



**Legislative Interview January 30, 2025, Sen. Josh Becker and Leagues of Women Voters in District 13 (Palo Alto, LA/MV, SanJose/SC, CU/Sunnyvale, S. San Mateo County, SWSCV**

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

Answer: Recovery from the Los Angeles wildfires and local wildfire preparedness are major state issues. On Feb. 18, Sen. Becker will be holding a town hall on fire preparedness. Last year he authored bills which increased state fire fighting forces and proposed a wildfire strategy plan.

Senator Becker is the Chair of the Senate Energy committee. Reducing energy costs to keep them affordable will be a big focus. He's excited about the bill that will create a regional grid with our neighboring states, which allows us to use renewable power in an integrated grid so we are not forced to import energy and can export renewables, providing more resiliency and potentially saving 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.

He also authored last session a bill to ensure that no one is denied healthcare based on a decision by AI. Physician decisions cannot be based upon algorithms. Physicians with good track records will not use algorithms to require prior authorization.

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

Criminal justice is another area he will be focusing on. He would be happy to discuss which issues he will be tackling. Also, there's a big focus on getting the clean up started in LA after the fires. The home insurance market is in crisis and we have to focus there. Where we locate electrical infrastructure must be evaluated as well.

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 much lower cost at 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 which would look at how to allow entitled empty commercial property to transfer to residential use. He supports low cost tiny homes programs; he submitted 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 big focus. We'll be working on it all year. If Southern California Edison is responsible, Edison will pay. If not, the public will pay and the insurance system needs to be overhauled. There is an issuance rate transparency issue to be addressed.

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 which was 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 and 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 do away with rate-setting transparency required by Prop. 108.*

Answer: The insurance commissioner adopted rules to allow companies to include forward looking modeling, including the effects of climate change, in rate setting. People would rather have insurance than not. The insurance 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 mentioned by you 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 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 thinking about a bond to support social housing in the county 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 units of social housing, a policy supported by the current conservative government. Sen Becker believes it is time to reconsider the concept of government-owned housing. The Montgomery County approach is a really important tool to address the shortage of affordable housing. He supports AB 11, the social housing bill, and doesn't know why it is having problems.

*Followup question: Would state legislation be necessary to help local counties or cities to increase their bonding authority to fund mixed income affordable housing, in light of the scarcity of federal and state tax credits, ordinarily used to finance affordable developments.*

Sen. Becker observed that there is no room in the state budget this year for state low income housing tax credits. 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.

Followup 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 billion bill to fight federal policy changes. 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 focussed on permitting reform.

*Local question 4: How can the legislature fight against federal policies which undermine the needs of Californians 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 at Stanford Law School on February 25 with legal experts to discuss this topic. There will be four panels of legal experts. The state Senate passed a \$25 million bill for lawsuits challenging federal policy. The Assembly has yet to pass it..

*Local question 5: What can the state do to address sea-level rise through the Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plans? How can state funding help address the success of local RSAPs and make sure disadvantaged communities are included?*

Answer:

Sen. Becker made sure last year there was money available to address sea-level rise. This money is also in the November Climate Bond. He will make sure 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 will, he hopes, address the problem through annual appropriations. This will be expensive and we'll need to support local solutions