



Members of LWV Diablo Valley (Danielle Crider, Julie Hartford, Tracy Leighton, and Marian Shostrom) joined members of five other Leagues (Solano County, Woodland, Davis Area, Napa County, and Sonoma County) to interview Senator Bill Dodd (S. 3) on February 10, 2021. Senator Dodd discussed a variety of topics of interest to LWVC, and explained his current priorities. Below is a summary of the interview.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND LAND USE

Senator Dodd acknowledged the importance of global climate initiatives and a desire for the US to be a leader on these issues. At the local level he expressed particular interest in addressing the prevalence of wildfires as they emit significant volumes of carbon dioxide. He is working with advocacy organizations, such as the Nature Conservancy, to do controlled burns for this reason. He also attributed increased frequency of lightning strikes, drought, and other natural phenomena to changing climate. When asked about carbon sequestration, Senator Dodd said he is not involved in the area, but knows of it and thinks it looks promising.

Senator Dodd also mentioned the Highway 37 corridor, a key thoroughfare in his district, which is vulnerable to sea level rise and surrounded by wetlands that can be preserved and rehabilitated. He efforts to grow wetlands off of Highway 37 and work that Sonoma Land Trust, and many other groups, are doing in this area to address the issue of sea-level rise. He thinks it might be the first project to address sea-level rise in CA. Highway 37 could be a great opportunity for us to combine good transportation planning and climate resiliency planning considering the vulnerability of this corridor to sea level rise.

We asked Senator Dodd if he sees opportunities in agriculture policy. He sees that agriculture is using so much water, but it is hard to regulate water usage on private property. Almond and walnut trees are very water intensive crops. The market is driving the crop choice, not necessarily sustainable practices.

Answering a follow-up question on funding priorities in this area, Senator Dodd thinks Cap and Trade is being used as a fund to provide for other projects not in the general fund and lets companies keep doing what they are doing. He wants stricter regulations and guidelines based on science. He said we need to have metrics, guidelines, and best practices on how to effectively reduce CO2. We are stewards of money that is collected from companies that are not adequately reducing their emissions, so these funds need to be used for effective CO2 mitigation.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS, AND ZONING

Senator Dodd said that despite the housing shortage, when people like Scott Wiener tried different things to get more regulations to promote housing, they got pushback from the League of Cities and local government. He felt that people wanted to promote good bills, but the bills did not make it through the process. Hopefully, this year will be better. He feels that labor unions can assist with the issue. He supports good union jobs but at the end of the day he needs to support bills that help get affordable housing. He said we need to solve two problems, the cost of the labor factor and the fees charged by local governments which he felt were excessive. Perhaps we need to fund support at the state level for the local governments, or we will never get more affordable housing. When asked whether there might be any redevelopment money available, Senator Dodd said we need to fix some redevelopment problems and then maybe some areas could work better. Redevelopment dollars are now going to education and it is a problem to take the money back. He felt that we are not funding education adequately now, so we cannot take more away from the schools. We need to find another source for the funds.

We asked Senator Dodd how Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) could gain home ownership as a way to generate wealth. Senator Dodd believes that this is important especially for the BIPOC and low-income folks, but we need to get more controls on banks and not let them do things with mortgages like the derivatives that caused problems. He especially wants to help new home buyers. He said that no real bills are on the way, but he definitely would support them.

We asked the Senator about reducing local control over Zoning in High Opportunity areas. Senator Dodd said that he is willing to support communities who cannot do it on their own. We should give counties and cities the right to control their own zoning, and when they cannot, then the state should come in. There is still a lot of land (open space) in California. He acknowledged that it is a big issue if the state tries to take over local control. With the large number of housing units that are needed, if some counties say no then maybe the state does have to take some control. Many places will not make room or build the housing on their own often due to NIMBY issues. Often if a lot of people show up at a Board of Supervisors or City Council meeting objecting to housing in their neighborhood the BOS/CC are reluctant to go ahead with the project. An example is the Napa Pipe project which originally was to have 3K units but now only includes 800 units which he found disturbing. There may be times when the state has to step in.

When Senator Dodd was asked about controlling urban sprawl, he said we have to find a way to legally control sprawl, but with private property rights, general plans, etc. there is only so much land left for housing. He acknowledged the state's responsibility to step in if local governments are not making good planning decisions, but there is always push-back when the state reduces local control (understandably) and it is difficult to limit sprawl when it is already included in the general plan of cities/counties. He also said that single family development is perfectly fine in some areas, but it is not acceptable when it just leads to lengthy commutes and high costs of living. There is more than adequate land in cities to facilitate the needed housing development.

COVID-19 RECOVERY AND HOW TO HELP THOSE WHO ARE MOST IMPACTED

Senator Dodd says while we had a digital divide before the pandemic, the pandemic really highlighted the issue. People most impacted and without connection cannot work from home, often cannot afford Internet service, and cannot do distance learning. There are upcoming projects, and he is working with

Cecilia Aguiar-Curry on this, to get more Broadband out, especially to rural areas. He supports help for low-income communities and businesses.

We asked the Senator about the homeless population, and how to get the vaccine to them. Senator Dodd said he knows several counties are working to get the funding to work on this. He knows Gov. Newsom is blamed for things he had no control over. He thinks the Governor is trying hard to find a way to reach the disadvantaged.

PERSONAL LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Senator Dodd is working with the insurance industry on getting insurance for those in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). He has several bills in this area. He has a patchwork of bills to address the impact of wildfires including rules for home hardening and defensible space. Hopefully, they would improve the situation and there would be less damage and loss of life. Senator Dodd says certainly no new housing should be built without fire resistant materials/design in fire risk areas. He questions why we would build huge subdivisions in areas we know will burn. Home hardening should be required everywhere that is fire prone. He agreed it would be helpful if the rules set were statewide.

Senator Dodd is also working on water policy for low-income households. He especially does not want water shut off because folks cannot pay, but non-payment impacts the utilities. CA has greater than one billion dollars in water bill debt, so he is trying to find funds to alleviate the burden on people and utilities.

The other issue that Senator Dodd is working on is single-use plastic recycling and product stewardship. He has visited various facilities including in Portland and other locations to see what they were doing. He supports SB 54 that Senator Allen sponsored (Solid Waste: Packaging and products). He says we cannot continue with plastics as we have. He also wants to look at a new bottle recycling bill for wine and spirits bottles. He says that today we only recycle 70% of our waste while Washington state recycles that much without the rules we have. He is meeting with folks on how to move forward on the bottle recycling issue.