



Every year the League of Women Voters meets with our state legislators to discuss subjects of interest to our state League. The questions reflect concerns our state League is hearing from Leagues around California. We also ask our representatives about their personal priorities. The following is what we learned from our Assemblyman Patrick O'Donnell when we met with him on February 10, 2017.

Meeting with Assemblyman O'Donnell were:

Linda Herman, Government Director, League of Women Voters of Palos Verdes Peninsula

Karen McLaurin Buresh, 3rd Vice President - Action Chair, League of Women Voters of Palos Verdes Peninsula

After introductions, we asked the questions and heard responses as follows:

1. **Funding of Elections:** *State and local governments have a fundamental obligation to provide an election process that ensures the integrity, accessibility, and security of our right to vote. However, the current approach to funding elections in California has many flaws. What legislative measures would you support to ensure adequate and stable funding of election administration in California?*

Assemblymember O'Donnell: Elections should be funded adequately. Democracy is the heart of our country. If more oversight is needed for areas to assure adequate funding for all elections throughout the State of California, he is open to measures to provide that oversight. For counties without adequate funds, the State should step in and assure proper funds are available for all counties but voter challenges are not always related to money. Some counties change their rules to make it harder to vote and that must be addressed as well. If initial funding is required from the State, he supports that, but we must also look at what counties are doing with their money, that they are doing what they can to make voting more available, not more difficult.

2. **Public Higher Education:** *To increase access for students, the legislature has asked public higher education institutions to increase enrollment of Californians, and to ensure that students with greater needs are also accommodated. Yet despite increased funding from the legislature in recent sessions, per-student funding is currently less than before the Recession, and costs have risen.*

How can California meet the challenge of enrolling more students, including students with greater needs, at the UC and CSU? Is more state funding needed? Where does this issue rank in your legislative priorities?

As Chair of the Assembly Education Committee, this issue ranks very high on the Assemblyman's priorities. As a former teacher, education ranks at the top of his legislative priorities. He is concerned with UCs and CSUs, and would include our community colleges in the conversation as well. Our governor sees it differently. The cost of public higher education is a problem. There is financial help for the lower class students. 50% of the students at Cal State Long Beach don't pay anything to go there. It's an even higher percentage at Long Beach City College. It's the middle class that's the problem. Now, the Governor is trying to get rid of the middle class scholarships. He will fight that proposal.

We must focus on multiple paths for all of our students. We must look at career technical education [CTE]. We need to re-boot the CTE effort. That must remain an option for students.

We need to address the growing teacher shortage. He has introduced legislation to bring back an undergraduate degree in education. It was abolished by statute in 1960. It might make sense for high school teachers to have specialized degrees in math, science, etc. But it may not make sense to require a specialized degree in middle school and it doesn't make sense in elementary school, where the teachers teach multiple subjects. He has also introduced legislation to provide grants for teachers who want to go into hard to fill fields, like the STEM fields, during their 4 year education experience. We need good teachers. Period. And we need more of them.

Education bills recently introduced were as follows:

- Feb. 6, 2017, introduced AB 312 which strengthens California's support for students with disabilities by creating a state funding source for special education preschool services and addressed long-standing special education funding inequities.
 - Jan. 18, introduced AB 169 and AB 170, both of which would help California address its growing need for qualified teachers.
 - Secured \$15 million in the proposed 2016-2017 California state budget to fund grants that incentivize partnerships between local school districts and their surrounding higher education institutions. If implemented, the money could help set up similar programs across the state, like the collaborative effort between the Long Beach Unified School District, Long Beach City College (LBCC) and California State University Long Beach (CSULB).
3. **Water Resources:** *The recent multi-year drought has made many Californians aware of the need to rethink the way they use water. California's economic activities, institutions, and infrastructure are based on water management models that were developed in the unusually wet 20th century. A report published in August 2014 by UC Davis researchers*

found that California has issued water rights for at least five times more surface water than the state receives on average from precipitation, even in a non-drought year.

What kinds of legislative proposals would you support to ensure that enough water adequate quality is available for municipal and industrial uses, agriculture and the environment in the face of over-stretched surface water and groundwater resources and climate conditions different than those California experienced in the last century?

The electorate passed Proposition 1 - the Water Bond - in 2014. We need to get those projects up and running. We need to focus on two areas: (1) conservation, and (2) storage.

Storage is a problem in California. Earthen dams are susceptible to earthquakes. In Southern California, there is no land available to build big enough storage - "a big enough barrel" - to serve the region. We will always rely on Northern California for water.

The Governor's two tunnel proposal needs to be a high priority. The tunnels don't increase water supply, but they will provide a safe and reliable source of water and that is what California needs most.

Local Issue Question: Assemblymember O'Donnell was asked about the state of the Ports. He responded that the Ports (Long Beach and Los Angeles) are "Sound but Challenged." He explained that a variety of changes in the shipping industry affect the ports and jobs in the area. There has been a trend of consolidation in the shipping industry. Shippers are parking ships, or going broke. The ships are getting larger. Each ship carries more cargo, and shippers now share cargo space on the same ship; multiple beneficial cargos (major retailers) loaded on each ship. That means more trucks are going more places when the ship is unloaded at the Port. Cargo takes longer to sort and trucks sit waiting while cargo is sorted on the dock. Ships sit at the dock longer and terminals are tied up. The average price to ship a container today is \$800; just a couple of years ago it was \$2600. That puts tremendous pressure on the shipping companies.

The widened Panama Canal which opened last year has impacted the ports, but not as much as people feared as it cannot accommodate the wider ships we see today. It can currently take the 14000 TEU [Twenty Foot Equivalent Unit] ships, but we are now seeing 18000 TEU and will soon see 20000+.

The Port Terminal Operators are losing funds. Hanjin was the lessee of the largest terminal in the Port of Long Beach, accounted for 12% of Long Beach port traffic and it went bankrupt.

The changes in the shipping industry lower the amount of money the Ports get for the leases.

There is a tremendous impact on the workforce from all of these changes. There are higher highs and lower lows on the docks. It's either very busy or very slow. There are more stringent clean air regulations on the trucks, which is a good thing, but not all drivers can afford to upgrade to meet all of the new regulations. And if you don't have enough trucks, you cannot deal with the cargo as it gets loaded off the ships, and it sits on the dock, keeping the next ship from coming in and getting unloaded.

He has very mixed feelings about automation. Automation is part of the "go green" movement, but automation decreases jobs. He is in favor of going green. However, he is troubled by using public money to put people out of work, arguably to benefit foreign companies.

When asked about his major priorities for 2017, Assemblyman O'Donnell identified:

- The Budget: we must live within our means. He favors many of the things the Governor has done to move us toward that goal.
- Education: always one of his highest priorities.
- The Trump Administration: he is concerned about the issues of immigration status and the possible impact on federal funds.
- Transportation: most people in the State want to move people, but he is far more concerned about moving containers.