



2020 General Election Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: James Talarico

Office Sought: State Representative

Political Affiliation: Democrat

Candidate's Website (if applicable): www.jamestalarico.com

Why are you running for this position?

Texas has always been a state of opportunity, but today's broken political system is undermining our future. From the White House to the State House, our leaders often choose short-term pandering over long-term planning. Irresponsible politics is keeping us from moving forward. Short-sighted decisions at the State Capitol hurt working and middle-class families in Williamson County. Families are paying more for less – for our schools, for our roads, and for our healthcare. From Round Rock to Taylor, the people of House District 52 want our state government to get back to basics. I'm a leader who is focused on building a future where every Williamson County family can get ahead. As a Round Rock native, a former public school teacher, and a state legislator, I'm committed to that future. In this campaign, and throughout my service to the great people of House District 52, I'll be honest about the real work it will take to get us there. I am working to model common sense in our State Capitol and craft responsible policies. Policies that Texans of all backgrounds and beliefs. Policies that local communities and the decisions they make for themselves. Policies that invest in our people and grow our economy. Policies that build an inclusive Texas where every family can achieve their fullest potential. My team and I worked diligently to accomplish all of these things during the 86th Legislative Session, but there is much work left to do, and I'm committed to creating a Texas as good as its promise.

What do you believe are the three most critical issues facing the State of Texas and why?

If I am re-elected to serve House District 52, my top priorities for the 87th Legislative Session will be to continue organizing for a quality and equitable education for all children in Texas. First, that means working towards a budget that does not make children pay for a pandemic. We cannot balance our state budget on the backs of our students, our teachers, or our hardworking families. Second, I plan on doubling down on my Whole Student Agenda to ensure our public education system serves children as human-beings first and students second. This means disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline, putting a social worker on every campus, pursuing restorative justice at our schools, getting lead out of school water fountains, and ensuring every kid has access to real-world curricula like civics and sex education. Third, I'm currently working with Texans Care for Children to establish the first Childrens' Caucus in the Texas House to make early childhood education a top priority in the next session. I don't believe in silver bullets in education policy, but high-quality early childhood education is the closest thing we have.

What do you believe are the three most critical issues facing your district and why?

As a product of Round Rock ISD schools and a former teacher, I'm deeply committed to ensuring educational equity for our kids and educators. Particularly now, as we confront the economic and public health crisis of COVID19, we will need to protect the commitment we made to our schools and educators for additional funding and support through HB 3, the biggest overhaul of our state's school finance system since before I was born. While HB 3 was a big step towards strengthening our schools, the work is not done. In the upcoming session, lawmakers will have to pursue policies to keep students and educators safe and healthy and meet every child's educational needs. I'm committed to doing all that I can to continue improving our education system for ALL students – especially in the midst of a national pandemic. Further, the COVID19 pandemic exposed how our economy was working for a few but not all Texans. Many of the frontline essential workers our economy depended on to keep critical infrastructure in place are not earning enough to make ends meet. As unemployment skyrocketed, the pandemic exposed how years of cutting critical state services, like unemployment benefits, put millions of Texans at risk during a moment of crisis. For too long, the Legislature has slashed funding for healthcare, education, and other necessary programs in favor of massive tax incentives for corporations. Additionally, this crisis has put additional strain on our state's healthcare system as thousands of Texans lost their employer-based health insurance. Healthcare is a right and should be guaranteed to every Texan. The best way to reduce our state's high uninsured rate is by expanding Medicaid, but the Texas Legislature refuses to accept billions of our own federal tax dollars available to expand health coverage. Last session, I supported an amendment that would have expanded Medicaid in our state. Though this amendment did not pass, I will continue to work for expanded access to affordable healthcare for every Texans.

If elected, what other items would you like to accomplish while in office?

If I am re-elected to serve House District 52, my top priorities for the 87th Legislative Session will be to continue organizing for a quality and equitable education for all of our children as well as affordable and accessible health care for all Texans. I also commit to holding our government accountable and working towards a budget that does not pay for the COVID-19 pandemic off the backs of our children or working-class Texans, but one that increases the state minimum wage and ensures equal pay for equal work for all Texans. We can rebuild the Texas economy by providing well-paying, safe jobs for Texans who need them. We cannot fix our state's economy overnight, but by providing the most vulnerable Texans with employment and by supporting Texas businesses, we can get back on track. Additionally, I'm committed to redrawing our district lines in a way that is fair, equitable, and provides every voter an equal opportunity to choose their leaders. I will also support efforts to remove politics from the redistricting process entirely by creating an independent, nonpartisan commission to draw district lines.

What do you believe is the role of the state in overseeing cities and counties, especially in regard to land use (zoning, permitting, etc)?

During past sessions, state leaders tried to overrule local communities on a variety of issues from tree ordinances to property tax caps, and from regulating bathrooms to sanctuary cities. I believe we should be listening to local city council members, activists, and police chiefs about what their own communities need, rather than legislators from hundreds of miles away. During the 86th legislative session, I went to bat for my local leaders and opposed HB 2, a bill that has limited the services that cities can provide their residents by setting strict property tax caps. I will continue to partner with the city leadership in my district to represent their interests at the state Capitol.

Cities and Counties are authorized by the state to create a number of citizen-led boards and commissions. One of these boards is the Board of Adjustment, whose two primary objectives are to review and hear appeals to certain land-use decisions and make determinations for a variance to the code. In the past several years, it has become much more difficult for property owners to be granted variances due to the lack of clarity surrounding the term "hardship." Would you support legislation to provide better clarity in the Board of Adjustment variance process to make it more predictable?

Yes

Additional Comments (Optional)

Some of our most valued treasures in Texas are the many historic sites and structures across our state. In Texas, cities are authorized by the state to designate structures as historic, including without landowner consent (requires a supermajority). However, when a historic district (multiple properties) is being formed, there is no remedy for an individual property owner to oppose being pulled into the historic district. In most instances if an individual property owner opposes being designated historic as part of a district it only requires a majority vote to create the district. Would you support legislation that defines a clear process for property owners to oppose being included in a historic district?

Yes. There should be a clear process for property owners to have a say in the designation of their property's status.

What is your position on Project Connect?

Texas needs to invest in the infrastructure necessary to reduce traffic without relying on tolls. Our outdated roads and highways threaten to slow growth and make commuting to work take longer and longer. It's time we take seriously the idea of a high-speed rail system and robust public transportation systems in urban and suburban areas, and work to rebuild Texas' vast network of highways, toll-free. By investing in creative transportation solutions, we can reduce air pollution, cut back long commutes, and increase access and opportunity to our community, making Central Texas more liveable for future generations.

What other measures would you support to improve current and future mobility throughout our region?

I support increased access to high quality public transportation systems so that Texans aren't relying on expensive toll roads or sitting on the highway for hours on their commute.

Do you support the expansion and improvement of major roadways and highways in our region such as IH-35, US 183, and 360?

Yes

Why or why not? (Explanation of Position)

Central Texas is one of the fastest-growing areas in our state, and with increased population size, comes an increased need for infrastructure to meet the needs of the population. Many of my constituents live in Williamson County but work down in Austin and spend exhaustive commutes stuck on highways that aren't equipped to handle the massive capacity of our workforce. It's beyond time that we improve our highways and provide cost-effective alternatives for people who can't afford high toll road expenses or who would prefer to opt-in to public transportation.