

## Hernandez faces two challengers for 48th District Assembly race

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WEST COVINA - Two challengers are hoping for a chance to unseat incumbent Roger Hernandez, a Democrat who is running for re-election as a representative for the state's 48th Assembly District.

Hernandez previously represented the 57th District, before the 48th District was created under redistricting.

Running against Hernandez is Republican Joe Gardner, a 57-year-old West Covina resident, and Covina resident Mike Meza, 60, who is running with no party affiliation.

The 48th District, which has a population of about 460,000, covers Duarte, Azusa, Glendora, Covina, West Covina, Baldwin Park, Irwindale, part of El Monte, and the unincorporated communities Charter Oak, Bassett and Valinda.

The top two vote-getters in the June 5 primary election will advance to the November election.

"I'm concerned about the direction the state is going," said Gardner, a retired law enforcement officer, of why he's running for office. "Now we have a \$16 billion deficit for this year's budget and the only answer seemingly is to continue to raise our taxes. Our taxes are out of control and our government is spending way more than they should and are not tightening their belts the way the rest of us have."

Garner's top goals if elected are creating jobs in the private sector, reforming government to be more fiscally responsible and increasing public safety.

Meza, a retired Pasadena police sergeant and small businessman who unsuccessfully ran for the Assembly in 2010, said his goals include eliminating government waste and eliminating fraud in social service programs.

"In 2010, I ran as a write-in because the two candidates at that time ... were in my mind two kids with no experience," Meza said of Hernandez and then-candidate Brian Gutierrez. "They weren't representative of people living in this district. This year is a continuum of what I wanted to do in 2010."

In 2010, Hernandez, 36, a former West Covina City Councilman, won with 67.2 percent of the vote against opponents Gutierrez and Meza.

Hernandez at the time garnered nearly all the major endorsements in the race and had the fundraising advantage, much like this time around.

From January to mid-March, Hernandez this year raised \$37,123 and spent \$101,200, according to financial records. His endorsements include the California Democratic Party, West Covina Police Officers' Association and other local elected officials.

Campaign donation information was not available for Gardner, but he said he has spent about \$10,000 to run his campaign. He has earned endorsements from the California Republican Party and County Supervisor Mike Antonovich.

Meza has raised and spent about \$7,166.

The challengers, though, have large obstacles to overcome, including running in a district where nearly 47 percent of registered voters are Democrats.

About 28 percent of registered voters are Republicans and 20.28 percent have no party preference.

Still, that has not swayed either challenger from making a run for office.

"I know it's going to be a challenge, but my values are the same values that a lot of Democrats share," Gardner said. "It's not about Republicans and Democrats, it's just about common sense and we really have to push an agenda for private sector job creation and fiscal responsibility at the state level."

Meza said blind loyalty is not the smart approach for voters to take.

"Hopefully people will take a look at me as an alternative to the status quo," Meza said. "I'm a pocketbook kind of guy. I want to see spending controlled before we offer anything else to other people, get a hold of our budget and go from there. If people can get out of the allegiance to the `R' and the `D' and look at the person, then I should be more qualified than the other two."

Hernandez, who recently gave up his state car after being arrested for driving under the influence, did not return calls for comment.

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