County, Md., which uses a revolving fund to allow public agencies to make construction loans to developers who build mixed-income affordable housing? The public agency can then become a part or full owner of the

development. Do you support AB11, Alex Lee's social housing bill, which would establish a state agency with the authority to use the revolving fund approach to build mixed-income housing with full or partial public ownership?

Answer: He recently spoke to Mike Callagy, Executive Director in San Mateo County, about this. Callagy is connecting with Montgomery County to learn how the approach works. San Mateo County is also considering a bond to support social housing this year. Callagy spoke about needing to get around a constitutional provision blocking bond funding of affordable housing, but this has been done before. Sen. Becker recently visited Australia, where he observed many social housing units, a conservative government-supported policy. Sen Becker believes it is time to reconsider the concept of government-owned housing. The Montgomery County approach is an essential tool to address the shortage of affordable housing. He supports AB 11, the social housing bill, and doesn't know why it has problems.

Follow-up question: Would state legislation be necessary to help local counties or cities increase their bonding authority to fund mixed-income affordable housing, given the scarcity of federal and state tax credits ordinarily used to finance affordable developments?

Sen. Becker observed that the state budget does not include room for low-income housing tax credits this year. He invited us to send information to his staff on the details of Montgomery County's financing approach and the issue of local bonding capacity and authority for mixed-income affordable housing.

Follow-up question: How can the state respond if the federal government revokes the Medi-Cal waiver allowing those funds for affordable housing?

He doesn't know what the federal government will do. The state Senate passed a \$25 bill to fight federal policy changes, but the Assembly has yet to do the same.

Local question 3: Can the state simplify the permitting process for installing heat pump space and water heaters to reduce costs and delays, similar to what the state did around solar and battery permitting?

Answer: Yes, he is supportive of this change. Please send him more information. He noted there was a nonprofit focused on permitting reform.

Local question 4: How can the legislature fight against federal policies that undermine Californians' needs in health care funding, the environment, and the safety of immigrants?

Answer: The senate passed a bill authorizing \$25 million to fund lawsuits protecting California from unconstitutional federal policies. The assembly still needs to take up the bill.

Senator Becker is hosting a symposium with legal experts at Stanford Law School on February 25, with four panels of legal experts discussing this topic. The state Senate passed a \$25 million bill for lawsuits challenging federal policy, but the Assembly has yet to pass it.

Local question 5: How can the state address sea-level rise through the Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plans? How can state funding help address local RSAPs' success and ensure disadvantaged communities are included?

Answer:

Sen. Becker made sure there was money available to address sea-level rise last year. This money is also in the November Climate Bond. He will ensure the climate bond money is used for sea-level rise adaptation plans. OneShoreline has been very thoughtful in addressing this problem. Mountain View has also been very forward-thinking. Aside from the climate bond, we hope the issue through annual appropriations. This will be expensive, and we'll need to support local solutions.