



Santa Maria Sun

Gregg Hart – 37th Assembly District candidate describes what he will do when elected

By Taylor O'Connor
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Second District Santa Barbara County Supervisor Gregg Hart will face off against attorney Mike Stoker for a seat in the state Assembly to represent California's 37th District.

After redistricting, the new 37th District now encompasses all of Santa Barbara County and southern San Luis Obispo County, prompting both candidates to run for office.

During the primary elections, Hart led in Santa Barbara County with 57 percent of the vote, and Stoker had 39 percent.

As the November general election approaches, the *Sun* sent a list of questions to each candidate to learn more about their priorities if elected and how they will work to address their constituents' concerns.

Sun: You highlighted resolving homelessness as one of your top priorities. How do you propose the state goes about fixing the issue?

Gregg Hart: In order to effectively address California's homelessness crisis, the state must support policies that prevent people from falling into homelessness, provide supportive services that help people get their lives back on track, and develop a stable funding stream for the creation of supportive housing units. I have led partnerships that have brought together the public, nonprofit, and private sectors to establish new services and bring people indoors. For example, I have worked closely with DignityMoves, a nonprofit organization that will be building small housing units at multiple locations around the county for individuals who want to get off the street and into a private space of their own. In return, the client agrees to participate in supportive services such as counseling and job training. This is a successful model program operated locally by Good Samaritan Shelter



A LOCAL OFFICIAL

Gregg Hart, who's running for Assembly, grew up in Santa Barbara, served on its City Council for four terms, and in 2018, he was elected to the county Board of Supervisors where he serves today.

that can be replicated through the county of Santa Barbara and as an affordable and effective model program for the state of California.

Sun: How does affordable housing fit into the dialogue of resolving homelessness, and what will you do to make it easier to develop in our communities? How will you provide incentives to encourage development?

Gregg Hart: I am an advocate for policies to increase the supply of housing that is affordable for people of all income levels, including low- and middle-income earners. I believe the people who work in our community should be able to afford to live here. I will address this issue by making sure the state works collaboratively with cities and counties to meet the unique housing needs of individual communities. In Sacramento, I plan to advocate for an expansion of state funding for affordable housing construction, and the preservation of existing housing stock. Additionally, I believe the requirements to include affordable housing in a market-rate housing project should be amended to both increase the percentage of affordable units assigned within the project, and require those units to remain affordable in perpetuity.

Sun: *As mental health provider shortages persist in communities like Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties, what will you do to increase access to affordable mental health care?*

Gregg Hart: As county supervisor, I have met with California Department of Public Health officials to call for more resources to increase access to mental health care and keep our community members safe. I also dedicate a significant amount of my time on mental health care issues, having served on the boards of the county Behavioral Wellness Commission, Psychiatric Health Facility, and Mental Wellness Center. Staffing shortages persist in practically every medical discipline. We have to do more as a society to encourage students to enter into these fields and when they have made that decision, provide them the proper incentives to pursue a career in mental health care.

Sun: *Extreme forest fires are one way we are seeing climate change's effect on our community. What are your thoughts on forest management and prescribed burns as a solution to help protect our residents? If not this, then what is the solution?*

Gregg Hart: I support a full range of appropriate forest management techniques as effective actions that can properly manage our state and federal public lands. I agree that prescribed burns are perhaps the best and most cost-effective ways to minimize significant wildfires. The county's Fire Department does an excellent job coordinating prescribed burns that reduce brush and chaparral, and ultimately protect areas around our populated regions.

Sun: *As California transitions to clean energy, how will you ensure this transition doesn't hurt those working in the oil and gas industry, and that the community can afford the clean energy options?*

Gregg Hart: California must provide national leadership by setting realistic goals and benchmarks to address climate change. I believe any plan should include a variety of energy generation options, and not be limited to a single approach as the only answer to this very complex issue. I do not favor fracking or the use of energy intensive cyclic steam injection and other forms of oil drilling that increase greenhouse gas emissions and potentially threaten water supplies. As we transition to a clean energy future in California, the state must do everything possible to ensure workers have new union jobs to replace the jobs that are at risk as the fossil fuel industry contracts. We need to use these new energy and infrastructure projects to support working families with good-paying union jobs. While this gets talked about a lot at all levels of government—the “just transition” to renewable energy—it’s time to recognize the direct connection between the need for clean energy directly along with the need to support working families that depend upon energy jobs.

Sun: *What policies or actions will you propose regarding the water shortage, specifically for the agricultural sector in our counties?*

Gregg Hart: California’s water quality and water supplies are both critical elements of our state’s infrastructure that must be preserved, expanded, and financially supported with significant new investment. I will work with my colleagues in the Legislature, local governments, and the agriculture community to identify new investments that are necessary to maintain and modernize our state’s deteriorating infrastructure systems that were originally constructed many decades ago. These systems require modernization to meet the needs of the 21st century and must respect the environment and ensure high-quality, reliable water supplies to all California residents, including our vital agriculture industry.

Sun: *The Sun recently reported on a record-breaking year of opioid-related deaths (“Reversing death,” Sept. 15). What actions will you take in order to ensure workers, like behavioral health professionals, law enforcement, and paramedics, have the resources they need when combating this crisis?*

Gregg Hart: The *Sun*’s recent article was an excellent example of highlighting how local government[s] can bring together community organizations and government disciplines to address an emerging and dangerous crisis. Our multi-jurisdictional program, initiated by Santa Barbara County Sheriff Bill Brown, ensures our partners have the tools they need to address this emergency. There is not a single solution to this issue; we must address this crisis with multiple approaches, including state legislation like AB1598, and identifying new funding sources to support local programs that offer a range of services such as residential treatment, intensive outpatient treatment, and aftercare. Unfortunately, this crisis will not be solved overnight. We must work together as a community to find solutions and care options that work, are effective, have long-term staying power, and will hopefully save lives and minimize the devastating impact on families.

Sun: *What are some marginalized or forgotten communities you'd like to see addressed at the state level? How would you help them as an Assembly member?*

Gregg Hart: As a member of the Assembly, I will be a voice for working families, who struggle every day to make ends meet. I will be their representative in Sacramento who will address the issues that matter most and deliver results for those families who live and work in our community. We must advance equity for all Californians. As a county supervisor, I have worked to address racial disparities in the criminal justice and health care systems. I am a strong advocate for advancing gender equity and supporting LGBTQ Californians. We need to do a better job partnering with marginalized communities to understand the inequities that exist, and develop solutions that can make our state more just, healthy, and prosperous for all. Specifically, I have met with community members in Santa Maria to better understand the impacts of pollution on residents who live near oil wells, agricultural operations, and industrial sites. Additionally, I have supported efforts to modernize our county's approach to regulating oil production by identifying abandoned infrastructure and holding companies accountable. This work needs to be expanded throughout the state, recognizing that commercial pollution hits marginalized communities the hardest, I am committed to protecting our environment in an inclusive and equitable manner.

Sun: *You recently attended a Santa Maria mobile home park community forum to address affordable housing concerns, specifically for senior citizens. What will you do to ensure this rapidly growing population group has access to affordable housing?*

Gregg Hart: Mobile home parks provide an excellent inventory of affordable housing for senior citizens that must be preserved. As I described during the forum, many seniors live on fixed incomes and need certainty to make sure they can afford their rent. Santa Barbara County and every city, except Santa Maria, recognized the importance of mobile home parks and adopted mobile home rent control to allow for modest rent increases tied to the annual CPI [Consumer Price Index]. This protects the tenants and provides the park owners with a fair rate of return. Long term, if a park owner wants to redevelop the park, the existing tenants must not be displaced. The owner should be required to provide new units to the existing tenants on a rent-restricted basis, in order to make sure that the community does not lose valuable housing for senior citizens.

Sun: *What investments will you make in the education sector and how will that improve the current system?*

Gregg Hart: The state of California is investing significant new funding to expand access to transitional kindergarten to all 4-year-olds. In the long run, this will be enormously beneficial to working families. The state must support appropriate levels of funding for physical enhancements to K-12 and community college campuses. I strongly believe that union trade apprenticeship programs help young workers to achieve their professional goals and are an essential component of safe worksites. I believe apprenticeship program[s]—such as LIUNA's [Laborers' International Union of North America] successful

program—should be modeled and expanded into our high schools and community colleges. Our community colleges such as Allan Hancock College provide an excellent pathway for local students to matriculate into a four-year college. We should do more to make this excellent educational opportunity available to our local students and to create a path for community colleges to offer four-year degrees. The state should provide enhanced CalGrants so our students are not burdened with significant college loans upon graduating.

Sun: *What would you adjust policy-wise in order to see public safety enhanced in communities? How will you work with law enforcement to make improvements?*

Gregg Hart: I believe that the public's safety should be a top priority for any elected official. I recognize and understand the importance of ensuring public safety agencies have the appropriate budgets and tools they need to protect us and help keep our communities safe. I oppose the privatization of public safety, and I do not believe it is prudent to reduce or redirect existing law enforcement funding of police patrol and investigation personnel. I am committed to working with crime survivors, law enforcement, community organizations, and criminal justice reform advocates to understand and successfully achieve their collective goals of providing effective public safety with transparency and fairness. The state needs to invest in data-driven crime reduction strategies including active community-led policing, drug and alcohol treatment, job training, and mental health services to make our communities safer and reduce recidivism. My commitment to the safety of our families and neighborhoods has earned me the endorsement of state and local law enforcement organizations including the California Highway Patrolmen's Association, the California Coalition of Law Enforcement Associations, the Santa Barbara City Police Officers Association, and Santa Barbara County District Attorney-elect John Savrnock.

Sun: *What will you do, or propose, to help legal cannabis businesses sustain in California and stop illegal operations?*

Gregg Hart: The state should look at the multiple taxes that are levied on legal cannabis businesses by state and local jurisdictions. I understand that the taxes on cannabis businesses are some of the highest of any profession in the state. The taxes at the state and local levels may have created a significant barrier to a successful business. Like any illegal business, the state should continue to aggressively enforce and prosecute illegal operations.

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