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JAN. 16 - JAN. 29 2026 ■ VOL. 39, NO. 2



Major changes coming to schools

Priorities include gender-neutral bathrooms, healthier food, protections from immigration raids and less smartphone use

By Sean Eastwood
Times Media staff reporter

California schools are implementing new education laws this year affecting 5.8 million K-12 students, introducing cell phone restrictions, protections for immigrant families, gender-neutral bathrooms, and healthier meal options.

New education law changes follow recent challenges such as declining enrollment and federal scrutiny over diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

Senate Bill 760 requires all schools to offer at least one gender-neutral bathroom which was signed by Governor Newsom in 2023.

The law requires the bathroom to be open to students of all genders, unlocked and readily accessible. It does not apply to campuses that have only one boys' and one girls' bathroom, nor does it include kindergarten and transitional kindergarten students. Schools can redesign any existing bathroom to meet the requirement.

See SCHOOLS, page 7

San Jose mayor opposes billionaire tax proposal

By Keith Menconi
San José Spotlight

San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan has come out against a controversial proposal to create a "billionaire tax" in California. Backers see it as a means of filling a massive deficit facing the state's health care system.

In a nearly 300-word thread posted to X Monday, Mahan warned if passed by voters, the pending statewide ballot measure would drive wealthy entrepreneurs out of California, sapping the state's tax base and undermining its economic dynamism.

"We need a rising economic tide to lift all boats, not a political plan that will sink California's innovation economy," Mahan wrote.

The post is just the latest example of Mahan chiming in on a hot-button statewide policy issue, amid speculation that he is considering a run for governor this November. The mayor's office has consistently downplayed such



San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan has spoken out on social media against a proposed ballot measure to tax billionaires in California. File photo.

rumors.

The proposed measure would impose a one-time, 5% wealth tax on about 200 Californians who hold more than \$1 billion in assets, backers said.

The October announcement of the ballot measure campaign has set off a political firestorm that has only intensified with time. In recent weeks, a number of wealthy Californians have responded with threats to move their homes and assets to other states. Mean-

while, prominent California Democrats have staked out opposing positions on both sides of the issue.

"We believe billionaires can pay a modest wealth tax so working class Californians have the Medicaid your party cut," Khanna wrote in an X post responding to criticism from Republican Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas.

Khanna is referencing pending cuts that stem from President Donald Trump's One Big

See BILLIONAIRES, page 9

Fligor wins race for Santa Clara County assessor

Kumar congratulates Fligor in a phone call

By William Bellou
Publisher

Los Altos Vice Mayor Neysa Fligor is the victor in a special election to become the next Santa Clara County assessor, defeating tech entrepreneur Rishi Kumar in the Dec. 30 runoff race.

Kumar conceded defeat late Tuesday night in a statement expressing gratitude to his supporters and volunteers.

Fligor apparently won over her voters with her deep-seated experience as the current assistant assessor. Now she is poised to succeed her former boss Larry Stone, who announced in June that he will be stepping down after three decades in the assessor's role.

Fligor garnered 66% of the vote, according



Neysa Fligor won the Dec. 30 runoff to become the new Santa Clara County assessor. Photo courtesy of Los Altos City Council.

to Santa Clara County Registrar's Office. Kumar, who finished second in the November 4 assessor election, picked up 35% of the vote. He formerly served on the Saratoga City Council.

He finished second in the Nov. 4 election for the assessor position. Because none of the four candidates in the race received more than 50% of the votes, the top two vote-getters squared off in the Dec. 30 runoff.

Early results showed Fligor with a commanding lead of more than 108,000 votes and Kumar with more than 56,000 votes.

"The people of Santa Clara County have spoken, and I respect the outcome. I have conveyed my congratulations to Neysa on a solid victory," Kumar wrote.

Fligor also thanked her supporters as she

See FLIGOR, page 7

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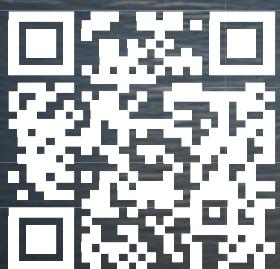




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WATER-WISE**Bird Watching in San Jose:
A January Perspective**

By Matthew Frazier

January is a fantastic time for bird enthusiasts, as the region offers a rich tapestry of year-round residents and wintering birds.

Situated in the heart of Santa Clara County, San Jose features a diverse habitat that attracts a wide range of bird species. From raptors soaring high in the sky to the gentle flutters of sparrows and warblers, the birding opportunities are plentiful. Local birding alliances not only encourage the passion for birdwatching but also engage the community through events and annual reports detailing seasonal sightings.

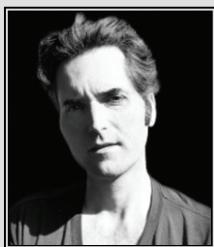
Common Birds Seen in January

During January, a variety of birds can be observed, categorized into year-round residents and winter migrants. Understanding these categories is crucial for birdwatchers seeking to enhance their field experience.

Year-Round Residents

These birds are a constant presence, delighting birders throughout the year with their unique calls and behaviors. Among the most commonly spotted year-round residents in San Jose are:

Finches and Sparrows: The House Finch is a frequent visitor to backyards, often seen at feeders, while the Lesser Goldfinch captures attention with its vibrant colors. The California Towhee and Spotted Towhee are ground foragers, easily recognized by their distinctive calls and plumage. Meanwhile,

**Water Wise**

Matthew Frazier,
Certified Water
Manager

the Dark-eyed Junco, especially prevalent in winter, forages in flocks on the ground, adding to the seasonal ambiance.

Jays and Crows: The California Scrub-Jay, identifiable by its bright blue and gray coloring, is a familiar sight in parks and residential areas. The American Crow, with its intelligent and adaptable nature, frequently engages in vocal displays.

Woodpeckers and Nuthatches: Nuttall Woodpecker and Acorn Woodpecker can often be spotted working on trees, while the White-breasted and Pygmy Nuthatches provide curious observations as they flit around searching for insects.

Titmice and Chickadees: The Oak Titmouse, with its distinctive tuft, and the Chestnut-backed Chickadee, known for its playful demeanor and sweet calls, are seasonal highlights that often visit feeders.

Other Common Birds: Birdwatchers can also spot Anna's Hummingbird, Black Phoebe, Mourning Dove, American Robin, Bewick's Wren, Bushtit, and Wrentit throughout January, showcasing the region's vibrant birdlife.

Winter Residents and Migrants

As colder weather sweeps through, a variety of migratory species return to the San Jose area. These birds add a dynamic aspect to the winter birding experience:

Sparrows: The White-crowned Sparrow stands out with its striking head patterns, while the Golden-crowned Sparrow adds a touch of vibrancy. Fox Sparrows are known for their ground-feeding habits and melodious songs.

Warblers and Kinglets: Warblers such as the Yellow-rumped Warbler and Townsend's Warbler are frequently seen flitting among the branch-

es. The Ruby-crowned Kinglet, with its acrobatic movements, brings additional excitement as it hunts for insects.

Raptors: January is an excellent time for spotting raptors, including Cooper's Hawks, Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harriers, and Merlins. Golden Eagles and Great Horned Owls may also grace the skies and parks, providing thrilling glimpses of these magnificent birds.

Other Winter Visitors: Look for Cedar Waxwings, Hermit Thrushes, and Northern Flickers. Waterfowl, gulls, and shorebirds can also be found in suitable habitats, creating opportunities for varied birdwatching.

Birding Resources and Events

For enthusiasts eager to deepen their understanding, the Santa Clara Valley Bird Alliance is a vital resource. They provide community science opportunities, local checklists, and participate in monthly sighting reports. Engaging with this alliance can enrich birdwatching experience and connect individuals with fellow bird lovers.

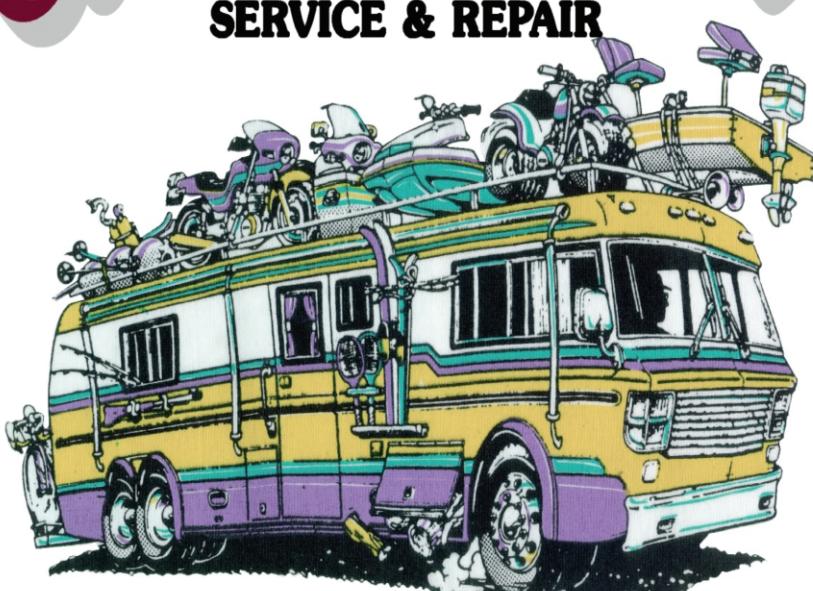
Additionally, the alliance organizes events that encourage participation and foster awareness of local bird populations. These are not only fun but also informative, as they allow participants to share their findings and learn from seasoned birders.

To enhance field identification skills, the Merlin Bird ID app from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology offers an innovative approach to real-time bird recognition. Using this app helps users accurately identify species in the field, making every birding outing more productive.

Local Christmas Bird Counts, typically held in January, offer a comprehensive snapshot of the bird populations across the region. These counts engage community members and provide critical data for understanding trends in avian populations.

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Join us for all you can eat soup until they are gone. Four homemade soups served with fresh bread and dessert. The soups will be...

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- **Tuscan Sausage**, (Gluten Free, Lactose Free)
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Tickets go on sale Monday, January 5th from 8am-10am and every M/W/F in the Almaden Community Center lobby
\$14, Cash or check, For more info call Jeanne at 408-425-5723

Save The Date, Steinbeck Museum, Thursday March 5, 2026
Travel with us to the Steinbeck Museum in Salinas with lunch at The Steinbeck House. We'll go by bus from the community center to Salinas for a tour of the Steinbeck Museum. Afterward we will have lunch at Steinbeck's childhood home a block away from the museum. Along with lunch, a docent will tell us about the house and Steinbeck's life there as a young boy. Time, price and start of ticket sales to be announced.

All events and trips are for those 50 years and over.
Payments are cash or check only (sorry no refunds).

Almaden Senior Association
at the Almaden Community Center
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[https://almadenseniors.org](http://almadenseniors.org)
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Times Local News



Saratoga Symphony presents 'Psychology Tonight'

By Sean Eastwood

Times staff writer

Enjoy a classical music orchestra concert free to the public with exciting rhythms and beautiful melodies Saturday, January 17, at 7:30 p.m. at West Val-

ley Presbyterian Church, 6191 Bollinger Rd., Cupertino, CA.

The music program features two composers, with a waltz (Valse Chevaleresque) and Symphony No. 4 by Sibelius, and Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2.

Internationally acclaimed pianist Tamami Honma is the special soloist for the piano concerto. This program's music was composed in the late Romantic Music Period.

Conductor Dr. Jason Klein talks about each music piece for the audience before it is performed. This adds pleasure to the concert.

Saratoga Symphony: <https://saratoga-symphony.org>

Tamami Honma, Piano Soloist <https://tamamihonma.com>

Editor's note: This is a FREE concert. Donations are appreciated. NO tickets or reservations are required. Children may attend. Wheelchair accessible. Doors open at 6:30 pm. Free parking.



National Steinbeck Center & Museum Thursday, March 5, 2026 Lunch at the Steinbeck House Restaurant

The day begins with a bus trip to the National Steinbeck Center and Museum in Salinas for a docent guided tour of the museum displaying the interesting life and literary accomplishments of John Steinbeck, the Nobel Prize winning author of many award-winning books including East of Eden and Grapes of Wrath.

Then go on the bus or walk two blocks to the Steinbeck House, John Steinbeck's boyhood home, for a delicious lunch along with a docent talk about the history of the house and Steinbeck's early days there. Enjoy a 3-course meal including Salad, Entree and Dessert (menu to be announced, vegetarian option available).

Arrive: 8:45am

Depart: 9:00 am

Return: Around 4:30 pm

Cost: \$100 check or cash

Includes: Transportation, Museum Entry, 3 Course Lunch

Sign up M,W,F 8am to 10am at the Almaden Community Center

Questions: Richard 408 219-8641 or Ann 408 221-8205



Times Local News

Schools*Continued from page 1*

The mandate comes amid years of debate across the Bay Area and beyond over gender-neutral bathrooms and locker rooms.

Protections from immigration enforcement activity

In September, Newsom signed a first-of-its-kind law prohibiting federal law enforcement and immigration officers from concealing their identities and barring their access to schools and health care facilities without a warrant or court order.

Two additional measures — Assembly Bill 49 and Senate Bill 98 — further expanded those protections.

AB 49, also known as the California Safe Haven Schools Act, prohibits school employees from allowing immigration officers onto campuses or sharing student information without a warrant or court order. When officers are permitted on campus, the law restricts them to areas where students are not present. The Santa Clara County Office of Education and the Santa Clara County Board of Education co-sponsored the bill.

Another law, Assembly Bill 495 — the Family Preparedness Plan Act — expands who can make decisions for children if their parents are detained or deported. As of this past Thursday, adults related to a child by blood or adoption within five generations can be authorized to enroll a child in school or make medical decisions about their care on campus.

Ultra-processed food ban

Under a first-in-the-nation law, Assembly Bill 1264, California schools will begin phasing out “particularly harmful” ultra-processed foods from student meals. The state has until July 1 to define which foods fall under that category. Schools will then have until 2029 to begin removing restricted items from meals and beverages, with a full prohibition taking effect by 2035.

Cellphone restrictions

Schools must limit or ban smartphone use on school campuses by July 1 under Assembly Bill 3216 — also known as the Phone-Free School Act. Newsom signed the legislation in 2024, making California the sixth state to restrict cellphone use in schools. The law allows districts to craft their own policies, leaving decisions about enforcement and exemptions — such as for medical needs or emergencies — to local leaders.

Easier college admissions

Eligible California high school seniors will be automatically admitted to participating California State University campuses through a new direct-admission program created under Senate Bill 640. The program

will notify students who have completed required coursework and met GPA thresholds, offering admission to one of 16 participating campuses, but not necessarily a student's campus of choice.

The law also directs the California Community Colleges system to develop programs that streamline transfers to four-year universities.

Expanded mental health resources for LGBTQ+ students

Beginning July 1, student ID cards for grades 7 through 12 and public universities must include a 24/7 crisis hotline operated by the Trevor Project, which provides suicide prevention and mental health support to LGBTQ+ youth.

Fligor*Continued from page 1*

celebrated her election victory.

“Thank you so much to everyone who voted and who helped with this campaign. Your support means so much to me and my team. I look forward to being your next Santa Clara County Assessor!” Fligor said in a statement.

The Santa Clara County Assessor's office is responsible for assessing the property values that make up the county's more than \$700 billion real estate rolls. Such assessments — which determine property taxes — have profound implications for residents as well as the county's schools and social safety net programs that rely on property tax revenue.

Fligor's campaign has fundraised \$420,000, according to campaign finance filings. Kumar has raised \$50,000, with nearly \$20,000 raised after the Nov. 4 special election, according to his campaign's latest Dec. 28 fundraising disclosures.

The turnout for the runoff election was relatively low, with the registrar estimating that about 15.5% of the county's roughly 1 million voters casting ballots.

Matt Moreles, the county's registrar of voters, said in a statement that the election was “unique in many respects, not least of which was the challenge of conducting an election during the holiday season.”

“This was the first time in our county's history that voting locations were open for voting on Christmas Day,” Moreles said in the statement. “The timing of this election was also challenging because it followed so closely after the November statewide special election.”

Kumar said he'll continue to campaign for a ballot initiative to exempt seniors from property taxes.

“Our commitment does not waver,” Kumar said. “We will remain a fearless voice for truth, accountability and good governance.”

Student ID cards are already required to list suicide prevention and domestic violence hotlines. The change comes after the Trump administration cut funding for specialized national crisis hotline services for LGBTQ+ youth over the summer.

Efforts to address antisemitism**and discrimination**

One of the most contentious laws taking effect this year, Assembly Bill 715, creates a new Office of Civil Rights and establishes a first-in-the-nation statewide Antisemitism Prevention Coordinator, who will track and report incidents of antisemitism in schools and advise districts on prevention and response strategies.

Faculty and teacher unions strongly opposed the bill, warning it could chill free speech and academic inquiry. Supporters argue the measure provides long-overdue oversight and consistency in how schools address antisemitism.

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IN REMEMBRANCE**Sam Henry Edward Seibert**

August 26, 1919 - November 30, 2025

Sam Henry Edward Seibert, born August 26, 1919 in Molson, Washington, passed away peacefully at his residence in San Jose on November 30, 2025, at the age of 106.

Sam honorably served in the United States Navy during World War II and subsequently had a distinguished 30-year career with the San Jose Fire Department, retiring at the rank of Captain. Following his retirement, he remained actively involved with the San Jose Fire Museum, which encourages donations in his memory.

Sam will be missed by many but forgotten by none.

Services were held on January 6, 2026, at the San Jose Fire Museum.

**Assemblymember Chris Ward launches new push to protect Californians' data privacy**

Assemblymember Ward held a press conference on January 6 to announce the reintroduction of legislation to ban the sale of geolocation data, the introduction of new legislation to strengthen protection for sensitive personal data, and continued efforts to advance AB 1337, currently a two-year bill in the Senate Judi-

cary Committee.

The event brought together consumer advocates, civil rights organizations, and privacy experts to highlight the growing risks posed by the unchecked collection, sale, and misuse of Californians' personal information.

The press conference included statements from privacy experts to underscore the urgency of protecting Californians' personal information from misuse, exploitation, and sale without consent.



San Jose is weighing implementing a shopping cart retrieval program that would charge retailers for abandoned carts. File photo.

San Jose shopping cart crackdown could be costly

By Keith Menconi

San José Spotlight

As part of a year-long effort to rein in San Jose's problem with abandoned shopping carts, the city has been reviewing proposals to hire a company to retrieve and return carts to grocery stores.

A three-month pilot program shows such a retrieval service could easily recoup its costs through fees charged to grocers. However, the hundreds of thousands of dollars in projected upfront expenses has made some council members squeamish.

"We have a challenging budget year, next year. We're going to be in service preservation mode as a council," District 8 Councilmember Domingo Candelas said during Tuesday's City Council meeting.

While Councilmembers didn't approve any specific action during the pilot program review, officials are working on proposals for a permanent program that could launch as soon as next summer — if approved.

It would mark the latest effort to deal with the vexing shopping cart abandonment problem that has plagued San Jose for decades.

"The thousands of carts that are lost every year and scattered across sidewalks and parks and our trails and waterways are not just a visible quality of life issue for our residents, not just an eyesore, but they actually really damage the environment," Mayor Matt Mahan said at the meeting.

The \$32,000 pilot program, carried out between August and November, saw the city partner with the company carTrac to retrieve 734 carts strewn about certain target areas. Officials project scaling up the program across the entire city would cost \$686,000 each year and likely pull in more than 12,800 carts.

Earlier this year, city staff warned state regulations would make it hard for San Jose to recoup the expenses from such a program. Those include rules that limit the fees California cities can charge retailers for cart

retrievals.

However, state Sen. Dave Cortese's Senate Bill 753, signed into law in October with backing from San Jose, has loosened those regulations. The measure has increased the maximum fines cities can impose on grocers with lost carts from \$50 to \$100 for each cart retrieved. It also removed the state's requirement that cities maintain an impound lot for recovered shopping carts.

If San Jose were to set its retrieval fine at \$100, staff estimated that a city-wide recovery program would draw in \$1.3 million each year, far more than the program's projected expense. However, the city would still face upfront costs to get the program up and running, including the need to pay for staff to oversee the effort, officials said.

"That's really the value in the pilot is being able to dig through the couch cushions to find resources, so we could experiment and see what it looked like," Chris Burton, director of Planning Building and Code Enforcement, said at the meeting. "And it is a successful program."

Councilmembers already passed a policy in May that strengthens oversight regulations for the city's retailers. The new rules require stores with 76 or more shopping carts to carry out enhanced measures to prevent cart losses, such as installing theft-prevention devices, requiring customers to pay a deposit for using a cart or paying a cart retrieval service directly to recover their lost carts.

The city's shopping cart crackdown has faced opposition from local retailers and industry groups. They have warned that by tightening regulations, the city is imposing added costs on grocery stores that will be passed along to residents.

San Jose grocer Lupe Lopez, who owns Arteaga's Food Center, argued in an op-ed piece for the Mercury News that Cortese's state law fails to address the root problems that lead some people to steal carts, including a lack of transportation.

"It's a shame the city couldn't have focused its efforts on legislation to offer support to those in need, not drive up grocery costs," Lopez wrote.

**Helpful Tips:**

- Know how to download your camera footage
- When mounting cameras, please be aware of places where people may have a reasonable expectation of privacy (examples: their backyard or interior of their home)
- Focus and mount your video on key points of entry or concern
- Exterior Mounting Location Options: Front door, rear door, side gate, driveway/front parking lot, second floor wide view and street view.
- Keep batteries charged in your cameras.
- Consider lighting around your cameras.

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Times Local News



Evergreen Valley College's nursing class celebrates their perfect 100 pass rate for the fifth quarter in a row. Photo courtesy of Evergreen Valley College.

Evergreen Valley College's nursing class posts perfect 100 pass rate

By William Bellou

Publisher

Evergreen Valley College's 2025 Spring nursing class of 34 nurses posted a perfect 100 percent NCLEX pass rate for the fifth quarter in a row.

The perfect 100 percent pass rate is an extraordinary milestone that reflects the sustained excellence of its program, said Niall Adler, spokesperson. "An even more impressive statistic, the three-year NCLEX success rate is that 160 out of 162 students

passed on the first attempt, placing EVC Nursing among the strongest programs in the state and nation."

According to the California Board of Nursing, the first-time NCLEX-RN pass rate for graduates statewide is 85.7 percent.

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Sikhs believe in three basic principles; meditating on the name of God (praying), earning a living by honest means and sharing the fruits of one's labor with others. Currently there are close to one million Sikhs living in the USA and Canada and 25 million Sikhs living around the world. Sikhism is the 5th largest religion in the world. At the Gurdwara (House of God) in San Jose we welcome all. We pray daily for peace and prosperity for everybody in the world. Come to visit and enjoy Langer (food) in our kitchen which is open 365 days of the year and serves complementary vegetarian meals. We also encourage you to enter our history room

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Times Local News

Billionaires*Continued from page 1*

Beautiful Bill. In California, the state stands to lose \$30 billion each year from the measure, resulting in 3.4 million people losing Medi-Cal coverage, according to estimates from The California Budget & Policy Center. The campaign behind the wealth tax — led by Service Employees International Union-United Healthcare Workers West (SEIU-UHW), a major statewide health care union — said the \$100 billion in projected revenue from the measure would provide a crucial buffer against those looming cuts.

Supporters must collect nearly 850,000 signatures by June 24 for the wealth tax to qualify for the November ballot.

Khanna's outspoken support for the billionaire tax has earned him fierce rebukes from a number of tech industry leaders, a constituency the Silicon Valley representative has generally counted among his reliable supporters. Mahan's series of X posts does not refer to Khanna.

Khanna's office did not respond to a request for comment. A representative for Mahan declined to provide further comment beyond the mayor's X posts.



Mahan's posts warned an exodus of wealthy entrepreneurs would devastate California's tax base — which is heavily reliant on high-income earners — leaving middle-class working households to "pick up the tab."

"I realize no one has sympathy for billionaires. But the truth is — they don't have to, and many won't, stay here if this tax is implemented," Mahan wrote. "The people who lose in the long run are California families who will be asked to foot more of the bill for government services and infrastructure."

Responding to Mahan's comments, a spokesperson for SEIU-UHW accused the mayor of misunderstanding the underlying funding problem the proposed tax

is intended to solve.

"He must be misinformed — because the goal of this measure is to save hospitals and keep ERs open, prevent higher health care costs, and protect health care for all Californians, including children, seniors and people with disabilities," Suzanne Jimenez, the labor organization's chief of staff, told San José Spotlight. "Without this measure, higher health care costs will be shifted onto millions of Californians, many of whom are already struggling with skyrocketing health care and prescription costs."

In his posts, Mahan — who recently launched a statewide Back to Basics initiative focused on promoting "common sense" policy fixes to the state's problems — also questioned the efficacy of imposing a new tax. He argued that before taking this step, California should first do more to crack down on "waste, fraud and abuse" in the health care system and state government.

"Income inequality is a very real issue and we need to address it with real solutions — like closing the massive loopholes nationally that allow the wealthiest among us to essentially never pay taxes on many capital gains," he said. "But for California to go it alone will be a disaster."

ELECTION 2024
Here's who's running for San Jose City Council, mayor
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