

Want to receive email updates from Ballotpedia?

Name

Email Address

California Public Vote on Bonds Initiative, Proposition 53 (2016)

The **California Public Vote on Bonds Initiative** (#15-0003) will be on the November 8, 2016 ballot in California as an initiated constitutional amendment.^{[1][2][3]}

A **"yes"** vote will be a vote in favor of requiring voter approval before the state could issue more than \$2 billion in public infrastructure bonds that would require an increase in taxes or fees for repayment.

A **"no"** vote will be a vote against the voter approval requirement and in favor of continuing to allow the state to issue new debt without voter approval.

Supporters of the initiative refer to it as the **"No Blank Checks Initiative."**

Background

While some bonds do appear on California ballots for voter approval, bonds paid for out of state revenue are not required to be voter-approved. There was a previous version of the Public Vote on Bonds initiative (#15-0003), Initiative #14-0009, submitted for the ballot in 2014, but it failed to qualify.^[4] Business Executive Dean Cortopassi backed both Initiative #14-0009 and Initiative #15-0003, submitting a request for a title and summary for the latter in 2015.^{[5][6][7]}

Text of measure

Ballot title

The ballot title is as follows:^[8]

“ Revenue Bonds. Infrastructure Projects. State Legislature and Voter Approval. Initiative Constitutional Amendment.^[9] ”

Ballot summary

The ballot summary is as follows:^[8]

“ Requires State Legislature approve use of revenue bonds for public infrastructure projects funded, owned, or operated by the state or any joint agency that includes the state, if the bond amount exceeds \$2 billion and repayment requires new, increased, or extended taxes, fees, or other charges. Requires that legislatively approved projects be presented on statewide ballot for voter approval. Applies to previously approved projects if remaining bond amount exceeds \$2 billion. Requires that specified project information for all state bonds be included in voter ballot pamphlet.^[9] ”

Fiscal impact statement

Note: The fiscal impact statement for a California ballot initiative authorized for circulation is jointly prepared by the state's legislative analyst and its director of finance.

The fiscal impact statement is as follows:^[8]

California Public Vote on Bonds Initiative



Election date

November 8, 2016

Topic

State and local government budgets, spending and finance

Status

On the ballot

Type	Origin
------	--------

Constitutional amendment	Citizens
--------------------------	----------

Want to receive email updates from Ballotpedia?

Constitutional changes

The proposed amendment was designed to add the following section to Article XVI of the California Constitution:

Section 1.6. (a) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, all revenue bonds issued or sold by the State in an amount either singly or in the aggregate over two billion dollars (\$2,000,000,000) for any single project financed, owned, operated, or managed by the State must first be approved by the voters at a statewide election. "State" means the State of California, any agency or department thereof, and any joint powers agency or similar body created by the State or in which the State is a member. "State" as used herein does not include a city, county, city and county, school district, community college district, or special district. For purposes of this section, "special district" refers only to public entities formed for the performance of local governmental functions within limited boundaries.

(b) A single project for which state revenue bonds are issued or sold in an amount over two billion dollars (\$2,000,000,000) may not be divided into, or deemed to be, multiple separate projects in order to avoid the voter approval requirements contained in this section. For purposes of this section, multiple allegedly separate projects shall be

Support

Supporters

The primary supporters for this initiative are Dean and Joan Cortopassi.

Arguments in favor

Campaign Spokesman **Tom Ross** spoke about Dean Cortopassi, who led the initiative's campaign drive, and said the following:
[2]

“ He started looking at the state debt issues and how do we control the state debt. If Californians are expected to pay for projects of \$2 billion or more, they ought to have a say on them. This gives Californians an opportunity to vote.^[9]

Opposition

Opponents

- Gov. Jerry Brown
- California Chamber of Commerce
- State Building and Construction Trades Council

Arguments against

Gareth Lacy, a spokesman for Gov. Brown, said the following:^[2]

“ This is a really bad idea that would cause costly delays in repairing our roads, colleges and water systems and make it harder to respond to natural disasters. The governor is strongly opposed to this initiative.^[9]

Robbie Hunter, president of the State Building and Construction Trades Council, argued the following:^[2]

“ Our state is suffering from a massive backlog of essential needs across the state including outdated water systems that are vulnerable to earthquakes, crumbling roads and bridges and overcrowded hospitals and universities. This measure worsens an already grave situation and threatens our economy and job creation.^[9]

Allan Zaremborg, California Chamber of Commerce president, said the following:^[2]

“ This ballot measure is both deceptive and dangerous. Since neither the general fund nor state taxpayers are on the hook for repayment, it’s misleading and unnecessary to call for a statewide vote.^[9]

Campaign finance

As of April 26, 2016, the support campaign for this initiative had roughly five times more in campaign funds than the opposition campaign had, and was entirely bankrolled by Stockton business executive Dean Cortopassi and his wife Joan Cortopassi.^{[11][12]} The majority of campaign funds for the opposition came from various engineering, infrastructure, business, and construction organizations.^[13]

Total campaign cash ^[10]	
 <i>as of April 26, 2016</i>	
 Support:	\$4,505,600
 Opposition:	\$850,000

Support

One hundred percent of the total contributions for this campaign were in-state donations made by Dean and Joan Cortopassi.

As of April 26, 2016, the following PACs were registered to support this initiative and the total amount raised below was current as of the same date. The amount spent listed below was current as of March 2016.^{[11][13]}

Committee	Amount raised	Amount spent
<i>Stop Blank Checks</i> (http://cal-access.sos.ca.gov/Campaign/Measures/Detail.aspx?id=1376142&session=2015)	\$4,505,600	\$356,316.27
Total	\$4,505,600	\$356,316.27

As of May 14, 2016, the largest and only donors in support of this initiative were:^[11]

Donor	Amount
Dean Cortopassi	\$3,005,600
Joan Cortopassi	\$1,500,000

Opposition

One ballot measure campaign committee registered in opposition to the measure as of March 7, 2016. The committee received the following total contributions as of March 7, 2016. The expenditures listed were current as of March 31, 2016.^[13]

Committee	Amount raised	Amount spent
<i>Citizens To Protect California Infrastructure</i> , Sponsored By Business and Construction Trades Organizations (http://cal-access.sos.ca.gov/Campaign/Measures/Detail.aspx?id=1376142&session=2015)	\$850,000	\$193,201.33
Total	\$850,000	\$193,201.33

The following are the top five donors who contributed to the Citizens To Protect California Infrastructure committee as of March 31, 2016:^[14]

Donor	Amount
MEMBERS' VOICE OF THE STATE BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION TRADES COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA	\$150,000
CALIFORNIA CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY LABOR MANAGEMENT COOPERATION TRUST	\$100,000
LABORERS PACIFIC SOUTHWEST REGIONAL ORGANIZING COALITION - ISSUES PAC	\$100,000
MEMBERS' VOICE OF THE STATE BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION TRADES COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA	\$100,000
CALIFORNIA ALLIANCE FOR JOBS - REBUILD CALIFORNIA COMMITTEE	\$50,000

Media editorials

Support

If you know of any editorial board endorsements that should be posted here, please email the Ballot Measures project director (mailto:ballotmeasures@ballotpedia.org).

Opposition

In a November 2015 editorial, the *Contra Costa Times* editorial board argued that the ballot measure language was too unclear and vague, saying the following:^[15]

“ Voters shouldn't lock into law any proposition leaving this much uncertainty, especially since it would require two-thirds approval to change or overturn it, even though it can pass initially with a simple majority. The governor is dead wrong about his \$15 billion-and-counting Delta plan. But when he calls Cortopassi's ballot measure 'a really bad idea' -- that's an understatement.^[9]

Other opinions

The Modesto Bee editorial board has not taken a position on the initiative, but did say the following regarding its potential impact on Governor Jerry Brown's plans:

“ Having been rebuked by the voters 33 years ago, the governor has been trying to remove the public from any decision regarding the Delta – leaving it up big water users instead. Cortopassi's initiative has the potential to block this sneak attack on Northern California's water. We'll need to learn more about the No Blank Checks initiative before we take a position on whether it's good for California's future. Opponents include labor unions and others, and some of their arguments appear valid, while others are perhaps overstated; reading the Legislative Analyst's review left it unclear. But we will say this much now: Brown deserves what he got.^[9]

Path to the ballot

See also: California signature requirements

15-0003 petition

- Dean Cortopassi submitted a letter requesting a title and summary for Initiative #15-0003 on January 7, 2015.
- A title and summary were issued for Initiative #15-0003 by the Attorney General of California's office on March 13, 2015.
- 365,880 valid signatures were required for qualification purposes.
- Supporters had until September 10, 2015, to collect the required signatures.
- This measure became eligible for the November 2016 ballot, per the Secretary of State's office, on November 2, 2015.^[16]

Failed 14-0009 version

- Dean Cortopassi submitted a letter requesting a title and summary for Initiative #14-0009 on June 27, 2014.
- A title and summary were issued for Initiative #14-0009 by the Attorney General of California's office on August 21, 2014.
- Supporters had until January 20, 2015, to collect the required 504,760 valid signatures for Initiative #14-0009.
- The initiative failed to qualify for the ballot on February 2, 2015.

Related measures

2016

Government finance measures on the ballot in 2016	
State	Measures
Alabama	Alabama State Parks Fund Amendment
Alaska	Alaska State Debt for Student Loans Amendment, Ballot Measure 2
Arizona	Arizona Education Finance Amendment, Proposition 123 
Arizona	Arizona Trust Land Amendment
Georgia	Georgia Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Children Fund Amendment
Hawaii	Hawaii Disposition of Excess Revenues Amendment
Illinois	Illinois Transportation Funds Amendment
Utah	Utah School Funds Modification Amendment
Wyoming	Wyoming Investment of Funds in Equities, Constitutional Amendment A

External links

- Letter requesting a ballot title for Initiative 14-0009 (<https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/initiatives/pdfs/14-0009%20%2814-0009%20%28Bond-funded%20Projects%29%29.pdf?>)
- Letter requesting a ballot title for Initiative 15-0003 (<http://oag.ca.gov/system/files/initiatives/pdfs/15-0003%20%28Bond-funded%20Projects%20V2%29.pdf?>)



Recent news

This section displays the most recent stories in a Google news search for the terms **California No blank checks initiative 2016**.

Some of the stories below may not be relevant to this page due to the nature of Google's news search engine.

California Public Vote on Bonds Initiative, Proposition 53 (2016) - Google News Feed (<http://google.com/search?hl=en&gl=us&tbm=nws&q=California+No+blank+checks+initiative+2016&um=1&ie=UTF-8>)

- Proposals headed for Oregon November ballot - Statesman Journal
- Initiative that could block high-speed rail makes November ballot - Silicon Valley Business Journal
- CP&DR News Briefs July 5, 2016: California Transportation Plan; November Ballot Measures; Bay-Delta Plan Blocked ... - California Planning and Development Report
- What Initiatives are on the November Ballot? - PublicCEO.com
- CA revenue bond ballot measure could kill future bullet train funding - Construction Dive
- The Daily 202: Has Trump never read the Constitution? - Washington Post
- November ballot crowded with weighty measures - SFGate
- PELOSI'S vow on guns: 'We're not going away' -- STEYER Still Mulling Run -- TONY HAWK Does it Again - Politico
- Making a Killing - The New Yorker
- Coalition opposes 'No Blank Checks' ballot measure - Fresno Business Journal

State profile



California's population in 2014 was 38,802,500, according to the United States Census Bureau. This estimate represented a 4.2 percent increase from the bureau's 2010 estimate. The state's population per square mile was 239.1 in 2010, exceeding the national average of 87.4.

California experienced a 2 percent increase in total employment from 2011 to 2012, falling below the 2.2 percent increase at the national level during the same period.^[17]

Demographics

California exceeded the national average for residents who attained at least bachelor's degrees, according to data from 2009 to 2013. The United States Census Bureau found that 30.7 percent of California residents aged 25 years and older attained bachelor's degrees, compared to 28.8 percent at the national level.

The median household income in California was \$61,094 between 2009 and 2013, compared to a \$53,046 national median income. Census information showed a 16.8 percent poverty rate in California during the study period, compared to a 14.5 percent national poverty rate.^[17] **To expand the boxes below, click [show] on the right side of each box.**

Racial Demographics, 2013^[17][show]

Presidential Voting Pattern, 2000-2012^{[18][19]}[show]

Note: Each column will add up to 100 percent after removing the "Hispanic or Latino" percentage, although rounding by the Census Bureau may make the total one- or two-tenths off. Read more about race and ethnicity in the Census here.^[20]

Footnotes

1. *California Attorney General*, "Letter requesting a ballot title for Initiative 15-0003," January 7, 2015 (<http://oag.ca.gov/system/files/initiatives/pdfs/15-0003%20%28Bond-funded%20Projects%20V2%29.pdf?>)
2. *LA Times*, "Ballot measure is new obstacle to diverting water to Southern California," November 2, 2015 (<http://www.latimes.com/local/political/la-me-pc-ballot-measure-new-obstacle-to-diverting-water-to-southern-california-20151030-story.html>)
3. *California Attorney General*, "Letter requesting a ballot title for Initiative 14-0009," accessed November 17, 2014 (<https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/initiatives/pdfs/14-0009%20%2814-0009%20%28Bond-funded%20Projects%29%29.pdf?>)
4. *The Stockton Record*, "Ad response gives Cortopassi hope for ballot measure," November 17, 2014 (<http://www.recordnet.com/article/20141117/NEWS/141119566/101143/NEWS>)
5. *California Office of the Attorney General*, "14-0009 Re: Request for Title and Summary for Proposed Initiative Constitutional Amendment," June 27, 2014 (<https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/initiatives/pdfs/14-0009%20%2814-0009%20%28Bond-funded%20Projects%29%29.pdf?>)

Categories: [California 2016 ballot measures](#) | [State ballots, 2016](#) | [State Ballot Measure, November 8, 2016](#) | [State and local government budgets, spending and finance, California](#) | [Elections and campaigns, California](#) | [Certified, elections and campaigns, 2016](#) | [Certified, state and local government budgets, spending and finance, 2016](#) | [California 2016 ballot measures, certified](#) | [Initiated amendment certified for the 2016 ballot](#)
