



## 2020 General Election Candidate Questionnaire

**Candidate Name:** Judith Zaffirini

**Office Sought:** State Senator, District 21

**Political Affiliation:** Democrat

**Candidate's Website (if applicable):** [www.judithzaffirini.com](http://www.judithzaffirini.com)

### **Why are you running for this position?**

I seek re-election to the Texas Senate to continue serving the families of District 21 by building on my foundation of bipartisan success. My work ethic, experience, and legislative effectiveness make me the best qualified candidate. In the 2019 Republican-dominated Legislature, I proved anew my bipartisan efficacy by passing 127 bills, breaking my record of 108 and being the highest bill-passer for the third consecutive legislative session. I also have passed more bills (1,160) than any legislator in the history of Texas. What's more, my dedication is reflected in my 100 percent voting record, having cast more than 64,000 consecutive votes. Recognized for my honesty and integrity, I am equally committed to accountability, transparency, and responsiveness. My staff and I respond to all issues, whether complex and controversial or local and impactful.

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

The three main issues facing District 21 are the health and economic effects of COVID-19; the need for better, affordable educational opportunities, including early childhood and higher education; and the number of persons, especially children, who remain uninsured and lack access to quality health care. While recovering from the pandemic by prioritizing health and effective social distancing, promoting widespread testing and immunizations, and reopening businesses safely to get Texans back to work, we also must look to the future. During next year's legislative session, we must protect education and health and human services budgets from damaging cuts and reform systems, such as unemployment, to avoid confusion during the next crisis. We must do more to make education accessible, affordable, and excellent. Every child has the right to the best possible education, from pre-K through higher education, from well-trained, properly compensated teachers. What's more, our students deserve to achieve their dreams without the crushing burden of student loan debt. We have one of the largest economies in the world. That 4.3 million Texans—including 623,000 children—lack health insurance is abominable. We should expand Medicaid immediately, providing 1.5 million Texans with coverage and saving our rural hospitals in the process.

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

Same answer.

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

My first priority next session will be to continue our standard of excellent constituent services that we have maintained throughout my career, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Working remotely, my staff and I are working harder than ever, forwarding our Capitol and Laredo telephone lines to our cell phones 24/7; answering every letter, email, and phone call; and hosting weekly Zoom meetings to interact with constituents about timely and important issues. We welcome every opportunity to be of assistance. What's more, I would continue to collaborate with my legislative colleagues to address priority issues affecting Senate District 21 residents and all Texans. My approach to legislation is simple: No bill is too big or too small, and every bill is consequential. Next session, I intend to file legislation to assist with our recovery from COVID-19; address college affordability and the student loan debt crisis; expand the progress made in recent sessions regarding early childhood education; promote broadband access, especially for low-income and rural Texans; ensure clean air, water, and soil; develop new, innovative transit solutions; increase access to justice; and combat corruption and cronyism in the judiciary. It's an ambitious agenda, but no less than my constituents and other Texans deserve, and I look forward to addressing these goals when the Legislature convenes on January 12.

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

I believe that, absent a clear and compelling interest otherwise, local governments should be allowed to lead on local issues, including regarding land use. That said, there are times that merit state intervention: resolving conflicts between localities, establishing foundational building codes and energy efficiency standards, and intervening to avoid discriminatory or exploitative practices, for example. The state's role primarily should be one of oversight: We must ensure that local governments operate ethically, use taxpayer funds appropriately, and establish standards that are applied equally and fairly.

**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?**

My vote would depend on the language in the bill—it's imprudent to opine on hypothetical legislation. When deciding how to vote, I listen to public testimony, consult with stakeholders, and hear from experts while prioritizing the needs of my constituents. My commitment to you is that I will listen to your perspective with an open mind, as I do with every bill.

**What is your position on Project Connect?**

I support Project Connect. Austin outgrew its infrastructure years ago, and then it kept growing. We need major investments in transit to stimulate further economic growth, give workers access to good-paying jobs, and mitigate traffic congestion and carbon emissions.

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

We need a mixed and robust plan to address Austin's mobility needs. Building and expanding roads isn't enough: That simply means more cars and more congestion—plus we cannot build roads quickly enough. We need to invest in public transit, including new bus routes and light rail, while also making targeted improvements to our existing infrastructure. One thing is certain, however: We must take significant and immediate action to avoid the type of gridlock that plagues other American cities.

**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)**