

Interview with Bill Monning

California State Senator, District 17

March 6, 2020

Attending: From San Jose/Santa Clara League of Women Voters: Jenny Imhoff-Dousharm, Sylvia Christopher and Marie Arnold. From Monterey County League: Alice Ann Glen, Howard Fosler. From Santa Cruz County League: Dorothy Fry, Pam Newbury. Senator Monning and Colleen Courtney, Monterey Field Office Representative.

Criminal Justice

- Monning is supportive of restoring voting rights to people on parole. He believes that restoring voting rights “empowers that person’s reintegration into society.” Although the measure has passed the Assembly, Monning noted that it “would be an uphill vote to secure” a 2/3 majority vote in the Senate. He urges the continuation of efforts to advocate for the restoration of voting rights.

Transportation, Housing, Climate Change

- Monning is a Senate representative for California Air Resources Board and is greatly concerned about addressing the interconnected issues of transportation, housing and climate crisis. He pointed out that although California is on track to meet most carbon emissions goals, vehicle emissions continue to rise and must be addressed. While an increase in the amount of electric vehicles could help reduce vehicle emissions, he pointed out that the state does not have an adequate charging station infrastructure for this to be a viable option.
- “How do you incentivize people getting out of their vehicles?” Monning believes that the solution must be to provide faster mass transit options. He would like to see a rail link between Salinas, Gilroy and the Central Valley and believes that this could not only reduce vehicle emissions, but would also improve individuals’ quality of life and health outcomes. He is also seeking support for the “Surf! Bus Rapid Transit” joint project of Monterey Salinas Transit and the Transportation Agency for Monterey County. This project would create a reversible busway for commuters between Marina and Sand City/Seaside, which would run parallel to Highway 1. He hopes that by providing a cost-saving and time-saving alternative to individual vehicle travel, this plan could incentivize individuals to change their daily commuting practices.
- Monning is the lead author of SB1213 with coauthors Senator Caballero and Assembly Members Robert Rivas and Mark Stone. The bill aims to address mitigation of the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander, while improvements are being made to CA-156. He noted that improvements are needed along CA-156, in order to improve safety, as this stretch of highway has one of the highest traffic fatality rates in Monterey County.
- Senator Monning voted in support of SB100 and wants to create community housing opportunities closer to major areas of employment, which would reduce the number of miles during a commute. He asks for the LWVC to consider supporting CHISPA Community Housing (www.chispahousing.org), which seeks to address housing needs.

He feels that transportation, housing and climate crisis are all interrelated and by securing more housing options, one can make significant strides toward managing all three issues.

- Monning emphasized that we are no longer facing climate change, but a climate crisis. He would like to see an increased emphasis on the link between climate crisis and public health, both in order to keep momentum toward addressing these issues, but also to ally with various groups to make positive changes on an accelerated course. According to Monning, California is making progress in many areas concerning climate crisis, but it is still not enough. He appreciates the income from CAP and trade programs being sent toward disadvantaged communities, to address health issues stemming from climate crisis. He also would like to see additional resources in addressing sea level rise.

Housing

- Monning noted his disappointment in the failure of SB50. He understands concerns that the measure would increase gentrification, but felt that the language of the bill was strong enough to protect against this. Monning mentioned that Toni Atkins, a strong housing advocate from Southern California, will propose a new bill that will address these concerns, while also working to establish more affordable housing options. Monning appreciates the support of the LWVC around SB50 and encourages their continued support to help address NIMBY issues.
- He stated that housing is a significant issue in California, with three major components that must be addressed: homelessness, mental health and low-income families. He mentioned that 30% of school aged children in the Salinas Unified school district were homeless (as defined by lacking a permanent shelter to reside). Housing shortages are impacting everyone from low-income workers to skilled professionals. He noted that Monterey and the surrounding area have had a lack of qualified candidates for police, fire, nursing and other professional jobs, due to this issue; some local municipalities are hoping to address this by offering no interest home loans up to \$100,000 for new hires. Lack of affordable local housing, especially for minimum wage workers, also means that there are more people commuting greater distances, negatively impacting both traffic and pollution.
- Monning is supportive of CHISPA and its mission to gain affordable housing for low income workers and would suggest LWVC to support their efforts.
- Monning reiterated that challenges to addressing housing are great. Although some additional resources for homeless individuals have been created, many of these beds are in shared rooms. He noted that there is a challenge in incentivizing homeless individuals to give up the privacy of their tent or car, in order to share rooms with others; plans to provide shelter for the homeless would be more successful if they addressed this key need for privacy.
- Mental health issues are another factor that can leave individuals more susceptible to becoming homeless. Monning supports the “No Place Like Home Program” that is now repurposing two billion dollars from the Mental Health Services Act to provide supportive housing for those with mental illness who are homeless.

Personal Priorities

- Monning is completing his 12th and final term. He has been most proud of his contributions towards public health, especially children’s health and plans to continue

work in these areas. He is thrilled to have passed SB200, which established a safe and affordable drinking water fund.

- He would like to see California address sugar sweetened beverages. Monning feels that big soda industry interests stalled SB347 while in the health committee. That bill was projected to have brought in \$1 billion per year in additional tax revenue. Now, they are switching tactics and looking to label sugar sweetened beverages in a consumer right-to-know bill.
- Monning is working with the Audubon society and Coyote Creek organization on SB1372, to address a wildlife corridor along CA-17.
- SB1208 with the CA Native Plant Society to address the illegal removal of Dudleya succulent plant.
- SB1061 firearm surrender program, which would remove the patchwork of local firearm surrender laws, creating a streamlined return system which could adequately addresses safety concerns.

Local Questions—Cotoni-Coast Dairies National Monument

- Monning is definitely interested in hearing concerns and is aware that an increase in traffic and tourism can be a new challenge. Since it is a federal monument, he suggests that the best course of action would be to continue to weigh in concerns, especially with coordinating agencies such as CalTrans.

Local Questions - Anderson Dam

- Monning noted that the dam's seismic safety is the paramount concern for the federal government. He suggests working with Zoe Lofgren and continuing community organizing to ensure that this issue continues to be rectified. Since dam safety is a federal criteria that should be met, they should provide the lion's share of resources in order to address the seismic retrofitting.