

South Orange County Young Democrats

General Body Meeting #2 — Endorsement Meeting — Minutes

Wednesday, May 13, 2026

Location: Whitney Gallery, 305 Forest Avenue, Laguna Beach, CA

Presiding: Jack Whitney, President

(Board Advisor John Paculdo Koenigshofer presided over the CA-40 endorsement)

Attendance: approximately 18 members and guests

Officers Present: Jack Whitney (President), Jasel Steinmetz (Treasurer), Ben Bartlett (Secretary), John Paculdo Koenigshofer (Board Advisor).

Officers Excused: Fatima Muniz (Vice President).

7:29 PM — Call to Order

President Jack Whitney called the meeting to order and thanked attendees — and the candidates in particular — for participating on short notice with the June 2 primary approaching. He outlined the evening's agenda: approval of the GBM #1 minutes, officer reports, announcements, the endorsement votes that were the meeting's main business, public comment, and adjournment.

7:30 PM — Approval of GBM #1 Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes of the April 8, 2026 inaugural general body meeting was moved, seconded, and approved by voice vote without opposition.

7:31 PM — Approval of Agenda

A motion to approve the meeting agenda was moved, seconded, and approved by voice vote without opposition.

7:32 PM — Officer Reports and Announcements

No formal officer reports were presented. The board announced that applications are now open for appointed, non-voting board positions — including Communications & Visual Media Director, Membership & Outreach Coordinator, Events & Programming Coordinator, High School & College Recruitment Lead, and Policy & Endorsements Research Lead — with a full application to be distributed to the membership roster over the coming month. Applicants will submit an application, complete an interview, and be confirmed by a vote of the board.

7:33 PM — Endorsement Procedure and Suspension of Bylaws

The chair reviewed voting eligibility and the endorsement process. Eligible voters were members in good standing who attended GBM #1 on April 8, together with elected officers in good standing — one vote per member, with no proxy voting — and eligible voters were identified by a sticker. Two formats were used: friendly Democratic incumbents would be considered together on a consent calendar decided by a single combined vote at a simple majority, and contested races would be heard individually with a two-minute opening, a ten-minute Q&A with the body, and a one-minute closing, requiring a 60% supermajority to endorse. "No endorsement" was noted as a valid outcome in any race.

Motion — Suspension of Bylaws, Article II, Section 5: Because the club's bylaws require attendance at two general body meetings to vote on endorsements, and only one general body meeting had been held, a motion was made to suspend Article II, Section 5 for this meeting only, so that members who attended GBM #1 could vote. Moved and seconded.

Voice vote: Approved without opposition.

7:34 PM — Endorsement: Friendly Incumbent Slate (Consent Calendar)

Four friendly Democratic incumbents were presented as a single consent-calendar slate: Mike Levin (U.S. Representative, CA-49), Dave Min (U.S. Representative, CA-47), Catherine Blakespear (California State Senator, SD-38), and Katrina Foley (Orange County Supervisor, District 5). The chair invited any motion to remove a candidate from the consent calendar; none was made. A motion to endorse the slate as presented was moved and seconded.

Voice vote: Approved without opposition. These are the South Orange County Young Democrats' first candidate endorsements.

Supervisor Foley was unable to attend; a representative from her campaign was present and was acknowledged for members interested in volunteering with her District 5 re-election effort.

7:35 PM — Contested Race: Assembly District 72 (Chris Kluwe)

Chris Kluwe, the sole Democrat in AD-72, appeared in person. A former NFL punter and longtime LGBTQ+ rights advocate from Huntington Beach, Kluwe is running for the open AD-72 seat, which Republican Diane Dixon vacated to run for the Orange County Board of Supervisors; he has been endorsed by the Orange County Young Democrats (OCYD), the California Democratic Party, and the Democratic Party of Orange County. He gave a two-minute opening statement, followed by Q&A with the body. Topics included California's online age-verification law, which he opposed on data-privacy and First Amendment grounds; the single bill he would prioritize, weighing wealth inequality and affordability against responsible regulation of AI; recent state housing reforms and CEQA streamlining; SB 79 and transit-oriented development; the war in Gaza; and recidivism and the prison-industrial complex. He gave a one-minute closing statement.

Discussion: Three members spoke in favor of endorsement, citing Kluwe's record of public advocacy, his standing as the only Democrat in the race, and his willingness to take clear positions.

Hand vote: 7 in favor, 0 opposed. Chris Kluwe is endorsed in AD-72.

7:51 PM — Contested Race: Assembly District 74 (Sergio Farias)

Sergio Farias, the sole Democrat in AD-74, appeared in person. A San Juan Capistrano City Councilmember since 2016 and a former mayor, Farias is challenging Republican incumbent Laurie Davies and has been endorsed by the California Democratic Party, the Democratic Party of Orange County, and the San Diego County Democratic Party. He gave a two-minute opening statement, followed by Q&A with the body. Topics included OCTA's proposed Metrolink service reductions, the online age-verification and consumer-data law, nuclear energy, and his record on the San Juan Capistrano City Council in support of public transit — including how the weakening of SB 79 affected local transit-oriented development. He gave a one-minute closing statement.

Discussion: Two members spoke in favor of endorsement, citing Farias's local-government experience and his focus on infrastructure investment.

Hand vote: 7 in favor, 0 opposed. Sergio Farias is endorsed in AD-74.

8:04 PM — Recess

The chair called a brief recess to set up the video-conference connection for the CA-40 candidates joining remotely.

8:15 PM — Contested Race: U.S. House, CA-40 (Esther Kim Varet, Joe Kerr, Lisa Ramirez)

CA-40 was the evening's only multi-candidate contested race — an open, lean-Republican seat covering Mission Viejo, Aliso Viejo, Laguna Hills, Laguna Woods, Lake Forest, Rancho Santa Margarita, Coto de Caza, and Anaheim Hills. Neither OCYD nor the California Democratic Party had endorsed in the race.

Because President Whitney serves as field director for one of the candidates, Esther Kim Varet, he handed the gavel to Board Advisor John Paculdo Koenigshofer, who presided over this race. The gavel returned to President Whitney following the vote.

Three candidates participated. Joe Kerr — a retired Orange County Fire Authority captain and longtime firefighters' union leader — appeared in person. Esther Kim Varet, founder of a contemporary art gallery and a Korean-American small-business owner, and Lisa Ramirez, a Santa Ana immigration attorney, each joined by video conference. Speaking order was set by random draw. Each candidate gave a two-minute opening statement — in the order Varet, Kerr, Ramirez — followed by a joint ten-minute Q&A with the body and a one-minute closing statement from each candidate. Q&A topics included partisan gerrymandering and Proposition 50, each candidate's path to victory in the primary and general election, whether they would vote to fund weapons to Israel, and what role the United States should play in Gaza after the conflict.

Following candidate statements, the candidates and campaign staff were excused and the body deliberated.

Vote: After one round of voting — Esther Kim Varet 5, Joe Kerr 0, Lisa Ramirez 0, no endorsement 1. Having exceeded the 60% supermajority required, Esther Kim Varet is endorsed in CA-40.

9:11 PM — Contested Race: Orange County Assessor (Janet Keo Conklin)

Janet Keo Conklin appeared in person as the sole Democratic-aligned candidate for Orange County Assessor, a nonpartisan office on which she appears on the ballot as a "California Nonpartisan Candidate." A La Palma City Councilmember and a longtime Realtor, Conklin gave an opening statement and took questions from the body, including on what would distinguish her service in the office. During her remarks, Conklin stated that she was not seeking the club's endorsement at this time. In discussion, it was clarified that the South Orange County Young Democrats is a chartered chapter of the California Young Democrats and is not a club chartered through the Democratic Party of Orange County.

Motion: A motion to table any endorsement in the Assessor's race indefinitely was moved and seconded.

Voice vote: Approved without opposition. The race is tabled indefinitely.

9:24 PM — Contested Race: State Senate District 36 (Chris Duncan)

Chris Duncan, the sole Democrat in SD-36, joined by video conference. A former two-term Mayor of San Clemente and a current city councilmember, Duncan is challenging Republican incumbent Tony Strickland and has been endorsed by OCYD and the California Democratic Party. He gave a two-minute opening statement, followed by Q&A with the body. Topics included statewide housing efforts and CEQA streamlining; the role of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community, particularly in Little Saigon, in his path to victory; the original version of SB 79 before it was amended; and the California Climate Superfund Act, which he supports. He gave a one-minute closing statement.

Discussion: Member Brandon Thede spoke in favor, disclosing a family relationship to the candidate and vouching for his character.

Vote: Unanimous in favor. Chris Duncan is endorsed in SD-36.

9:39 PM — Contested Race: Assembly District 71 (JJ Galvez, by application)

JJ Galvez, the sole Democrat in AD-71, was unable to attend and was considered by written application. A director and treasurer of the Silverado-Modjeska Recreation and Park District, Galvez is challenging Republican incumbent Kate Sanchez and has been endorsed by OCYD, the California Democratic Party, and the Democratic Party of Orange County. A motion to endorse JJ Galvez by application was moved and seconded.

Voice vote: Approved without opposition. JJ Galvez is endorsed in AD-71.

9:39 PM — Public Comment and Announcements

No members of the public asked to speak. The chair shared upcoming dates and opportunities:

GBM #3 — Wednesday, June 10, 2026 at 7:00 PM, location to be announced. The boundary discussion tabled at GBM #1 — whether to add Irvine to the club's boundaries — will be on the agenda.

Mission Viejo Pride — The club will host a joint table with the Orange County Young Democrats at Mission Viejo Pride in June.

Second endorsement meeting — A second endorsement meeting will be held in late summer for November-ballot races — including city councils, school boards, and water districts — after candidate filing opens July 14.

Members were again encouraged to apply for appointed board positions and to add their names to the sign-in sheet so the club can share field opportunities — canvasses and phone banks — for its endorsed candidates. Attendees were also encouraged to bring friends to future meetings as the club continues to grow.

9:40 PM — Adjournment

With no further business, the chair adjourned the meeting.

Minutes prepared by Ben Bartlett, Secretary