NEWS > POLITICS > ELECTION > Fulltimer

Tony Strickland, SD-36 candidate, 2026 primary election questionnaire

Tony Strickland is a Republican candidate in the special election for the 36th State Senate District seat. (Photo by Wilson Lang, Contributing Photographer)

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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 wish to represent you. You can find the full questionnaire below. Questionnaires have been edited for spelling, grammar, length and, in some instances, to remove hate speech and offensive language.

Name: Tony Strickland

Current job title: State Senator

Political party affiliation: Republican

Incumbent: Yes.

Other political positions held: California State Assembly: 1998-2004; California State Senate: 2008-2012; Huntington Beach City Council: 2022-2025; California State Senate: 2025- Present

City where you reside: Huntington Beach

Campaign website or social media: strickandforsenate.com

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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.)

Balancing a budget this much out of whack isn't going to be easy. Spending has gone up and up and up. Meanwhile, major taxpayers are actively being driven out of state.

The answer starts with spending cuts. Major ones. California clearly has a spending problem.

To the extent new revenues would be helpful, they can't come in the form of new taxes. That would be self-defeating. Instead, we need to find ways to loosen regulations to let businesses and building thrive. The way to more revenue in California is to unleash our private sector.

Between the two, we can balance this budget responsibly. But we have to stop burying our heads in the sand about the cause of, and solutions to, the major budget problems California faces.

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

Raising taxes to solve spending issues is a complete non-starter for me. Again, California doesn't have a revenue problem. It has a spending problem. California's decision to keep more of their own hard-earned dollars. They shouldn't have to give more to make up for Sacramento's overspending.

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.)

Lowering the cost of gas wouldn't just lower prices at the pump for California drivers; it would bring down the costs of goods like groceries, too. We have to find ways to make living in California more affordable.

Along those lines, every dollar wasted by Sacramento is a dollar taken from California taxpayers who could use the money better themselves. That's why I've been so aggressive in trying to get rid of waste, fraud, and abuse. And we don't need to look past the massively wasteful High Speed Rail project for an example.

And lastly, I always say that public safety is the No. 1 responsibility of government. That's why I continue to fight for fully funding Proposition 36.

What specific policy would you champion in the statehouse to improve the cost of living for residents? Would you see this having an immediate impact on Californians or would it take some time? (Please answer in 250 words or less.)

As touched on above, I believe cutting the gas tax would be a game-changer for California.

Immediately. Families would save over $1,100 per year. That would be huge for many families.

The added benefits of cutting the gas tax would be that the costs of transporting goods would soon drop, too. Among other savings, that'd mean lower grocery costs.

California has a long history of making it more expensive to live here. I think we can reverse some of that, and I hope we start with cutting the gas tax.

There have been numerous efforts made in the state legislature to curtail federal immigration enforcement in California. From prohibitions on sharing private records to banning federal officers from future employment in a public agency. Do you see any 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? Would you see the role as a state legislator fall into your beliefs here? (Please answer in 250 words or less.)

Our federal immigration system was broken for years. We had a nearly open border for four full years. And that's largely been stopped.

In California, we continue to make the problems worse, not better. Law enforcement has a tough enough job already, without politicians muddying it up.

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.)

There are three areas I'm worked on this year that I believe will help lower healthcare costs in California.

First, we've lowered the cost of insulin. For the millions of Californians with diabetes, that's a big deal.

Secondly, we worked to get private equity out of healthcare. That healthcare turns a profit is great. I'm a capitalist! But the whole system shouldn't be designed to hurt patients and only turn profits. That defeats the purpose of healthcare.

And thirdly, working with colleagues to root out waste, fraud, and abuse, we can bring down the costs for patients playing by the rules.

Healthcare will still be expensive in California. But I hope we can continue finding ways to make a difference.

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? Do how would you propose the people who cannot afford health care will get the necessary care they need without expanding state programs? (Please answer in 250 words or less.)

California can't give everything to everyone. We don't have the money.

Too many Californians, who are citizens, are struggling to pay for healthcare. The more we let those have illegally access the same care without paying, only drives up costs for everyone else.

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

California desire to build more housing is great. They've just gone about where to build that housing all wrong. Sacramento keeps trying to cram more housing where it doesn't fit, isn't wanted, and will worsen neighborhoods forever. And they keep trying to do that instead of building in the rest of the state that is still undeveloped.

Here in Orange County, cities are being forced to find room to squeeze in tens of thousands of new high-density units, instead of the state simply looking to build more in the Inland Empire. It makes no sense.

By all means, let's build. Let's go create whole new cities and build the future of the state.

Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a law in 2022 authorizing state energy regulators to penalize oil companies making excessive profits. But the California Energy Commission put off imposing the penalties last year after two oil refineries, which represent nearly a fifth of the state's gasoline supply, announced they were shutting down. Do the 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.)

Years of bad decision making in Sacramento have left California to impose more than a dollar a gallon in taxes and fees. That adds to more than $1,100 for families every year. I've authored a bill to eliminate the gas tax because California drivers deserve a break.

In 2024, voters approved Proposition 36 to increase penalties for certain drug and retail theft crimes and make available a drug treatment option for those 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.)

Since coming back to the Capitol, I have constantly been championing the need to fully fund Prop. 36. California voters weren't subtle in their demands that public safety be taken more seriously, passing Prop. 36 overwhelmingly. They intended for the new rules to kick in and for the dollars to be there to pay to enforce those rules.

I've become the lead voice, working to ensure the voters get the funding for Prop. 36, as they had intended.

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 don't believe the state should play any role in guaranteeing gender-affirming care.

I do believe the state should play a role in protecting kids under 18 from undergoing such treatment without express approval from their parents.

California puts enough regulations on our doctors and hospitals. There doesn't need to be more.

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

This is an evolving issue that will require ongoing examination. Just a couple of months ago, the American Academy of Pediatrics put out its first ever in-depth look at social media usage from a pediatric doctor's perspective. And the results were fascinating.

The culprit wasn't necessarily social media or games, in general, but certainly types of them.

From car seats to safety caps to movie ratings, protecting kids comes in many forms. And I think there is an appropriate way for the government to do so here.

Artificial intelligence has become a ubiquitous part of our lives. Yet public concerns remain that there aren't enough regulations governing when or how AI should be used, 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.)

AI is going to pose challenges in the future, no doubt. But fighting against AI's development in a single geographic setting is going to be self-defeating because it is a worldwide race. California has historically been a leader in such efforts, and I hope AI follows that path.

Silicon Valley, and the technologies created there in the past few decades, have no doubt "replaced jobs." But the good they've created on the whole far outweighs the challenges they've added. AI is going to change the world as we know it, and in ways we can't even yet wrap our heads around. Trying to regulate such an evolving technology is to jumping out a thumb on our own future.

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 see your role in the state legislature in addressing the underlying issues that make Californian feel unsafe in their own neighborhoods? (Please answer in 250 words or less.)

Californians have felt unsafe because they have seen with their own eyes what happens to communities when laws stop being enforced. Crimes have to come with consequences. Repeat offenders have to be dealt with accordingly. Much of this is common sense.

We are seeing that trend shift back toward normalcy, but there's still more to go. And Sacramento has to actually meet the moment. Voters made their demands clear when they overwhelmingly passed Prop. 36. But, while funding for projects like High Speed Rail can keep falling from the sky, it is pulling teeth to get proper public safety funding.

The legislature certainly has a role to play in making sure not just that Californians are safe in their own neighborhoods, but that they feel safe. Too.

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

I don't know how hidden a talent it is, but many are surprised to learn that I used to play semi-pro basketball.

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