

## **Modesto Rotary Club**

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SINCE 1920



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## **MoRo hosts Congressman Josh Harder**

Freshman Congressman Josh Harder shared his priorities about water, housing affordability and homelessness, and the link between education and job creation to an overflow audience Tuesday at the Modesto Rotary Club's weekly lunch meeting.

The Turlock Democrat also answered questions about mental health services, what can be done to prevent more mass shootings like those recently in El Paso, Dayton and Gilroy, and the quality and access to care afforded to military veterans.

Harder grew up in Turlock and graduated from Modesto High School before attending Stanford University and, later, Harvard. He worked as a business consultant for start-up companies before returning to the Central Valley to teach at Modesto Junior College. He was elected to represent the 10<sup>th</sup> Congressional District in November 2018.

In discussing water, Harder said his vision reflects the pragmatic approach most farmers apply to their businesses. He said “we must check all the boxes” rather than choosing between alternatives such as building new dams, replenishing diminished groundwater supplies and protecting the environment.

Housing affordability in California – where the average price of a home is about \$500,000, according to Harder – is a thorny issue in many communities, including Modesto. So is homelessness, which harder said has its roots not only in a fragile economy, but also with drug addiction and mental health issues. The congressman stressed that all levels of government – local, county, state and federal – must work together to address chronic homelessness.

Harder had praise for vocational job training programs such as Opportunity Stanislaus in Modesto, which teaches important skills to people and then matches them with local employers. He said nearly 86,000 people in his 10<sup>th</sup> District commute daily to jobs in the Bay Area because they cannot find suitable work locally, saying more must be done to bring those jobs to the Central Valley.

Regarding the horrific mass shootings, Harder said the rest of the nation should take a page from California’s book. He cited state laws banning sales of assault weapons and mandating background checks for potential gun buyers as being the kind of sensible efforts people from all political beliefs can and will support. He said he had sent a letter to Senate Republican Leader Mitch

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McConnell asking that stalled legislation that includes some of those initiatives be considered immediately by the Senate (it already has passed the House of Representatives).

And in response to a Rotarian whose son served in Iraq and was one of just five survivors in a 20-member unit, Harder said more must be done to provide much-needed mental health care and counseling to veterans. He said he recently visited the VA facility in Modesto, where there are just three nurses on hand to help when there used to be 10. Harder said pay deficiencies that allow VA workers in Stockton to make 25% more than those in Modesto should be fixed.

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With more than 225 members, MoRo is among the largest Rotary clubs on the West Coast. Since its founding in 1920, Modesto Rotary has been committed to improving the world. Local projects have included scholarships and other education initiatives, work with other service clubs on the Virginia Corridor bike and walking trail, and support for the Miracle League of Stanislaus County baseball league for disabled children.

Rotary International is a global organization of business and professional leaders who provide humanitarian service, encourage high ethical standards in all vocations, and help build goodwill and peace in the world. Approximately 1.2 million Rotarians belong to more than 30,000 Rotary clubs in more than 160 countries. Rotary club membership represents a cross-section of the community's business and professional men and women.

Internationally, Rotary's long-stated goal is to eradicate polio in the world. Last year, there were only about two dozen cases reported.