

LWV Meeting with Assemblyman Al Muratsuchi

The Leagues of Women Voters of the Beach Cities and the Torrance area interviewed California Assemblyman Al Muratsuchi on March 15, 2019. In attendance from the Beach Cities were Joan LeSage, Grace Peng, and Arnette Travis. Representatives from Torrance were Lola Ungar and Jimmy Gow. We appreciate the time he spent with us, and his work for our district and all of California.

Following is a summary of Assemblyman Muratsuchi's responses to our questions.

Q1 Redistricting: Do you support independent commissions for redistricting for local elections?

Independent commissions were an important good government measure that eliminated gerrymandering in CA state races. First we need to get the census done correctly, and then figure out the appropriate redistricting. The census is critical to ensure fair representation of all Californians. All federal and state funding as well as political representation depends on supporting a bill for local governments fair representation. We need to educate Americans on the importance of accurately answering census questions--particularly immigrant communities, which have participated at historically lower rates.

Q2 Water Resources: What ideas do you have to advance water management planning to benefit all Californians?

The main water resources priority is for all Californians to adopt sustainable water sources and practices. CA doesn't have a water shortage problem. What we have is a complicated water system that makes it more important for our state to treat water not as an endless resource. We need to focus on adopting a culture and practices, and a mindset that water is a precious resource that we need to conserve and use wisely.

We just came out of the best rainy season in recent years. But the vast majority of rainwater just flows out into the ocean. We need to build a water system to capture and store water and recharge the natural underground aquifers.

Our water practices to date of pumping the groundwater out is unsustainable. This is especially true in the Central Valley. 80% of all CA consumed water is used for agriculture. It's literally a race to the bottom where they [farmers] are drilling deeper and deeper. We can't subsidize unsustainable water practices. Much water is used by growers focused on water intensive cash crops like almonds and walnuts.

So while we are telling urban users to save water by not watering lawns, or flushing less often, we need to look at the bigger picture. We shouldn't have to debate to flush or not, when the bigger picture shows that 80% of the water goes to agriculture.

We have to support agriculture, one of our biggest industries. But we must call upon them to adopt sustainable water practices. There is no such thing as an unlimited resource. They are not entitled to an unlimited supply of water by sinking more and deeper wells. That also goes for urban water well drillers.

Locally, we passed Measure W to fund sustainable water infrastructure that will allow us to capture and treat rainwater to refill our underground aquifers. This allows us to rely less on Northern California.

I know another controversial topic is whether we should have one or two underground tunnels to bring water to Southern California. Gov. Newsom proposed scaling down from twin tunnels to a single tunnel. We need to do everything we can to ensure that SoCal has adequate water, we need to adopt this. I support the scaled down plan. It is a reasonable compromise that balances the water needs with the environmental concerns.

Q3 Public Education: There are achievement gaps by race, ethnicity, income, and English learner status. Are there ways to avoid the gaps?

Clearly the data shows that CA has a persistent achievement gap. Focusing on children prior to kindergarten. Numerous studies show that we can get the biggest returns by focussing on under 5 education.

The question is always money. Where is the money going to come from? This is the second year I've been working on AB39 [to increase the funding for K12.] It is one of my highest priorities. This will help us to get CA from 41st in the US on per pupil spending back into the top 10. Even after we increased K12 funding by 50% over the last 7 years, we are still 41st. We were in the top 10 before Proposition 13. People want lower taxes, but they also want good schools.

We need to close the achievement gap using several approaches, including under 5. School funding disparities also need to be addressed including the needs of low income and immigrant communities. AB39 also addresses the need to increase the base funding for all communities.

All these wonderful things that we want to do, but how will we pay for it? AB39 will help.
<https://legiscan.com/CA/bill/AB39/2019>

Q follow-up: School educators say that time spent on compliance to state requirements is pulling money and time away from classroom education.

We're trying to make compliance less burdensome, but we also need assurance that money is well spent. We need to ensure that school districts are operating in a transparent way. LCAP <https://www.cde.ca.gov/re/lc/>, the local control and accountability plan, provides an online dash board to see actual breakdowns of school district spending in a simple way.

Q4 Unfunded pension liabilities: Should the state provide financial support for municipalities' and school districts' unfunded pension liabilities?

Cities have their own budgets. We need to hold cities accountable for fiscal reporting and obligations. Cities determine their own city pensions. Citizens need to monitor and hold their

cities accountable. The state helping school districts with their unfunded liabilities has its pros and cons.

Every dollar spent on pensions is not spent in classrooms. I believe teachers are underpaid for the social value of the work that they perform. Employee benefits are important and there is a teacher shortage. But school districts should be more transparent and held accountable. The state should not be counted on to bail out cities and school districts that have not been fiscally responsible.

The governor's January budget proposal already has items helping school districts in several ways. But some are making similar calls to help out cities in a similar way.

The State has its own pension problems. Our pension problems started in the early 2000s with providing generous pension benefits that should not have been offered. This was exacerbated by market losses in the Great Recession in 2008 and investments by CALPERS. We've made progress with the recovery of the stock market and the state's progress in paying down our debts. In 2012 the state passed The California Public Employees' Pension Reform Act (PEPRA) <https://www.calpers.ca.gov/page/employers/policies-and-procedures/pension-reform-impacts> In 2014 CALPERS was restructured requiring employees to contribute more for their pensions.

He supports making some payments for future CalSTRS pension liabilities that would have the effect of reducing the rate of payment for school districts. We need to closely monitor the pension system so it doesn't affect our children's education in the classroom.

Q5 General question about how we will manage transportation, climate change and housing:

The fundamental challenge for the South Bay is how we will build more housing while not destroying our quality of life. Whenever the Beach Cities propose housing, it is met by opposition residents who bring up traffic and parking. My job as the South Bay assemblymember is to work with all of the communities I represent to balance those challenges. How do we build in a way that doesn't undermine our communities as we know it?

Our adult children are finding it increasingly difficult to live in the communities they grew up in. The workers that we rely upon, from teachers to police officers and firefighters, especially teachers, are not able to afford to live in the cities that they work in.

One of the most important statistics: CA population in 1980 was 23 million; it is now 40 million. We almost doubled our state's population in 40 years. While the idea is to create more jobs in the Inland Empire and Central Valley, the reality is that most of the job growth has been along the coast. That's why the coastal communities are most heavily impacted by housing shortage.

We need to build more housing to shorten commutes, fight climate change and provide worker housing in a way that has the collective support of residents in our communities.

Q6: What other issues concern you?

Housing.

Healthcare, not just access, but also bringing costs under control.

Education. CA has the best higher education system in the country. CSU is the nation's largest public education system in the US. CSU educates more teachers and engineers than any other system. Community colleges are an engine for social mobility. We need to continue to invest to maintain and improve on quality.

K12. We continue to have wide gaps among different ethnic groups. Even more stark are the differences in achievement among children of differing income levels.

[Where are you going to spend your energy?](#)

Increase base state funding for K12. AB39 is a multi-year long effort. It tries to lift the boat for all districts. We are making significant strides. Over half our state budget goes to education at all levels. CA was in the top 10 in school funding before Proposition 13 passed. We have a high income tax, but very low property taxes.

[How do you feel about the Prop 13 amendment for a split roll?](#)

I support Prop 13 for homeowners. But I believe that corporate loopholes are exploited and need to be closed. I'd need to read the specifics and fine print of any proposal to amend Prop 13 before taking a stand.

[Given the differences in population, is that the cause of our funding shortfall?](#)

Not necessarily. Immigration also has an impact on school needs.

[What are your legislative priorities?](#)

AB245 will create the California Aerospace and Aviation Commission to champion the aerospace industry in CA and the South Bay. <https://legiscan.com/CA/text/AB245/2019> We are the aerospace capital of the world. It built this area. We need the commission to ensure that CA remains the national and global leader in aerospace, to ensure that we continue to attract and retain global leaders like Northrop Grumman, Boeing, and SpaceX.

AB308: is to provide small business tax relief <https://legiscan.com/CA/text/AB308/2019>
It will cut the franchise tax for small businesses (gross income <\$250,000).

Bills in progress :

A bill to require minimum setbacks for oil drilling in neighborhoods and communities. This became a problem locally for Hermosa Beach. All communities need the public health protection of setbacks from drilling near homes and schools.

Another bill is needed to protect school children from pesticide exposures by requiring organic practices for school grounds.

Regulations are needed for shared mobility devices like scooters so they do not dangerously clutter up our sidewalks.

A bill to address distractions and mental health impacts of smartphone use. Require school districts to adopt local policies to restrict the use of smartphones on school grounds.

Other comments:

He did not support the legalization of recreational marijuana. He supports medical use. He does not support the rush to expand the CA marijuana industry. Part of education funding should be spent on parent education of brain development harm from minors' use of marijuana.

He wants to ban toxic chemicals in cosmetics, especially ones marketed to young children.

He sponsored a gun control measure to crack down on bad agents among gun dealers. It requires gun dealers to videotape all gun purchases.