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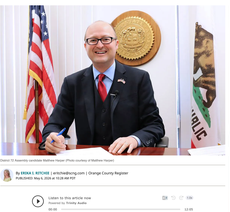
Matthew Harper, AD-72 candidate, 2026 primary election questionnaire



District 72 Assembly candidate Matthew Harper (Photo courtesy of Matthew Harper)

By ERIKA I. RITCHIE | eritchie@ocreg.com | Orange County Register
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Ahead of the June primary election, the Southern California News Group compiled a list of questions to pose to the candidates who seek to represent you. You can find the full questionnaire below. Questionnaires may have been edited for spelling, grammar, length and, in some instances, to remove hate speech and offensive language.

Name: Matthew Harper

Current job title: Real Estate Broker

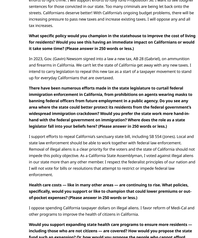
Age: 57

Political party affiliation: Republican

Incumbent: No

Other political positions held: California State Assemblyman (2014-2018), Huntington Beach Mayor (2013-2014), Huntington Beach City Councilman (2010-2014), Huntington Beach High School District Trustee (1998-2010), State Chairman, Young Republican Federation of California (2000-2001)

City where you reside: Huntington Beach



Campaign website or social media: www.VotemarperJ.com

CALIFORNIA PRIMARY ELECTION: ASSEMBLY DISTRICT 72 CANDIDATES

- Matthew Harper
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- Frank Wagner

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Do you believe balancing the state budget should rely more on spending cuts, new revenue streams or a combination? Tell us how you would propose tackling California's projected budget deficit. (Please answer in 250 words or less.)

California has a structural budget problem and that means that spending should be reduced instead of new or increased taxes. I signed the Pledge to Protect Proposition 13 and the Pledge to Oppose Tax Increases. I have a record of upholding these promises – I've never voted for a tax increase. I'm the only candidate in this campaign who has the support of 13 from the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association. We need to put a budget priority on improving education and fighting crime. Spending on illegal aliens should be cut. California can make broad spending cuts to state operations by eliminating vacant positions and reforming major programs, like Medi-Cal. We can't be lulled by rosy revenue forecasts. Instead, we need to hold the line on behalf of taxpayers.

For you, what's a non-starter when talking about budget cuts? Why? (Please answer in 250 words or less.)

Raising taxes is a non-starter. Californians are overtaxed. I will support the Proposition 98 funding guarantee for education. California needs to spend smarter on education and get more focused on results and student learning. Education reform, to help students perform their best is also a priority.

What are the top three most pressing issues facing the state, and what would you propose, as a state legislator, to address them? (Please answer in 250 words or less.)

I will support improvements to education. I believe that in order to be taken seriously on education reform, a state legislator needs to have earned a high school diploma, or better, and university degree. I want to see efforts to shackle charter schools repealed. I will support efforts to fight crime. I will support efforts to fully fund Proposition 36. I want to see tougher sentences for those convicted in our state. Too many criminals are being let back onto the streets. Californians deserve better! With Californians ongoing budget problems, there will be increasing pressure to pass new taxes and increase existing taxes. I will oppose any and all tax increases.

What specific policy would you champion in the statehouse to improve the cost of living for residents? Would you use this hearing on state income taxes on Californians or would it take some time? (Please answer in 250 words or less.)

In 2023, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed into a law a new, SB 39, California's, oil, gas, ammunition and firearms in California. We can't let the state of California get away with any new taxes. I intend to carry legislation to repeal this new tax as a start of a taxpayer movement to stand up for everyday Californians that are overtaxed.

There have been numerous efforts made in the state legislature to curtail federal immigration enforcement. Should state and local agencies receive more resources to coordinate with officers from Salem, or should the state focus its efforts on the area where the state could better protect its residents from the federal government's widespread immigration crackdown? Would you prefer the state work more hand-in hand with the federal government on immigration? Where does the role as a state legislator fall into your beliefs here? (Please answer in 250 words or less.)

I support efforts to repeal California's sanctuary state bill, including SB 554 (Jones). Local and state law enforcement should be able to work together with federal law enforcement. Removal of illegal aliens is a clear priority for the voters and the state of California should not impede this policy objective. As a California State Assemblyman, I voted against allowing illegal aliens in our state more than any other member. I respect the federalist principles of our nation and I will not vote for bills or resolutions that attempt to restrict or impede federal law enforcement.

Health care costs — like in many other areas — are continuing to rise. What policies, specifically, would you support or like to champion that could lower premiums or out-of-pocket expenses? (Please answer in 250 words or less.)

I oppose spending California taxpayer dollars on illegal aliens. I favor reform of Medi-Cal and other programs to improve the health of citizens in California.

Would you support expanding state health care programs to ensure more residents — including those who are not citizens — are covered? How would you propose the state fund such an expansion? Or, how would you propose the people who cannot afford health care still get the necessary care they need without expanding state programs? (Please answer in 250 words or less.)

No. I oppose spending California taxpayer dollars on illegal aliens. Though our state is large in population and budget, it is not right to tax our citizens for these kinds of medical benefits. Instead, California state and local law enforcement should be allowed to work with federal law enforcement toward the removal of illegal aliens.

As part of combating homelessness, elected officials often talk about the need to prevent people from being their homes in the first place. What policies or programs should the state adopt to make housing more affordable for renters and homeowners? What do you propose the state do to incentivize housing development and expedite such projects? (Please answer in 250 words or less.)

I want to allow property owners and home builders to meet the free market demand for affordable housing without government mandates. I oppose rent control in any form, as these kinds of market restrictions are counterproductive. The many restrictions and costs are put on home builders and home sellers in California. CEQA reform signed into law by Gov. Newsom did not go far enough, and I would continue to advocate for more.

Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a law in 2023 authorizing state energy regulators to penalize oil companies making excessive profits. But the California Energy Commission put off enforcing the penalties until 2027 to allow refiners time to boost production to 95% of California's refining capacity, said they would shut down operations. These announcements prompted many to be concerned about soaring gas prices. What do you think of the commission's decision? And how would you, as a state legislator, propose balancing California's climate goals with protecting consumers from high gas prices at the pump? (Please answer in 250 words or less.)

The actions of Gov. Newsom and the State Legislature have chased refineries out of the state and we are paying the price at the pump. Nobody wants to meet no-harm reforms in California to replace this capacity. The heavy hand of government has distorted the free market to the detriment of us as consumers. This not only impacts our wallets, but every other use of petroleum from our refineries will impact the cost of goods in California. As a California State Assemblyman, I called for gas tax relief opposed regulation that would lead to the high gas prices we have in California.

In 2024 voters approved Proposition 36 to increase penalties for certain drug and retail theft crimes and make available a drug treatment option for some who plead guilty to felony drug possession. Would you, as a legislator, demand that more funding for behavioral health treatments be included in the budget? How would you ensure that money is used properly? (Please answer in 250 words or less.)

I will support the efforts of State Sen. Tony Strickland and others to fully fund Proposition 36. As California State Assemblyman, I called for more money for mental health in California and believe that behavioral health treatments are an important priority.

What role should the state play in ensuring hospitals and doctors are providing gender-affirming care to LGBTQ+ residents? Similarly, what role do you believe the state could play should other states adopt policies that restrict that care? (Please answer in 250 words or less.)

I do not think the State of California should have a role in funding that.

Governments around the world are increasingly considering an age ban or other restrictions on social media use among young people, citing mental health and other concerns. Do you believe it's the state's responsibility to regulate social media use? Why or why not? And what specific restrictions or safeguards would you propose as a state lawmaker? (Please answer in 250 words or less.)

I likely would not favor an age restriction regarding social media. Over the decades, there have been similar concerns about comic books, television, video games, and popular music. However, I fully support efforts to place common-sense restrictions on students in public schools regarding social media and smartphones. As State Senator Assemblyman, I authored AB 2122 to prevent bullying using social media in schools.

Artificial intelligence has become a ubiquitous part of our lives. We public concerns about how it could be used to manipulate elections, how it could be used for low cost, and that the technology would replace jobs and leave too many Californians unemployed. How specifically would you balance such concerns with the desire to foster innovation and have California remain a leader in this space? (Please answer in 250 words or less.)

I am deeply concerned about the potential impacts of artificial intelligence, intended and unintended. I will listen to educated experts, stakeholders, and the general public before making decisions regarding artificial intelligence, especially since these are new issue areas with emerging research.

Statistically, violent crime rates in California is on the decline, but still, residents are not feeling safe or at ease in their communities. How do you your role in the state legislature in addressing the underlying issues that make Californians feel unsafe in their own neighborhoods? (Please answer in 250 words or less.)

Californians are rightly concerned about crime. There appears to be more open drug use and chaos in public in California now than any other point in my lifetime. So much goes unreported because many citizens have given up on state and local government. I will support the efforts of State Sen. Tony Strickland and others to fully fund Proposition 36.

What's a hidden talent you have? (Please answer in 250 words or less.)

It's not a secret that I love the great outdoors and hiking in Orange County and throughout California. Over the last few years, I have hiked to the summits of over 250 significant peaks in California, including: Mount San Antonio, San Jacinto Peak, San Bernardino Peak, San Gorgonio Peak, and Mount Whitney. I appreciate the natural beauty of our state and our freedom to explore it.

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Sourcing & Methodology

The Orange County Register sent questionnaires, based on current events and questions from readers, to candidates on the ballot in Orange County via email, phone and/or mail in August. Answers have been lightly edited only to correct spelling or grammar or to remove offensive language and hate speech.

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