

Marc Berman, Assembly District 23
February 21, 2025
Summary of League of Women Voters 2025 Legislative Interview

Question 1: What major issues must the LEGISLATURE deal with in 2025?

In his address welcoming members back to Sacramento, CA Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas outlined key legislative priorities for 2025:

- Reducing the Cost of Living: Tackling high expenses across housing, utilities, and everyday necessities.
 - Expanding Housing Supply: Accelerating the construction and funding of new housing to meet demand.
 - Lowering Utility Costs: Implementing measures to make residents' energy more affordable.
 - Strengthening the Home Insurance Market: Working toward a more competitive insurance industry—progress was being made, but the recent LA fires have posed new challenges.
- Combating Homelessness: Advancing solutions to provide housing and support services for unhoused individuals.
- Ensuring Educational Equity: Expanding access to quality education for all students, regardless of background, ensure Californians have access to job training as the economy changes.
- Addressing Wildfire Impact: Responding to the devastation of the LA fires and strengthening wildfire prevention and recovery efforts.

General Question 2: What are YOUR legislative priorities?

My focus is on consumer protection—preventing fraud, reducing costs, and ensuring transparency.

- Ban Dog/Cat Breeder Brokers: I introduced legislation to prohibit breeder brokers in the state, as exposed by the Los Angeles Times (<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-09-23/puppy-mill-pipeline-serious-alarms>).
- Combat ADU Contract Fraud: Companies like Anchor Tiny Homes lured homeowners into paying huge down payments for ADUs before going bankrupt. I support ADUs and don't want to disincentivize ADU construction, but we need stronger consumer protections. These projects should follow home improvement standards, preventing excessive down payments. As chair of the Business & Professions Committee, which oversees contractor licensing, I am working on solutions.
- Increase Rental Car Price Transparency: Like the past hotel pricing legislation I authored, I want to prevent deceptive pricing practices in rental car agreements, where consumers are hooked by low rates but hit with excessive add-on charges.
- Regulate High Energy Costs: We need more oversight on investor-owned utilities, and I am currently working on a bill to address this issue.

- **Speed Up Ballot Counting:** The election process must be more efficient, and the time to cure ballots needs to be reduced. Since ballot counting varies by county, the legislature should identify and address county-specific needs. I am collaborating with election officials to:
 - Accelerate the counting of non-contested ballots.
 - Determine what support counties need from the state to streamline their processes.
- **Make it mandatory that every high school offer Computer Science:** I am reworking a bill I authored last year that would require all high schools to offer computer science courses. After two previous attempts, I remain committed to passing this critical legislation.

Local Question 1: The State is helping southern California recover from the disastrous wildfires. As we rebuild, will fire-resistant homes and landscape be a requirement?

Yes, fire-resistant homes and landscaping will be required in Southern California and across the state. A friend in Pacific Palisades saw firsthand how fire-resistant roofing and materials helped some homes survive while others were lost. There's extensive science on what works, but cost remains a concern.

Fire defense requires full community participation. The overall protection is weakened if 80% of homeowners follow best practices, but 20% do not. Rebuilding will take time—it won't happen overnight—but measures like Zone Zero (maintaining a 5-foot vegetation-free perimeter around homes) will be critical. This isn't just a Southern California issue; fire-resistant practices can make a difference even in places like Menlo Park.

The governor has issued an Executive Order mandating the 5-foot clearance, but enforcement will be challenging. To refine building standards, the following steps include studying which homes in LA withstood the fires.

Local Question 2: California is in a housing crisis that shows no sign of easing. It's been estimated by the Pew Research Center that over 50% of renters are cost-burdened, spending more than 30% of their income on rent. Getting affordable housing projects approved, let alone financed, is very difficult. In this climate, should the state consider adopting a revolving fund program to build mixed-income affordable housing projects, as proposed by Assemblymember Lee?'

As proposed by Assemblymember Lee, a revolving fund for mixed-income housing is worth considering, but I'm not well-versed in the specifics of his bill. A new outlay of funding for this year was going to be very difficult and therefore I will focus on streamlining regulations and speeding up approvals. The cost of materials and labor is beyond our control, but cutting bureaucratic delays is something the state can address.

Possible solutions include:

- Exploring a public agency to help finance construction costs.
- Ensure builders focus on building and not excessive paperwork.
- Refining the funding process to make it more efficient.
- Leveraging local governments, which are working to allocate more resources for affordable housing.

Two years ago, I passed a bill to streamline reporting across California’s three housing finance agencies. I remain open to ideas that increase flexibility and create more funding opportunities for much-needed housing projects.

Local Question 3: The national office of the League of Women Voters wrote a letter to the elected leaders of Congress, imploring them to exercise their responsibilities to address executive overreach threatening the balance of power in the federal government and violating states' rights. What is the California legislature prepared to do to protect our citizens from this federal overreach into our state programs, including schools, immigration, and voting rights?

The California Legislature is doing everything possible to protect our state from federal overreach, particularly in schools, immigration, and voting rights. This effort began eight years ago during the first Trump administration. In 2017, we enacted laws to protect Californians from unconstitutional federal policies and will continue to build on those efforts. Many private law firms also stepped up to provide pro bono support at that time.

Today, the landscape has changed. As a lawyer, I’ve seen law firms take on pro bono cases during Trump’s first term. Now private legal firms are hesitant to challenge federal actions due to fear of retaliation, shifting even more responsibility onto the state. In response, the legislature has allocated \$50 million in 2025—\$25 million for the Department of Justice and \$25 million for local nonprofits—to defend Californians’ rights. However, more funding is needed to support nonprofit legal services.

There is growing public frustration with the instability caused by federal overreach. Many who voted for Trump did not anticipate the consequences, such as Central Valley farmers losing access to the water Trump released from dams or tax filers facing delays due to IRS staffing cuts. Meanwhile, Trump’s approval rating is declining as his actions—wasting 2 billion gallons of water, renaming the Gulf of Mexico, firing officials who oversee nuclear security, and neglecting public health issues like avian flu—create unnecessary chaos.

These actions are not improving lives.

While immigration remains under federal jurisdiction, we are committed to funding legal action and nonprofit support.

The Legislature will continue to allocate resources to lawsuits and nonprofit legal aid as the budget allows. We remain committed to protecting Californians from harmful federal policies and upholding our state’s rights.

Local Question 4: California passed multiple laws in 2024 addressing the disclosures around and uses of AI (including your bill AB2655). Did those address your primary concerns about potential societal harms from AI, or do you have an agenda for further legislation for this year?

In 2024, California passed multiple laws addressing AI disclosures and uses, including Assembly Bill 2655. However, no comprehensive, overarching regulation has been enacted, and the current federal administration has removed the AI regulations that were previously introduced.

I led the charge last year with three AI-related bills. This year, I am stepping back to see what my colleagues propose. While the Legislature is not finished addressing AI, I want to allow others the opportunity to shape policy before deciding on further action.

The challenge lies in striking a balance—creating measures that maximize AI’s benefits while mitigating risks. Any regulation must be carefully crafted to protect society without stifling innovation in this rapidly evolving industry. The conversation is ongoing, and we must ensure California remains a leader in responsible AI governance.

Local question 5: California's Plastic Pollution Prevention and Packaging Producer Responsibility Act (SB 54) was enacted in 2022. The law requires producers to take responsibility for the plastic waste they create. This could be a recycling game-changer. Are we making good progress?

I don’t have a definitive answer now, but I will look into it. SB 54 was Senator Allen’s bill, and I plan to follow up with him to assess the progress and impact of its implementation.