

## Local News

### Assembly Candidates Gregg Hart, Mike Stoker Discuss Housing, Reproductive Rights and More at Forum

By Serena Guentz, Noozhawk Staff Writer  
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California State Assembly candidates Gregg Hart and Mike Stoker spoke about some of the current issues throughout the state in a candidate forum on Thursday evening hosted and moderated by the League of Women Voters of Santa Barbara.



State Assembly candidates Mike Stoker, left, and Gregg Hart answer questions about a range of issues during a candidate forum Thursday moderated by the League of Women Voters of Santa Barbara.

(Serena Guentz / Noozhawk photo)

Hart, who represents the Second District on the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors, and Stoker, who served on the Board of Supervisors from 1986 to 1994, will face off in the general election on Nov. 8 for the Assembly seat representing the 37th District, which encompasses all of Santa Barbara County and a small portion of southern San Luis Obispo County.

The candidates were asked several questions about topics

ranging from housing to reproductive freedoms and recent changes in the justice system.

One issue the candidates discussed includes the balance between the state wanting to provide housing and local control over community land use.

“We have a supply and demand imbalance. We need to build more housing, and it needs to reflect the communities where it’s going to be constructed,” Hart said. “The state so far has been really taking a top-down approach, mandating each local government’s universal approach to housing. I think that there’s tremendous creativity and resourcefulness at the local government level.”

Stoker spoke on wanting to focus more on policies at the state level and doing more with mobile home parks.

“Mobile home parks and mobile home communities are more affordable housing,” Stoker said.

When asked about their views on Gov. Gavin Newsom’s recently signed Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Court, both candidates appeared to agree on the importance of providing mental health care to homeless people.

“I don’t support a lot of bonds because I’m a fiscal conservative, but I’ll support a bond to get mental health clinics built throughout the state that have inpatient clinics they can bring the homeless in, get them set, get them on the meds they need, and then after 30 to 45 days have outpatient care where they can come in,” Stoker said. “If we’re going to deal with homelessness, we need to deal with mental health.”

Differing views between the candidates were made clear when they were asked about their thoughts on Proposition 47 — which recategorizes “nonviolent” offenses as misdemeanors — and Assembly Bill 109 — which shifts correctional responsibility from the state to counties.

“I think it’s been harmful [to public safety]. I think we need to get back to having a ‘three strikes, you’re out’ system,” Stoker said. “We’re not going to solve the problems with crime in this state or this country unless we make criminals that commit crimes pay the price.”

Stoker also said there should not be any early releases from prison.

“Violent criminals need to be in prison. There are many people who are committing low-level offenses who should be receiving the services to turn their lives around,” Hart said. “Many of the prisoners in the current county jail right now suffer from significant mental health issues and they are not getting services that they need.”

While both candidates expressed their belief that women should have the right to an abortion, they disagreed on the importance of having Proposition 1 on the ballot.

“I think Proposition 1 is morally unconscionable because it’s already a constitutional right in the state of California,” Stoker said. “I’m not going to overturn any laws, I wasn’t going to overturn Roe v. Wade, I’m not going to overturn the current constitutional right that a woman has to an abortion.”

Proposition 1 would amend the California Constitution to expressly include an individual’s right to reproductive freedom, including the right to have an abortion and to use contraceptives.

“We need to step up in California and pass Proposition 1 and constitutionally protect that right,” Hart said.

Stoker added that he thinks parents should have a right to consent to their child getting an abortion.

“The one thing I do disagree with the majority of the state — parents should have a right to give consent so that their 12-year-old daughter can’t go to Planned Parenthood and Planned Parenthood tell her, ‘Your mom and dad don’t really know what’s best for you. You can have an abortion and mom and dad don’t have a right to know about it,’” Stoker said. “I think that is morally unconscionable as well.”

The full State Assembly candidate forum was livestreamed, and a recording of the forum is set to be posted on the League of Women Voters of Santa Barbara’s website and YouTube channel.

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