

Texas Legislative Update: Who's on the Ballot?

December 12, 2017

Filing for the 2018 March Primary Election Ends

Filing for the 2018 March Primary Election closed yesterday at 6 p.m. and has set up an exciting election season going into the New Year. Those atop the statewide ticket will see challengers from both the right and left. The retirement of seven Texas congressional members set off a scramble of current state officials seeking those seats, thereby opening up Texas Senate and House offices for newcomers, or former officials in some districts. The retirement of Speaker Joe Straus, along with four of his committee chairs and other senior members, will alter the balance of experience in the Texas House. However, despite the departure of many in the Texas Legislature, no significant change in the party balance is anticipated. Democrats in Texas are contesting all 36 congressional seats, 14 out of 15 Texas Senate seats, and 133 out of 150 Texas House seats.

Governor Greg Abbott's most serious challenger at this early in the elections game appears to be four-term Dallas County Sheriff Lupe Valdez. Valdez, a Democrat, announced last week that she would be seeking the top post after much speculation over who the Texas Democrats would pick to go against the Republican Governor. Keep in mind that in firecracker red Texas, no Democrat holds a statewide office, and Governor Abbott will go into 2018 with more than \$40 million in his campaign war chest. Valdez will have to raise a considerable amount of money to go head-to-head with the fundraising powerhouse. In total, one Republican and ten Democratic candidates ended up filing for the top post, including Andrew White, son of the late Governor Mark White.

Lt. Governor Dan Patrick, Land Commissioner George P. Bush, Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller and

Railroad Commissioner Christi Craddick face opposition in both the primary and general elections. The Lt. Governor race will be David vs. Goliath with a former Rockwall City Councilman, Scott Milder, taking on the vocal and well-known Lt. Gov. Patrick in the primary. The most buzzworthy race is sure to be a primary match between incumbent Land Commissioner George P. Bush and Jerry Patterson, a long-time Texas elected official who preceded Bush in that seat, serving from 2003-2015 until he left to run an unsuccessful campaign for Lt. Governor against Patrick. Patterson stated he is running against Bush due to the commissioner's mishandling of the Alamo redevelopment and housing recovery from Hurricane Harvey. Austin lobbyist and ethics advisor Trey Blocker is challenging Ag Commissioner Sid Miller in the GOP primary. The race has already elicited personal jabs from Commissioner Miller on Twitter. Railroad Commissioner Craddick will face a familiar foe in the primary, Weston Martinez. Attorney General Ken Paxton and Comptroller Glenn Hegar did not draw primary opposition, but will face Democratic opponents in the general election.

Texas has seven open congressional seats – five Republican seats and two Democratic seats. Both parties will likely hang on to their current allotment of seats. State Senator Sylvia Garcia (D-Houston) is expected to easily move up to Congress to replace retiring U.S. Rep. Gene Green, and State Senator Van Taylor (R-Plano) will likely replace retiring U.S. Rep. Sam Johnson, thus eventually paving the way for two new members in the Texas Senate. Three current state representatives are vying for congressional seats, opening their Texas House districts up to newcomers. Rep. Lance Gooden (R-Terrell) has filed to replace retiring U.S. Rep. Jeb Hensarling and will face former State Rep. Kenneth Sheets and the Hensarling-endorsed GOP fundraiser Bunni Pounds in the March primary. Rep. Kevin Roberts (R-Roberts) seeks to replace retiring Congressman Ted Poe, and Rep. Jason Isaac (R-Dripping Springs) will face multiple GOP candidates with strong name-recognition in the race to succeed retiring Congressman Lamar Smith, including former Congressman Francisco "Quico" Canseco and U.S. Senator Ted Cruz's former chief of staff, Chip Roy.

Another race to watch will be CD 27 as embattled Congressman Blake Farenthold (R-Corpus Christi) faces a field of challengers going into 2018, including former Texas Water Development Board Chairman Bech Bruun. Farenthold is facing criticism and calls to resign for using \$84,000 in taxpayer funds to settle a sexual harassment claim made by a former staffer.

Other open Texas House seats include:

- HD 113 Rep. Cindy Burkett (R-Sunnyvale) - Challenging Sen. Bob Hall (R-Canton)
- HD 8 Rep. Byron Cook (R-Corsicana)
- HD 106 Rep. Pat Fallon (R-Frisco) – Challenging Sen. Craig Estes (R-Wichita Falls)
- HD 109 Rep. Helen Giddings (D-DeSoto)
- HD 52 Rep. Larry Gonzales (R-Round Rock)
- HD 15 Rep. Mark Keough (R-The Woodlands)
- HD 89 Rep. Jodie Laubenberg (R-Parker)
- HD 62 Rep. Larry Phillips (R-Sherman)
- HD 13 Rep. Leighton Schubert (R-Caldwell)

In Bexar County, two former representatives are challenging freshman incumbents for their old seats: former Rep. Trey Martinez Fischer in HD 116 held by Rep. Diana Arevalo, and former Rep. John Lujan in HD 118 held by Rep. Tomas Uresti.

For a full list of candidate filings, visit the Texas Secretary of State's online website at www.sos.state.tx.us.

Speaker Election Changes

Earlier this month, the Texas House Republican Caucus changed their bylaws for selecting a speaker candidate, potentially paving the way for a more conservative leader of the House. The caucus will meet in December 2018 to decide who should be the Republican candidate to replace outgoing Speaker Joe Straus in the 2019 session. The caucus will hold additional rounds of voting if a speaker contender does not win two-thirds support on the first ballot. Reps. Phil King (R-Weatherford) and John Zerwas (R-Richmond) have announced they will run for speaker,

and more candidates are expected to throw their names into the hat.

Upon filing, Republican candidates for Texas House seats were given a party pledge form by the Republican Party of Texas to commit them to support the House Caucus' choice for the next speaker. As of last week, fewer than half of the Republicans running in 2018 had signed the pledge. Additionally, the State Republican Executive Committee approved a proposition that will appear on the March 6, 2018 GOP primary ballot that will read:

"Republicans in the Texas House should select their Speaker nominee by secret ballot in a binding caucus without Democrat influence. Yes/No"