

ELECTION 2020; The Times' endorsements

Los Angeles Times

October 7, 2020 Wednesday

Final Edition

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Section: MAIN NEWS; Editorial Desk; Part A; Pg. 1

Length: 1498 words

Body

The volatile presidency of Donald Trump makes the current election one of the nation's most important ever, but don't overlook races farther down the ballot that would alter the state's approach to criminal justice, race, taxes, education, privacy and other crucial issues.

Ballots have begun arriving in voters' mailboxes, and voting is underway. The Times' recommendations, rolled out over the last several weeks, are summarized here. Check [LATimes.com/endorsements](https://latimes.com/endorsements) for links to full versions that explain our reasoning and for answers to voting questions in this most unusual of election years.

The Times endorses selectively. Your ballot will include races in addition to those discussed here.

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PRESIDENT

Joe Biden President Trump's record easily justifies a position of "anybody but Trump." But former Vice President Biden isn't just preferable to Trump; in many respects, he is Trump's antithesis.

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CONGRESS

House of Representatives, District 25: Christy Smith Congress has enough political extremists pounding away at the partisan wedge. What it needs are more lawmakers like Smith who quietly work with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to make government better.

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BALLOT MEASURES

Proposition 14 (\$5.5-billion general obligation bond for the state's stem cell research institute): No When California voters approved a stem cell research initiative in 2004, the idea wasn't to have the state replace the federal government's funding for the long term. It was to kick-start an industry that would then operate on its own.

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Proposition 15 (property tax "split roll" for commercial and industrial real estate): Yes At long last, here is a fix for one of California's most intractable problems: a wildly unfair and lopsided property tax system that has starved local governments of revenue and distorted the costs of buying a house and starting a business.

Proposition 16 (repeal of ban on affirmative action in state programs): Yes Proposition 209, a ban on affirmative action programs in public institutions that voters adopted in 1996, has set back the state's efforts to promote diversity. It's past time to remove it.

Proposition 17 (restoring parolees' right to vote): Yes In California, felons who have served their time in prison are denied the right to vote until they finish their parole. That's an obstacle they don't need as they reintegrate into society.

Proposition 18 (right to vote in primaries for some 17-year-old Californians): Yes It makes sense that the teens who will be 18 years old and eligible to vote in a general election in California should also help decide, when they are 17, whose names will be on that ballot.

Proposition 19 (transfer of property tax assessments when homes are sold): No By letting older homeowners keep the property tax break they've built up when they move to a new home, Proposition 19 would extend inequality by benefiting those who were lucky enough to buy a home years ago and hold onto it as values skyrocketed.

Proposition 20 (criminal justice reform rollbacks): No California is leading the nation away from decades of foolish and wasteful policies that prevent even low-level offenders from correcting their mistakes and getting on with productive and law-abiding lives. This is no time to reverse course.

Proposition 21 (rent control authority for local jurisdictions): Yes Cities are on the front lines of managing the upheaval and suffering caused by the state's housing crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. They need the flexibility to adopt policies in response, such as limits on rent increases or temporary rent freezes.

Proposition 22 (treating app drivers as independent contractors): No California needs a better approach to gig workers. But rather than accepting the bad bargain Proposition 22 presents, voters should demand a better, broader answer from Sacramento.

Proposition 23 (dialysis clinic requirements): No There's no evidence that the measure would protect the health and safety of dialysis patients, but there's plenty of evidence that it is being improperly used as a labor organizing tool.

Proposition 24 (consumer data privacy): Yes The state's groundbreaking data privacy law has come under attack in the Legislature. This measure would expand the protections for personal data and bar the Legislature from weakening them, while leaving the door open for improvements.

Proposition 25 (money bail referendum): Yes This measure would ratify a law to end bail and the use of wealth or poverty in California to determine whether a person accused of a crime stays in jail or goes home before trial.

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Board of Supervisors District 2: Holly Mitchell The people of L.A. County's 2nd District need Mitchell's vision of and commitment to better justice, better health and smarter development.

District Attorney: George Gascon One of the first police leaders to question the old-style tough-on-crime approach, Gascon is the right candidate at the right time in the largest local criminal justice jurisdiction in the United States.

Measure J (shifting county dollars into certain social programs): Yes If the county is to fund a community-based, care-first approach to public safety without raising taxes, the Board of Supervisors will have to allocate a greater share of its existing funds to those programs than it currently does.

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L.A. COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT

Superior Court Office No. 72: Steve Morgan Morgan has been in numerous trials, some as a criminal defense lawyer, some as a prosecutor, some in military court and many in L.A. County Superior Court. Judges before whom he has appeared and lawyers whom he has worked with praise his skill and his demeanor.

Superior Court Office No. 80: David Berger Berger, an experienced criminal prosecutor, has developed over the years from an old-school tough-on-crime prosecutor to one who recognizes the importance of rehabilitative alternatives to incarceration.

Superior Court Office No. 162: David D. Diamond Diamond brings some of the breadth of experience it would be nice to have more of on the bench, yet he also has solid trial experience. A former member of the Burbank Police Commission, he has worked as a family lawyer, a civil litigator and a criminal defense lawyer.

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L.A. CITY COUNCIL

District 4: David Ryu Ryu has impressed during his first term with his willingness to listen, learn and respond, and to fight the good fight in the face of opposition from defenders of the status quo. He's earned a second term.

District 10: Mark Ridley-Thomas Voters would have a hard time finding another candidate with Ridley-Thomas' experience and knowledge or his long list of accomplishments. His perspective will be especially helpful as the council grapples with how to reimagine policing in L.A.

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L.A. UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Measure RR (\$7-billion bond): Yes The COVID-19 pandemic has made clear that new investments in school infrastructure and equipment are crucial right now and that the public cannot expect these to come out of a depleted general budget.

Board of Education Seat 3: Scott Schmerelson The experienced hand of incumbent Schmerelson, a former principal, is more valuable now that schools are in crisis mode. Though he is a generally reliable ally of the teachers union, Schmerelson has voted for his share of charter schools.

Board of Education Seat 7: Tanya Ortiz Franklin Franklin addresses the issues facing the district in a more specific, informed and energetic way than her opponent. She's deeply concerned about teacher safety during a future return to school, but also deeply worried for the 7,000 L.A. Unified students who still lack computers to work from home.

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L.A. COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

Board of Trustees Seat 1: Andra Hoffman An administrator in the Glendale Community College District, Hoffman was the best qualified for this seat when she first ran five years ago, and she has grown in knowledge and ability during her term.

Board of Trustees Seat 3: Gerald Anderson Anderson, a business consultant and adjunct business instructor at West L.A. College and L.A. City College, would help broaden community representation on the board and bring both an insider's view of the system and an outsider's experience of the world, adding welcome dimensions to the trustees' deliberations.

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Board of Trustees Seat 5: Nichelle Henderson A former middle school teacher who currently is a faculty advisor and lecturer in a Cal State program that helps students obtain teaching credentials, Henderson exhibits a firm grasp of the community colleges' role in the larger educational system and the unusual needs of LACCD students facing homelessness, food insecurity and financial barriers to continuing their educations.

Board of Trustees Seat 7: Chris Han Han, a lawyer and adjunct instructor in business law at L.A. Mission College, has direct experience with students within the district, which gives him a ground-level perspective on district policies, and he wisely pushes for more robust relations with mentoring and apprenticeship programs.

Load-Date: October 7, 2020

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