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## Republican Party: Harmer no stranger to policy and politics

By Lisa Vorderbrueggen  
Contra Costa Times

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REPUBLICAN David Harmer knows the odds. His Democratic challenger in the 10th congressional district special election, Lt. Gov. John Garamendi, has more money and name recognition in the heavily Democratic district.

The men are competing on Nov. 3, along with three minor party candidates, to replace former Rep. Ellen Tauscher, who resigned in June to take a U.S. State Department post as undersecretary for arms control and international security.

Harmer, a gregarious, clean-cut California native with a talent for making people feel at ease, describes his approach to the campaign as grounded but undeterred.

Granted, the San Ramon resident has never held public office and failed in his 1996 Utah bid for Congress.

And until his former employer, Washington Mutual, went bankrupt earlier this year and was sold to JPMorgan Chase, he had worked in the private sector for nearly eight years as an attorney.

"One of my heroes said, and I am paraphrasing here, that a majority has never been necessary to prevail but what it takes is an irate and tireless minority keen to set fresh fires of freedom in people's minds," Harmer said. "Whether a Republican

can carry this seat depends on how badly the voters want to send a message to both parties than an explosion of (government) spending has to stop."

Though Harmer lacks Garamendi's elected-office resume, the attorney is no stranger to policy.

Before working for a credit card company, he was a fellow at the Heritage Foundation and the Pacific Legal Foundation, chief of staff and campaign manager to former Rep. Enid Greene of Utah, and counsel to a U.S. Senate subcommittee.

The Cato Institute was so impressed with his book on school choice that it published it in 1994. Called "School Choice: Why You Need It, How You Get It," Harmer argued in favor of allowing parents to direct the tax dollars they pay for education to the school of their choice.

"The book offered an ideal school choice reform initiative, like a sample bill that could be used in all 50 states," said David Boaz, executive vice president of the Cato Institute. "And I didn't need to make any changes in the book, which is very unusual."

That comes as no surprise to friends and colleagues who describe Harmer as exceptionally meticulous, competent and ethical.

"He is one of the best lawyers I've worked with in my 20 years of practice," said Steve Whittaker, Harmer's former manager at Washington Mutual. "Each of his traits — his intelligence, his work ethic and his integrity — would easily translate from the private sector to Congress."

Windemere Ranch Middle School Education Fund President Jan Virant said Harmer helped them to raise \$160,000 for the school.

"He is our vice president and when we have had to

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go to the parent community to ask for money, I ask him to speak because he is so articulate," Virant said. "I remember one of the teachers walking out after he had talked to the sixth-grade parents and saying to me, 'Wow! I'm ready to get out my wallet!'"

It was probably inevitable that Harmer would run for public office.

Family photos show him as a toddler with his mother, younger brother and sister walking precincts for his dad, former state Sen. John Harmer from Glendale.

The senior Harmer served in the state Senate until 1974, when his friend and then-Gov. Ronald Reagan appointed him to fill a vacancy in the lieutenant governor's office.

John Harmer lost the 1974 election — along with many Republicans in the wake of the Watergate scandal — but the experience left an impression on his eldest son.

Harmer recalls sitting in Reagan's office and "with all the solemnity of a treaty signing, he would open his jar of jelly beans and hold it for me while I thrust my hand in. He always acted like I had done him a favor to visit him and I think I probably had."

Harmer's first serious political job did not turn out well. He had gone to work as finance director for Greene, a rising Utah Republican star. On the recommendation of the outgoing campaign manager, he took over the 1994 congressional campaign and later worked briefly as her chief of staff in Washington.

Harmer would not learn until after he quit that his boss' husband, Joe Waldholtz, had played fast and loose with the campaign's finances. Waldoltz was later convicted and sent to prison for stealing

money from his wife's parents and illegally funneling the money into her campaign. When there was talk of Greene running for re-election, Harmer filed for the seat himself.

He lost in the primary. But he said the experience reaffirmed his commitment to fiscal transparency in his campaign, volunteer work and any office he may hold.

Thirteen years later, Harmer says he is wiser.

"The major difference now is that I am not running against anything," he said. "Back then, I was young and thought I had all the answers. But parenthood humbles me and so does reality.

"Having spent time as a volunteer and having other professional experience, I'd like to think that I am still principled but I am approaching the campaign with humility."

about the candidate

AGE: 47 HOMETOWN: San Ramon

WEB SITE: [www.harmerforcongress.com](http://www.harmerforcongress.com)

EDUCATION: Bachelor of arts in English, Brigham Young University, 1984; law degree, Brigham Young University, 1988.

FAMILY: Married to Elayne, a San Ramon Valley School District substitute teacher and former attorney. Four young children.

BACKGROUND: First vice president and assistant general counsel in credit card division at Provident, which was acquired by Washington Mutual and then JPMorgan Chase, 2001 to January; attorney, Riddle & Associates, in Utah, 1997-2001; Bradley Resident Fellow, Heritage Foundation think-tank in Washington, D.C., 1995-1996; chief of staff to Rep. Enid Greene, R-Utah, 1995; president of Excellence Through Choice in Education League in El Segundo, 1992-1993; associate attorney, O'Melveny & Myers, in Los Angeles, 1990-1991; fellow at College of

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Public Interest Law at the Pacific Legal Foundation in Sacramento, 1989-1990; minority counsel to a Senate Judicial Committee subcommittee, 1988-1989.

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