

Legislative Interview with Assemblymember Simon Salinas
Assembly District 28
24 February 2006

Question 1. *California continues to face the problem of a gap between revenues and state expenditures. While the current Legislative Analyst's report indicates that state revenues are up at the present time, it is expected that the gap of the past few years will continue. In general, three strategies can be found to deal with this gap: 1) cut state spending; 2) raise revenues through tax or fee increases or by discontinuing certain tax expenditures (i.e., tax credits, exemptions, deductions and other special tax breaks or incentives); and 3) generate revenue by floating state general obligation or revenue bond issues.*

Which of these would you choose? If you favor cuts in state spending, please indicate exactly where you would cut. If you favor raising taxes or other revenues, please indicate specific items (e.g., income tax, sales tax, user fees) you would vote to raise. If you favor a bond measure, please indicate the amount you feel the state should borrow and the specific purposes for the funds (e.g., transportation, Delta levees, etc.)

Answer: We should do all three. The first step is always to cut inefficiencies, which the Assembly has been doing. However, there is a point where you can't cut anymore without cutting the safety nets. I am wary of cuts as that would dismantle the safety net, and most programs have already been cut to the bone. I would consider raising revenues, but the Republicans are set against any tax increases, so bonds look like the most viable option, especially for schools and transportation. The Democratic leadership is looking at issuing on the order of \$38 billion in bonds, which is between the Governor's figure of \$68 billion and Senator Perata's proposal for \$13 billion. That would give some balance, allowing us to pay for things that need to get done without binding future generations. We are also always looking for ways to plug tax loopholes but we need bipartisan support, which is not likely in the current political climate. I would like to use any revenue that is raised this way to support county hospitals like Natividad. If we don't support them now, rising health care costs will cause even more long-term problems.

Question 2. *What should the legislature do to ensure that all Californians have access to health care?*

Answer: I support universal health care, especially for health care for children. In the past, universal health care didn't pass because the Republicans objected. We can start by expanding access. There was \$72 million was in the budget for Healthy Families last year but it was vetoed. I think that we need to expand capacity too. We need to train more nurses, doctors, dentists, oral hygienists, etc. so that there are enough qualified personnel to staff outreach clinics. I am sponsoring a bill that would allow oral hygienists to practice in an outreach mode, at these clinics and at schools. At the present time, a prescription is needed to allow an oral hygienist to practice outside of a dentist's office. My bill has passed the Assembly and is going to the State Senate for consideration.

Question 3. *Would you support a legislative effort to place a proposal on the ballot to vest authority for redistricting in an independent commission? What specific provisions would you like to see in such a proposal?*

Answer: Yes. The system needs to reflect the diversity of the population. The key is to have an independent commission that reflects diversity and is impartial and fair. The commission must represent all communities of interest and redistricting should be an open and public process. Senator Lowenthal has introduced a bill to set up an independent bipartisan commission. There has been discussion of putting an initiative on ballot but we shouldn't need to do that unless the Legislature themselves can't pass a bill to do it.

Question 4. *What are the major issues that you see the legislature must deal with in 2006? What are your personal priorities?*

Answer: My priorities are:

1. Education. I would like to freeze tuition and, if possible, try to roll back community college fees and provide more grants. We need to do a better job for English language learners including providing better materials. Studies have shown that immersion is no better than bilingual education. We need to give more flexibility and local control to school districts so that they can direct resources most efficiently and not impose so many state or federal mandates on them.
2. Transportation. I think that we need to fund Prop 42 from gasoline taxes. The transportation program should also provide geographic equity in funding distribution (e.g.; the central coast doesn't currently get its fair share of the dollars) and respect local priorities even though the state is providing most of the resources.
3. Housing. More resources should be put into affordable and farmworker housing as well as adding transitional and homeless housing. We should consider using economic development money for transitional and homeless programs.
4. Health Care. The State needs to recognize its responsibility for helping local hospitals. We need to support county hospitals like Natividad.
5. Other priorities include:
 - a. Support for the Clean Money bill. This would make it possible for more people to afford to run for public office. I am introducing a bill to allow high school students to be poll workers, which has two benefits – it involves them more in elections and it helps support the polling places. An important item in the bill is that it would allow the schools to still get the student funding for students who are at the polls for those days. Right

now, the school loses the funding if the students aren't in the classroom because poll working doesn't fall under the category of official school sanctioned functions.

- b. Energy. I support looking at increasing the gas tax and increasing the fuel standards for new cars and trucks but, the reality is, that it is likely to get blocked by the anti-tax legislators.
- c. Election requirements. I support reducing the percentage of the vote needed to pass taxes and bonds.
- d. Drinking water quality. I think that we need to help small communities improve their drinking water quality. One way to do that is to assist them to recapitalize the infrastructure of systems before they fail. Clean water is an important public interest. It should not be left to private for-profit interests.