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Endorsement: Matthew Harper for the 72nd Assembly District



Assemblyman Matthew Harper waves to the crowd during the 113th annual Huntington Beach 4th of July Parade on Tuesday, July 4, 2017. (Photo by Jeff Gritchen, Orange County Register/SCNG)

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD | opinion@ocregister.com PUBLISHED: April 22, 2026 at 10:48 AM PDT | UPDATED: April 28, 2026 at 9:20 AM PDT

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The race for California's 72nd Assembly District, which includes Huntington Beach, Newport Beach, Aliso Viejo and other nearby cities, offers a microcosm of American politics. It features two candidates who, quite frankly, have no business running for a high-level legislative office, but who epitomize the sorry state of the two major parties.

There's also an unknown independent candidate and, thankfully, one serious former legislator who in a sane political world would make it to Sacramento in a cakewalk. The latter is Republican Matthew Harper, the former Assembly member, school-board trustee and council member from Huntington Beach. We endorse Harper, but we first must address the candidates who have been hand-picked by their parties.

The GOP has tapped Huntington Beach City Council member Gracey Van Der Mark, who is primarily known for her efforts to advance a MAGA-inspired culture-war agenda that includes fighting housing deregulation, censoring library books and passing a Voter ID law. Democrats have backed Chris Kluwe, a former NFL punter and political neophyte who largely regurgitates progressive talking points on everything from healthcare to taxation.

Readers won't be surprised by our broad disagreement with them. Our shock and dismay comes not from political differences — but from their lack of knowledge beyond superficialities.



There's a learning curve for anyone who makes it to the Legislature, but candidates need to understand the framework of California government. Kluwe was at least capable of having a real discussion rather than just repeating trite phrases. However, his points about, say, charter schools and the tax structure were based on misinformation. Talking with him was like talking with a personable, half-informed guy you'd meet at a bar.

This Editorial Board has interviewed several dozen candidates this election cycle and Van Der Mark was the least informed by a country mile. For instance, we asked her about her views on housing and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). She called for cutting red tape and reforming CEQA, but then couldn't explain why she and her council colleagues filed lawsuits trying to stop state housing laws that provided CEQA exemptions. She couldn't even explain the nature of the city's lawsuit.

It's fine not to agree, but we'd expect a former mayor to be capable of having an informed discussion. Regarding insurance, she called for regulatory reform, but was unfamiliar with Proposition 103 — the 1988 initiative that provides the framework for insurance regulation. She emphasized that she's a cultural conservative, which might explain her lack of understanding of pension reform and her support for public-employee unions.

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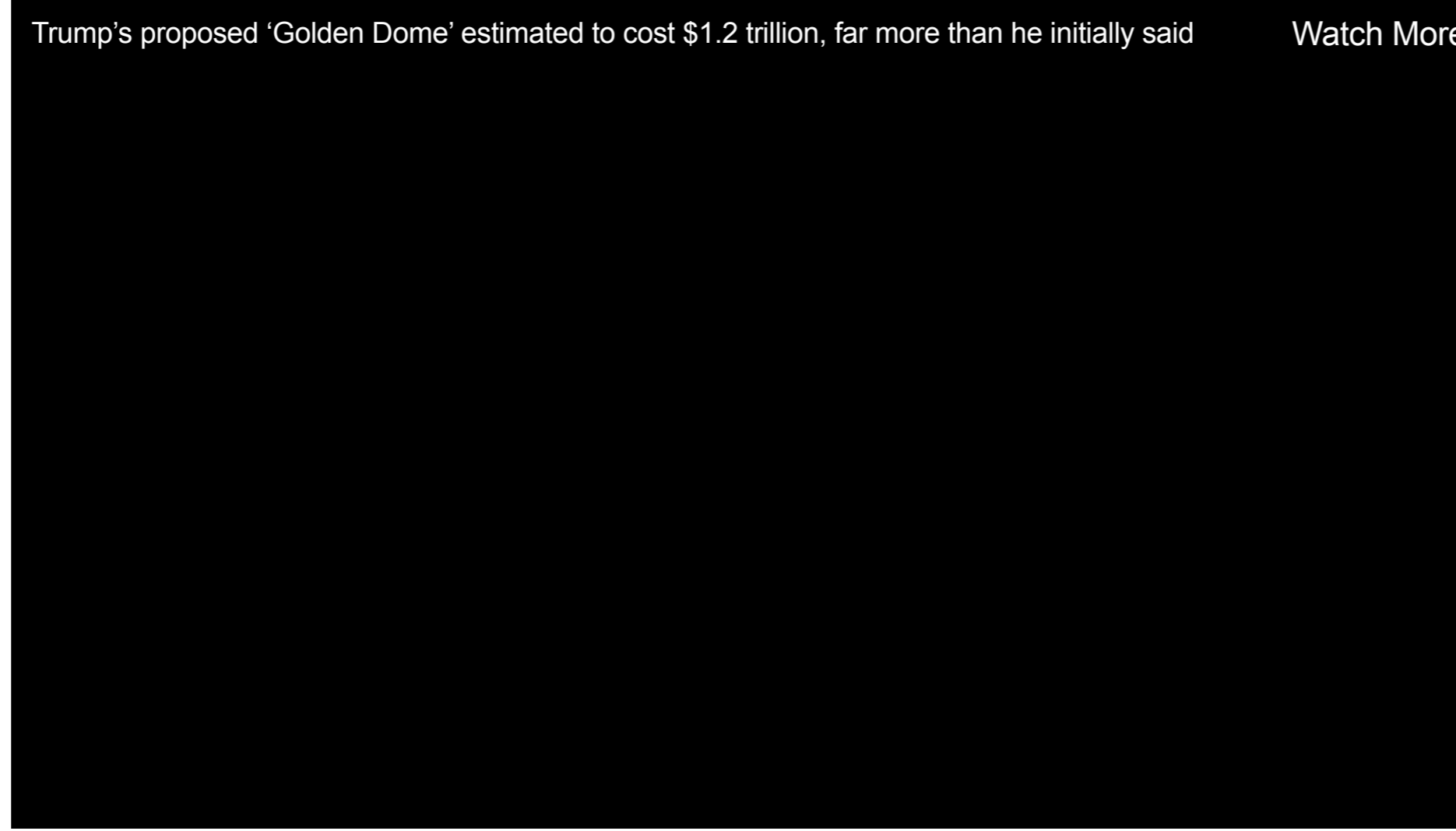
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How would she address pension liabilities? By cutting high-speed rail. We would end the bullet train in a heartbeat, but we figured an Assembly candidate would have a passing knowledge of how pension systems work. Why would the GOP tap her to serve as one of the party's small number of seats in the state Capitol, especially given that an experienced, free-market conservative also is on the same ballot?



That candidate, Harper, understood the crucial issues — budgets, pensions, housing reform, transportation, taxes — and had in-depth ideas. His positions are solidly conservative and reflect where the Republican Party used to be.

He believes in private property rights and so he wants to get the government out of the way of housing development. He recognizes the perils of public sector unions and so is capable of criticizing their influence on government.

Apparently the modern OC GOP wants to lean into big-government culture wars instead. Fortunately, OC voters still have a choice. We urge a vote for Matthew Harper.



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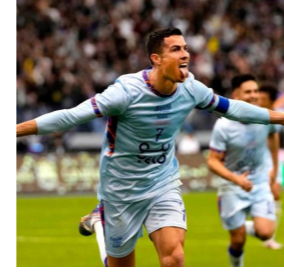
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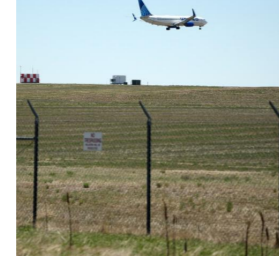
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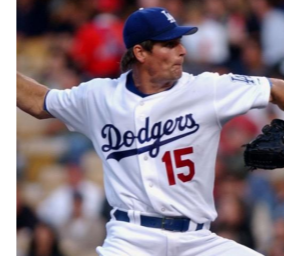
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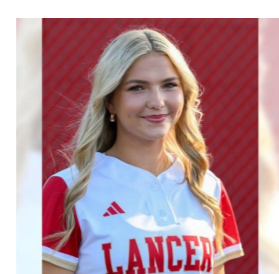
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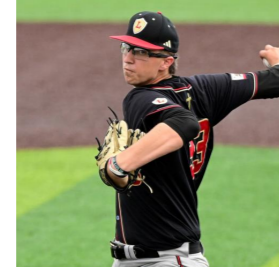
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