

Thursday, October 17, 2024

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**OPINION | A2**

**EDITORIAL:**  
Think your vote doesn't matter? Think again.



**SPORTS | B1**

**FOOTBALL**  
The Bears are back in action against Texas Tech.



**A&L | B5**

**GIRL + GUITAR**  
Student musician is inspired by her Hawaiian upbringing.



Kassidy Tsikitas | Photographer

**AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE** America tends to go through cycles of presidential eras, broad periods of time defined by a president and their lasting impact on politics and the country's values. This November may decide if we're moving into a new era, or if the age of eras is over altogether.

## Election Day will define the next presidential 'era'

**OLIVIA TURNER**  
Arts & Life Editor

In three weeks, the next presidential "era," the overarching set of policies and values that America votes by, will be defined for the history books.

Dr. Curt Nichols, a political science professor who specializes in the presidency, supreme courts and political parties, said the reasoning behind why presidential "eras" occur is due to cycles within American politics.

"So you get these eras — you get the Jeffersonian era, the Jacksonian era, the New Deal, the Reagan Revolution," Nichols said. "You get these time periods that kind of fit together historically and create different contexts for presidents."

Nichols said that over time, these cycles have become more spaced out and that there's a good chance America is currently in a "post-cycle era." However, Nichols said he personally believes we are still in the Obama era.

Baylor political science professor Dr.

Dave Bridge recently had his students write a paper on whether or not America is still within the age of Ronald Reagan. Pittsburgh senior Luke D'Ambrosio said he thinks the age of Reagan is no longer upon us and instead, the country has entered the age of Trump.

"When Donald Trump came [onto] the scene in 2015, he really knew how to leverage social media and get fast attention and do it quickly, do it constantly," D'Ambrosio said. "Whether you like him or you don't like him, that's who has been the GOP candidate for the past three election cycles now."

On the other hand, Fairhope, Ala. senior Ann Marie Fedro said while America is out of the Reagan era, the new era is not defined by Trump. Instead, she said young generations have begun a new era not defined by a leader, with many more voters in the middle of the political spectrum than previously.

"A lot of the people in the country are moderate," Fedro said. "It's just that

the people on both sides of the extreme speak the loudest. We're seeing a lot of differences between how we vote now [versus how] our parents vote because social issues have changed our opinion on abortion [and] same-sex marriage."

Fedro said that while it's unlikely, she hopes to see more unity between parties as older members of office begin to move out.

Bridge said he has seen more pro-choice Republicans and more economically-conservative Democrats, but that there are certain qualities that each party will cling to no matter what presidential era America enters.

"One thing has held, and that is what defines the Republican Party and its tax cuts," Bridge said. "It'd be really great if we could work together, but I just think that we're incentivized not to."

While different presidential eras have historically been able to garner support

**THE ERAS CAMPAIGN >> A8**



**Inside:**

- ★ What to know about state and local races
- ★ Side-by-side policy comparisons
- ★ The big issues at the ballot box

## Reject war-like politics, panel of speakers urges

**MACKENZIE GRIZZARD**  
Staff Writer

When the shadow of Nov. 5 looms over the hearts and minds of American citizens, there is a light at the end of the tunnel — not in the next American president, but in finally waving the white flag on the political battlefield and treating each other the way Jesus intended.

Kevin Villegas, Dean of Intercultural Engagement at Baylor introduced two speakers to an audience of Baylor students in the Alexander Reading Room, searching for the intersection of Christian love and politics.

Curtis Chang is the founder of Redeeming Babel, a nonprofit "guiding Christian engagement with the broader world." Its goal, Chang says, is to pursue a "biblically faithful approach to politics."

Chang said our "war-like" behaviors concerning politics are turning us

farther away from Jesus, which reflects the turmoil so often seen. Chang warned the audience not to get too caught up in the "what" of politics like ideology and focus more on the "how," which boils down to community.

"I think for a Christian, there is no precedent in scripture to ever demonize or dehumanize the other person you're talking about," Chang said. "In the hyper-polarized media environment, the way we're trained to talk to each other is awful."

A study conducted by the PEW Research center in February found that 65% of adults in America felt "exhausted" by politics, and 55% felt angry talking about it. This polarization can only be rectified through a Christian lens,

**CIVIL DISCOURSE >> A8**

## McLennan County District Judge race marked by party realignment, personal attacks from candidates

**JOSH SIATKOWSKI**  
Staff Writer

Four District Judge positions will be on the McLennan County ballot on Nov. 5. Although three of these tickets contain unopposed Republicans, the race for the 19th District Court is a contested and contentious one.

Incumbent Republican Judge Thomas West, 59, faces off against Barry Johnson, 68, who became a Democrat in December 2023 before filing for election. It is safe to say that neither thinks the other is fit for office. The issue with the opposing candidate, both agree, is not a matter of political lean, but of experience and character.

Johnson — who had a long career as a civil litigator in Dallas and served as the McLennan County District Attorney from 2018-2022 — is returning to local politics by challenging West, who is in his first

term. Johnson said that much of the exigence to switch parties and run for district judge came from his perception of West's character.

"I have not seen any judges



I have not seen any judges with any poorer temperament or any worse character flaws...

**BARRY JOHNSON | DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGER**



You cannot move 5,000 cases with a bad temperament. I have a great temperament.

**THOMAS WEST | REPUBLICAN INCUMBENT**

with any poorer temperament or any worse character flaws than the incumbent in this case," Johnson said. "That's the reason I ran for election."

West, who had a long career in criminal law before becoming a

judge in 2021, said similar things of Johnson, calling his opponent "an angry man."

He also denied Johnson's claims that he has a poor temperament, saying that his efficiency as a judge disproves them. When West began his term in 2021, there was a growing backlog of 2,500 cases.

"I started with 2,500 cases in the backlog, and I get new indictments every two weeks, so that's about 6,000 [cases] in three and a half years."

Since then, West has held over 18,000 hearings and said he has reduced the backlog of cases to 800.

"You cannot move 5,000 cases with a bad temperament," West said. "I have a great temperament."

The reduction of the backlog, West said, is one of his biggest

**THE RACE IS ON >> A8**



Michael Aguilar | Photo Editor

**TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS** McLennan County has struggled with a long backlog of cases, which contributes to inefficiency in the local justice system.



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James Ellis | Cartoonist

## Walz, Vance held back by running mates

**JOSH SIATKOWSKI**  
Staff Writer



In a policy-heavy Oct. 1 debate, vice presidential candidates JD Vance and Tim Walz surprisingly found a lot of common ground. But the most glaring shared trait is they are both held back by their running mates. Being offered the job of vice president gives Vance and Walz a huge career boost.

The debate, hosted by CBS, was a perfect example of a Midwestern clash. Vance a native of Ohio and Walz of Minnesota, said as many as 10 times that they agreed with each other. All of the weighty issues — immigration, gun violence, home prices and even abortion — were met with civility. The debate, though considered to have a positive tone by 88% of viewers, also offered painful reminders that the refreshingly courteous dialogue on display last week was only a break from the current political climate.

For Vance, his weakest moment came almost undoubtedly at the end of the debate. The 40-year-old marine turned venture capitalist turned Ohio senator looked ready to close an overall solid night. He spoke fluidly, answering each question with clarity and substance and gave an educated twist to Trump's policies. However, at the end of the night, Walz turned to Vance and asked directly whether Trump lost the 2020 election.

Vance gave a dodgy response, saying he was "focused on the future." Walz got the last word, calling it a "damning non-answer."

Vance's opinion of the 2020 election's validity has been under fire recently due to a 2022 video that shows him agreeing that Trump won four years ago. In 2016, he called Trump "America's Hitler" and questioned whether he cared about the people he was running to serve. In 2020, Vance reversed his opinions as he vied for a Trump endorsement during his Ohio Senate campaign. Vance received the endorsement after admitting to Fox News that he "regretted" his prior statements.

Tim Walz is not entirely elevated by his running mate, either. The Minnesota governor had some missteps in the debate attributable to his own nervousness, like stumbling through his opening statement and struggling to answer a question about whether he was really in China during the time of the Tiananmen Square protests.

While Walz did find his footing, he too had to deal with the faults of his running mate. Maybe that challenge is best exemplified by what Vance told him early in the debate:

"Honestly, Tim, I think you've got a tough job here," Vance said. "You've got to pretend that Donald Trump didn't deliver lower inflation, which, of course, he did. And then you've simultaneously got to defend Kamala Harris' atrocious economic record."

While Walz did perform well against digs at immigration, gun control and abortion, he was clearly under-resourced for any talk of the economy — an issue many Americans care the most about.

Perhaps these two only seem held back because of the nature of the vice presidency. Walz and Vance themselves have limited impact and like all vice presidents, spend most of the campaign season acting as high-level groupies.

But the biggest disparity between these men and their running mates was that the former seemed exceptionally human. It might be the only glimpse of that humanity we get for the rest of this election, but it provides a glimmer of hope for 2028.

## Ditch the tin foil: Diddy's trial sparks celebrity conspiracies

### THE EDITORIAL BOARD

In the spirit of spooky season, Beyoncé had been dubbed a murderer and Kanye was the good guy all along — all of it was allegedly uncovered in the wake of rapper Sean "Diddy" Combs arrest in September.

We'll give you a little summary. Combs was arrested in September and charged with sex trafficking, racketeering and transportation to engage in prostitution. Since his arrest, more than 100 alleged victims have come forward with accusations against him. In addition to these allegations, TikTok sleuths have concocted countless conspiracy theories in conjunction with the charges.

Since the news, people have noticed his long-time friendship

with Jay-Z and Beyoncé. Conspiracists have slandered Beyoncé as the mastermind behind the deaths of Michael Jackson, Aliyah and TLC's Lisa "Left Eye" Lopez, with help from Combs and Jay-Z. The apparent proof lies in J. Cole's song "She Knows," where he references the three passed artists. To make the situation fishier, many have connected the song title with Beyoncé's maiden name, Knowles.

Now that we know Beyoncé is in actuality a stone-cold killer, let's look at some award acceptance speeches. When Adele won Album of the Year at the Grammy's in 2017, she thanked Beyoncé. The same thing happened with various, seemingly random artists who thanked Beyoncé when they received awards. The list includes Britney Spears, Lizzo, Lady Gaga

and now Jojo Siwa — yes, Jojo Siwa. As the theory goes, artists thank Beyoncé in their acceptance speeches so she will spare their lives.

If you're not done making your tin foil hat, don't worry. The conspiracy goes one step further. We all remember Taylor Swift's acceptance speech at the 2009 VMAs and Kanye West's interruption to — you guessed it — thank Beyoncé. What was in 2009 an obvious attempt to undermine a naive 19-year-old country music artist is now being dubbed a noble effort to spare Swift from Beyoncé's fury. It's a sweet sentiment, really, and we would love to think that Kanye was protecting her all along. We know TikTok loves the bad-guy-turned-good cliché.

So, there you have it. After the

arrest of Combs, Beyoncé — along with her bedazzled cowgirl boots — is a serial killer, J. Cole with his 2013 hit song is the boy who cried wolf and Kanye West is Taylor Swift's knight on his white horse.

Here's the facts of the matter: Combs was arrested because he did some horrifying things and deserves punishment. We won't go so far as to say Beyoncé is perfect (though we loved "Texas Hold 'Em"), but we also don't think she's a murderer. The bottom line is — there are hundreds of victims looking for justice in correlation with Combs' crimes. Focusing on petty conspiracies to entertain ourselves takes attention off of the bigger issue, and satirizing the situation reduces hundreds of victims' trauma to a fun dinner conversation.

## Trend of the fall: an 'I Voted' sticker

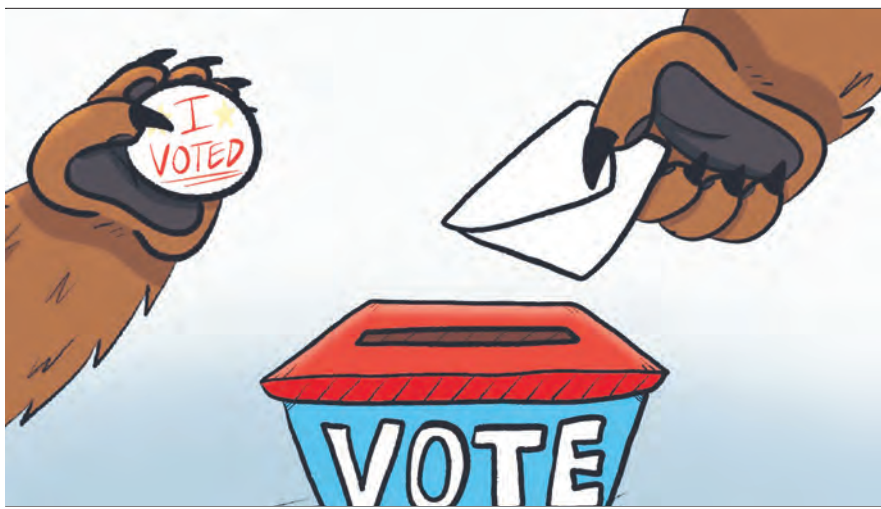
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While a vintage 2023 census shows that 18 through 25-year-olds make up almost 15% of Texas' adult population, this age group is also known for not exercising their right to vote.

Statistics show that only 31.9% of Texas citizens between 18-24-years-old voted in the 2016 presidential election.

This number has been on the rise since then, with 43.3% of the same demographic voting in the 2020 election, but it is still significantly less than the 76.3% of voters above the age of 65 that participated in the 2020 election.

The Texas Tribune noted that student voters are not permitted to use student IDs as a form of identification and same-day, online and automatic voter registration is also not permitted. These laws pose an obstacle to out-of-state students, who registered to vote under different laws and expectations.



James Ellis | Cartoonist

Some of the most common reasons registered voters neglect to participate in elections is because they either feel that their vote doesn't matter or they haven't researched candidates and learned about the election.

There are countless places to educate yourself on the upcoming election. Whether it's going to a trusted political science professor here at Baylor, reading from a news outlet you trust or discussing politics with people around you, you can start to feel out what you believe

and value and match it with a candidate.

Your voice does matter — even if you feel like it doesn't. If you didn't register to vote, that doesn't mean you can't be involved. Continue to have conversations about local and federal laws with people who converse in respectful dialogue. In a political climate that has never been more polarizing, you don't have to be. Start by asking questions to people that you don't

agreewith. You'll probably have more in common than you think.

Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 5 and The Hurd will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. for students to cast their vote. Baylor will provide shuttles during the day to additional polling sites in Waco. Early voting begins on Oct. 21 through Nov. 1. Students who are not registered to vote in McLennan County may apply for a mail-in ballot from their county of residence.

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# Railroad Commissioner candidates to introduce new energy policies, not railroad regulations

**RORY DULOCK**  
Staff Writer

Candidates from the republican, democratic, libertarian and green parties are all hoping to have the edge in the Railroad Commissioner race on Election Day.

Despite its name, the Railroad Commission actually has nothing to do with railroad regulations anymore. The commission no longer has authority over railroads in Texas since the remaining jurisdiction was transferred to the Texas Department of Transportation in 2005.

“Our mission is to serve Texas by our stewardship of natural resources and the environment, our concern for personal and community safety, and our support of enhanced development and economic vitality for the benefit of Texans,” the website reads.

The current three commissioners are Republican Chairman Christi Craddick, Republican Commissioner Wayne Christian and Republican Commissioner Jim Wright. Each term is six years long, and every two years there is a reelection for Railroad Commissioner. The candidates seeking the open Railroad Commissioner slot are Craddick, Democratic candidate Katherine Culbert, Green Party candidate Eddie Espinoza, Libertarian Hawk Dunlap and Richard McKibbin, a write-in candidate.

**Christi Craddick (R) (Incumbent)**



Craddick was first appointed commissioner back in 2012. She said via email that the main regulations she would push for if re-elected are ones that support Texas’ energy independence and rights.

According to Craddick, other important goals include providing consistent regulation to allow industry to innovate and develop new technologies. She said she aims to protect Texans’ health, safety and private property rights through these initiatives.

Craddick said during her past two terms as Railroad Commissioner, she considers the efficiency of her agency to be her biggest accomplishment.

“Ensuring the agency can serve the people of Texas in a timely, efficient and effective manner is a top priority,” Craddick said. “Under my leadership, we have overhauled the agency’s IT system, which has reduced permitting times significantly, in some cases allowing operators to receive a permit within 48 hours. In contrast, many federal permits can take over 12 months.”

Craddick said she understands and promotes “science-based regulation that fosters innovation and growth in the energy sector, while upholding the mission of the Railroad Commission to protect personal and environmental safety.”

“It’s vital that we continue to have experienced leadership in what is one of the most critical statewide offices,” Craddick said. “The Railroad Commission has regulatory oversight of an industry that is essential to the state’s prosperity and the nation’s security.”

**Katherine Culbert (D)**



Culbert said some specific regulations and policies she would push for if elected is try to change the name of the Railroad Commission, push for transparency within the agency and address the language justice issues within the commission.

“The railroad commission deals with a lot of oil and gas operations and a lot of the operations happen in communities where English is not the first language,” Culbert said. “Everything that is produced by the Railroad

Commission to communicate to residents, most of it is published only in English. They have started doing a couple things in Spanish, but we really need to expand that language with justice and really allow all our communities to be informed and to know what’s going on and how these decisions are affecting their lives.”

The commission just needs to enforce a lot of the regulations that are already in place, not necessarily add new regulations, Culbert said. According to Culbert, the Railroad Commission has had over 8,000 requests for flaring and venting exceptions since 2021, and the commission has approved all but 44 of them.

“We just need to enforce the rules we have on the books and make sure that these companies are doing the right thing,” Culbert said. “We really need a strong regulator that’s going to hold these companies accountable and not just give them a free pass and let them do whatever they want with our state.”

**Eddie Espinoza (G)**



According to Espinoza’s campaign website, his action

plan includes cleaning up and phasing out the fossil fuel industry, protecting water, renaming the Railroad Commission, prioritizing lowering energy costs for Texans, stopping oil and gas bailouts, transparency and campaign finance reform.

“The Texas Railroad Commission can help Texas achieve affordable and sustainable energy independence by working towards 100% renewable energy and utility-scale batteries,” Espinoza stated. “Texas families need a railroad commissioner who will strongly advocate to cap orphaned, zombie and unplugged idle oil and gas wells. Our Texas environment needs a commissioner who will ban fracking and call for the transition of fossil fuel jobs away from drilling to plugging and cleanup.”

**Hawk Dunlap (L)**



According to Dunlap’s campaign website, he knows the need for reform especially in plugging wells effectively to prevent groundwater

contamination, blowouts and “zombie wells.”

“These problems not only endanger public health and the environment but also undermine the integrity of our energy industry,” Dunlap said. “With [my] leadership, the commission can enforce stricter regulations, improve well-plugging procedures and ensure accountability, thereby protecting Texas’ resources and communities.”

**Richard McKibbin (Write-in)**



McKibbin is running as the American Solidarity Party candidate as a write-in. According to his campaign Facebook account, he said his candidacy “offers voters an opportunity to exercise their conscience.”

“As a write-in candidate for Railroad Commissioner, endorsed by the American Solidarity Party, I represent a small yet growing pro-life organization grounded in Catholic social teaching and reformed Christian principles, welcoming individuals from diverse faith backgrounds and secular advocates,” the website states.

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**SPRINT TO THE FINISH** With only a few weeks left in the race, Sen. Ted Cruz and congressman Colin Allred met Tuesday in Dallas for the only debate of the campaign. During, they went head to head on immigration, abortion, the Middle East and more.

# Cruz, Allred tussle over immigration, abortion

**EMMA WEIDMANN**  
Editor-in-Chief

The Tuesday night debate between Sen. Ted Cruz and congressman Colin Allred was the first and only between the two, but it touched on what the moderators named the two biggest issues for Texans this election: abortion and immigration.

"I agree with the United States Supreme Court that under our constitution the way we resolve questions like [abortion], questions on which we have real and genuine disagreements, is at the ballot box, is voting," Cruz said on stage in the WFAA studio in Dallas.

On the topic of abortion, many Texans fall in different camps. In 2023, The Pew Research Center reported that in states where abortion is prohibited, 43% of adults say it should be easier to obtain, and 62% of Americans think it should be legal in all or most cases.

Cruz and Allred are at odds on the topic, as Allred, a Baylor alumnus, has strongly opposed the 2022 Dobbs decision that overturned Roe v. Wade. On the other hand, Cruz has taken a much more anti-abortion stance, co-authoring an amicus brief to the Supreme Court in 2021, urging the justices to overrule Roe and Casey v. Planned Parenthood. In the debate, he sidestepped

questions about whether or not he supports exceptions for rape or incest with a simple, "Why do you keep asking?"

After a short verbal scuffle on the debate stage, the moderators moved the candidates to an equally divisive topic: immigration. Cruz has long been a proponent of former President Trump's border wall, while Allred downplayed the issue as a "right-wing echo chamber" in 2022. However, Allred has run a campaign largely focused on stricter border protections while Cruz voted against a bipartisan border bill that sought to secure an emergency supplemental allowance of billions of dollars for border security and combating fentanyl trafficking.

Dr. Felipe Hinojosa, endowed chair in Latin America and professor of history at Baylor, said candidates have figured out how to use the border for "bumper stickers" and campaign energy. However, Hinojosa said politicians' rhetoric has become dehumanizing and misses the heart of the issue.

"The language that they're using... which has just sort of painted all immigrants that are coming here as a threat to the nation... those sort of sound bites are, I think, what Trump and others have realized work in an election cycle," Hinojosa said.

Though he takes issue with Republicans'

language when dealing with immigration, Hinojosa also took aim at Allred's approach.

"I think the Democratic Party is not innocent in any of this," Hinojosa said. "They have responded to polling data they're seeing and how Americans seem to see this immigration issue as a major threat without speaking into the economic benefit, without speaking into the fact that immigrants have always been a plus in American society, without speaking into the fact that study after study has shown that wages do not decrease with an increase in immigrants."

Both issues are on the ballot on Election Day, as Cruz and Allred promise to deliver very different results in the Senate throughout the six-year term.

At his campaign stop in Waco in August, Cruz promised to "Keep Texas Texas." Meanwhile, on the debate stage Tuesday night, Allred told Texans "we don't have to be embarrassed by our senator. We can get a new one."

The Texas Tribune reports that last month, Allred pulled ahead in a statewide poll for the first time, and the latest numbers from pollster 538 have Cruz leading by only four points.

On Nov. 5, only one can prevail, but there's no clear prediction now of who that will be as the race remains nail-bitingly close.

## What do I need to bring on Election Day?

Election Day is Nov. 5! You'll need to bring a form of ID like a Texas driver's license, military ID, certificate of citizenship or concealed handgun license. You can bring a paper voting guide with you as well.

## What is not allowed at the polls?

Campaigning or wearing political attire is not allowed. Using wireless devices like phones is prohibited within 100 feet of polling locations. You may not photograph or record on the premises.

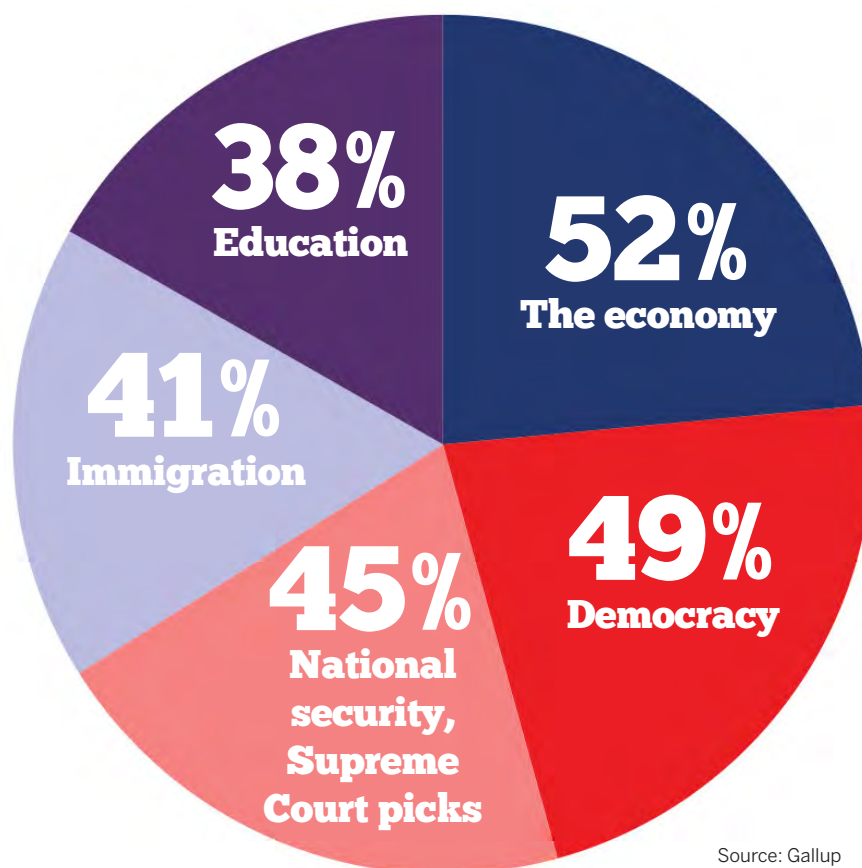
## What sites are closest to campus?

The Hurd Welcome Center, Cesar Chavez Middle School, South Waco Library and the McLennan County records office are close to campus.

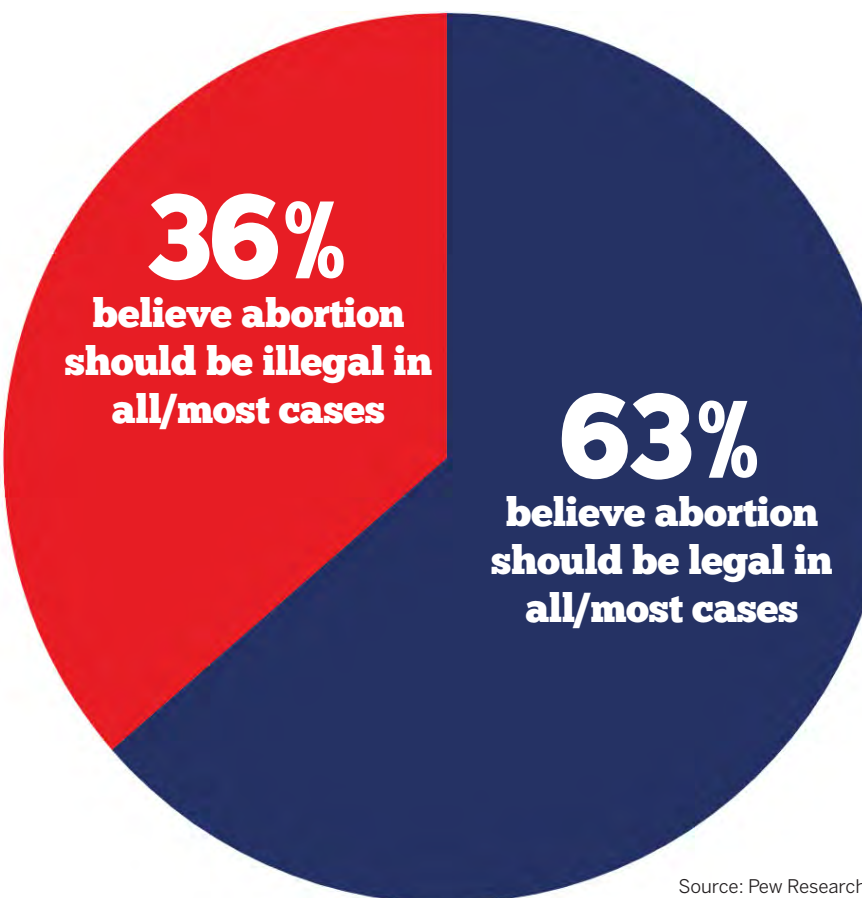
## How late will the polls be open?

All polling locations will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. If you're in line by 7 p.m., you can still vote.

## The issues voters call "very important"



## Views on abortion amongst U.S. adults



## POLICY BATTLE: Donald Trump vs Kamala Harris

Close U.S.-Mexico border, enact the "largest deportation" in U.S. history

No tax on tips

Defend the right to mine bitcoin

Send astronauts to the moon and Mars, develop assets and real estate in space

Prohibit China from buying American land, prevent importation of Chinese vehicles

Ban companies that outsource labor from doing business with federal government

Tax credits for unpaid family caregivers

Invest in growing military in research, technology and capability

Source: Donald Trump campaign

Cut taxes for families with newborns, credit for first-time homebuyers

Expand, strengthen Affordable Care Act

Advance climate action

Supports codifying pro-abortion legislation

Secure \$2 billion in funding for Offices of Civil Rights across federal government

Implement anti-discrimination protections for LGBTQ+ in health care, housing, education and more

Ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, require universal background checks, support red flag laws

Bring back bipartisan border security bill

Source: Kamala Harris campaign

## RECORD BATTLE: Ted Cruz vs Colin Allred

Authored amicus brief urging SCOTUS to overturn Roe v. Wade decision

Cosponsored act to require proof of citizenship before allowing people to vote

Introduced act to allow sanctuary city police to cooperate with federal immigration authorities and pull taxpayer-funded grants from sanctuary cities

Supports school choice

Filed amicus brief to block Obama's "Clean Power Plan"

Source: Ted Cruz campaign

Supports expanding Medicaid to uninsured Texans

Worked to expand access to affordable birth control, over-the-counter contraception

Worked to pass revised USMCA trade deal with Mexico and Canada

Voted for Paycheck Fairness Act to ensure equal pay for women

Voted to raise minimum wage

Supports earned pathway to citizenship

Source: Colin Allred campaign

# Baylor students say abortion major issue in 2024 election

**ASHLYN BECK**  
News Editor

In an especially contentious election season, and as many Americans vote contrary to their party, a few issues might sway this presidential election either way.

One of the biggest issues impacting voters' decisions is abortion, and Baylor students are no exception. Texas law currently prohibits abortion except in cases where the life or health of the patient is at risk.

Allen junior Abigail Fair is the president for Bears For Life, an anti-abortion group on campus, and said the candidates' abortion stance is one of the biggest influencers of her vote in this election.

"I oppose all abortion, and I try to vote according to that belief because I believe that human life is the most important issue," Fair said. "I always try to vote for the party and the ticket that will cause the least loss of life."

Heartbeats are detectable beginning in the sixth week of pregnancy. However, Fair said she believes it is never justifiable to obtain an abortion, even before a heartbeat is detected.

"At any point, it's always going to end a human life, whether it's early in the pregnancy or not," Fair said. "Every abortion will stop a beating heart."

Glendale, Ariz. senior and Texas Rising Campus Organizer Brynley Jones takes the opposite stance. She said that although Texas Rising is a non-partisan organization and does not take a position on the issue, she is in full support of abortion in all cases.

The issue of abortion is riddled with misconceptions, Jones said. Many believe it's a form of birth control, but Jones said this just isn't the case.

"There's just so many different scenarios that play into it that people have the privilege of not having to think about," Jones said.

Additionally, Texas' current ban on abortion often puts medical professionals in difficult spots. Texans who perform abortions can face life in prison or fines up to \$100,000. Doctors in the state have already been sued for providing the medical procedure.

Jones said anti-abortion laws take away a woman's right to make decisions for her body.

"I don't believe it is my business to be making any decisions about what you can and can't do with your body," Jones said.

Despite such opposing views, Jones and Fair agreed that it's essential to talk about the issue with civility. While they hold differing positions, both of them acknowledge that the issue is very personal to many women, and charity and grace are imperative in these conversations.

"I do think that it is so important to recognize how this issue can be extremely intense and emotional for many people to talk about, especially women," Fair said.

It's possible and important to have conversations that don't attack specific people or their views, Jones said. Conversations can simply explore the logic and science of the issue to hopefully come to a similar conclusion.

"There are people that I have had just really passionate conversations with [about abortion]," Jones said. "We haven't ended in a resolution, but it's helped me better understand them and their perspective."

Jones said she has felt difficulty at times discussing abortion at a Baptist university. Despite this, she is resolute in continuing to advocate for women's rights.

"I get really sad about the notion that is afforded to me that I don't care about babies," Jones said. "I also care just as much about the mother's rights. I care about human rights. I care about bodily autonomy. I believe in personal freedom."

Jones said she finds creative ways to advocate for women's rights and believes it's essential that people continue to have hard conversations.

"If nobody talks about women's rights, they're just going to keep getting smaller," Jones said.

Jones said it's tragic that abortion became so politicized and now it's voters' responsibility to bring about the change they want.

According to Fair, who expressed her distrust in the presidential candidates, both have said what is necessary to win their party.

"[Harris] supports abortion through all nine months, so up until the point of birth," Fair said. "This is really just problematic, because obviously life begins at conception, so any abortion at any time would be a loss of life."

While Fair said she supports the Trump administration, she said he doesn't have the strong "pro-life" platform he claims, but continually says what is necessary to win the majority of the Republican vote.

"My overall message to anyone voting, if they are interested in looking into this issue... [is] at the end of the day, fewer babies will die under the Trump administration," Fair said.

Jones encouraged students on both sides of the abortion issue to show up at the polls on Election Day and to do research on both potential administrations before voting.

"I want to make it very clear that I don't care how you vote. I just really want you to vote," Jones said.



# Democratic, Republican candidates vie for seats in the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals Office



Cameron McCollum | Photographer

**UP FOR GRABS** Texas Democrats and Republicans alike vie for three available judge positions in the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals Office, and each candidate has their own goals for the position.

## AUDREY VALENZUELA Staff Writer

One of the key races gaining attention this election season is for the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, the highest court in the state for criminal cases.

The CCA serves as the final appellate court for all criminal matters in Texas, particularly those involving serious offenses, including death penalty cases.

Made up of nine judges, including a presiding judge, the court is elected statewide for six-year terms. Each year, voters have the opportunity to select a portion of the court's judges, and terms are staggered to ensure continuity.

Given Texas' size and high number of criminal cases, the decisions made by the CCA affect not just defendants and law enforcement but

also the broader framework of Texas jurisprudence. Its rulings can set statewide legal precedents, impacting issues such as constitutional rights, law enforcement practices and standards for trials.

Three positions on the CCA are up for election: the presiding judge or Place 1, Place 7 and Place 8.

With issues like the death penalty, bail reform and wrongful convictions in the spotlight, the results of this election will have significant implications for Texas's legal landscape. Moreover, with rising public interest in how courts affect social justice, civil rights and public safety, voters are more likely to tune in to this critical race in 2024.

Republican David Schenck is running against Democrat Holly Taylor for presiding judge or Place 1, a position currently held by Judge Sharon Keller.

Schenck is a Baylor Law graduate with over 25 years of

private practice and government service.

"If elected, I will advocate for an efficient system of justice" Schenck said through his campaign. "I have made it a centerpiece of my campaign as I run for the presiding judge seat on the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals."

Democrat Holly Taylor, meanwhile, is known for her work in public integrity and civil rights. She serves as the assistant director in the civil rights division of the Travis County District Attorney's office, focusing on appeals and wrongful convictions.

"As a candidate for leadership of the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, I offer a unique combination of experience and values to meet the needs and challenges of this critical position," Taylor said through her campaign. "Years of legal experience ... have prepared me to handle

the important work of the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals today."

Republican Gina Parker, a Waco-based attorney, is running against Democrat Nancy Mulder, a judge from Dallas for Place 7, which is currently held by Judge Barbara Hervey.

Parker, with more than 30 years of accomplished attorney work, has built her campaign around a strict constitutionalist approach. A Baylor Law graduate,

Parker said she plans to speak on the importance of operations of Texas' two high courts, The Supreme Court and The CCA.

"I will work to implement changes by upholding the rule of law and never legislate from the bench and to increase the number and timeliness of opinions written and the number of oral arguments set for hearing," Parker said. "In addition, [I will] consider

a limitation on the amount of donations from lawyers and litigants appearing before the court."

According to Mulder's campaign website, she has "more than 20 years of combined legal and judicial experience" and currently presides over Texas Criminal District Court 6. Mulder stands on fairness, preparedness and dignity to ensure her clients are getting what they deserve in court.

"Everyone has a right to a fair day in court and a process that treats them with dignity," Mulder's campaign said.

Running for Place 8 are Democratic Judge Chika Anyiam and Republican Lee Finley.

Anyiam currently presides over Texas Criminal District Court No. 7 in Dallas County. She made history in 2018 as the first African immigrant to be elected as a state district judge in Dallas.

"I go to work each day honored that I am able to serve my community and be a part of the justice system that is so fundamental to our society in this country,"

Anyiam said. "I am running for Texas Court of Criminal Appeals because we need change in our statewide courts to add diversity of perspective and legal experience."

Lee Finley, a licensed attorney with over 20 years of practice in Collin County and a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, has extensive experience in magistration, indigent defense and mental health cases.

"Lee Finley will serve on the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals with honor and integrity. He will strictly interpret our constitution and honor the rule of law," his campaign page reads.



Lee Finley



Holly Taylor



Gina Parker



Chika Anyiam



David Schenck

# District 10 board of Education race picks up, introduces fresh faces as Election Day looms

## GRANT MORRISON Staff Writer

Texas State Board of Education Republican, Democratic and Libertarian candidates are fighting for the upper hand in elections and Nov. 5 draws closer.

The Texas State Board of Education is made up of 15 single-member districts, five of which feature contested

elections. There will be multiple new faces on the board this year, as some members retired while others faced primary challengers as part of the Texas GOP's ongoing internal conflict around education savings accounts, or school vouchers. The State Board voted in Nov. 2022 to urge the Texas legislatures to reject voucher programs, but reconvened in February to remain neutral and punt the



Tom Maynard

District 10 spans much of central Texas, bending around Austin and Waco, stretching

from Henderson County southeast of Dallas down to Brazos county, then stretching around the Austin metro through Williamson county down to Comal county north of San Antonio.

The Republican candidate is incumbent Tom Maynard, who was first elected in 2012 and led the Board's February reversal from their anti-voucher position. He was a

former school board trustee in Williamson County, and the first slide on his website declares that

"work ideologies have no place in Texas education."

The Democratic candidate is Dr.

Raquel Saenz Ortiz, an assistant professor of education at Southwestern University in Georgetown. Her platform highlights a more equitable education system and ensures that educators have a voice in decisions that impact their classroom.

She also bemoans the number of teachers leaving the profession at higher rates than ever before due to the politicization of schooling.



Dr. Raquel Saenz Ortiz

# McLennan County Commissioner candidates strive for unity, fixed roads, developed economy

## RACHEL CHIANG Assistant News Editor

When Election Day arrives on Nov. 5, voters will have the option to choose between Republican Donis "D.L." Wilson and Democrat Jeremy Davis for McLennan County's Precinct 2 county commissioner.

County commissioners serve on an elected county where they oversee county day-to-day policies. These decisions include maintaining infrastructure such as bridges and roads, ensuring proper allocation of taxpayer funds and developing healthcare and the local economy.

A Waco native and current board secretary on Waco ISD's board of trustees, Davis said he understands the area, the

people, their plight and their needs at an intimate level, so he is excited to serve the community in that capacity.

"For me, it's huge. Just being a native to Waco, being able to help uplift the community that I love and that pours so much into me," Davis said.

According to Davis and his website, the main issues he will address if elected are developing the economy, developing infrastructure and supporting community programs.

Davis said the experience of being on the board and of a team of eight who each bring diverse backgrounds, thoughts and strong views on various topics has allowed him to collaborate and find common ground, making him suited for the role.

In addition to his work in the local community, Davis interned with Black Men for Bernie, where he traveled to over 40 states with the Bernie Sanders campaign. He said his time on the campaign changed his perspective on how politics and elected officials can have an impact, making him want to be more involved in public service and providing him the tools to be more effective.

"I think the biggest thing that impacted me on during that time was really being able to see the correlation between my everyday life and the decisions that our leaders are making," he said.

Like Davis, Wilson has experience in the school system, and is currently serving as Riesel High School's chief of police after retiring

from being a state trooper with the Texas Department of Public Safety for over 20 years.

Wilson said his number one goal is to ensure safety of students in buildings and school grounds.

Wilson recognizes that not all Baylor students live on or near campus, so he said he wants to ensure those living in the area are safe and well-protected as well. He intends to increase safety by supporting local sheriff and police departments and ensuring that local volunteer fire



Jeremy Davis

departments are well funded.

While the current court is predominantly Republican now, it has been historically Democratic, and Wilson voiced his disappointment in their lack of progress regarding improving road conditions. In addition to his time as a state trooper doing highway patrol, Wilson worked on road, bridge and roadway design as he studied civil engineering technology in college.

"I grew up in this area. The roads have been horrendous, and the roads are poor out here compared to all other roads and precinct, all the other precincts in McLennan County," Wilson said. "So it's time for somebody just to have some new vision and then some new eyes."

Davis shared Wilson's

concerns regarding road conditions surrounding the county and recognizes a need to ensure they are maintained properly.

"We have a lot of roads and bridges that need repair and fixing too, so we can't just patchwork it and try to do things as fast as possible," Davis said. "We need to do a comprehensive evaluation of our roads and bridges and come up with a strategic plan for longevity."

Despite being on opposing parties, both candidates said they hope to unite the precinct and work for all its residents, no longer pushing for division.



# Democratic, Republican candidates cross party lines to win South Texas House of Reps seats

**ASHLYN BECK**  
News Editor

With Federal House of Representatives election races underway, political science professors say Democrats might have the change to flip the Republican-controlled House in 53 districts' "battleground races"—and three of those battlegrounds are found in South Texas.

In Texas, the battleground races are for three vacant seats: District 15, District 28 and District 34.

According to Interim Chair and political science professor Pat Flavin, the best chance Democrats have at gaining a majority is to overturn those vacant seats in the house, because it's unlikely a new candidate will win in a race against an incumbent.

"If you're a Republican waiting for a favorable district. You would wait for an open seat, but it's also an opportunity, for, say, the district's been controlled by a Republican for a while, it's probably the Democrats best chance to try to flip the seat," Flavin said.

Of the 45 open districts in the House right now, Democrats need to turn at least five to gain a majority.



Associated Press

**BATTLGROUND RACES** As the races in districts heat up, Democrats fight to overturn the Republican-controlled House.

"Republicans currently have a razor-thin majority in the House. That's evidenced by difficulty wrangling routine votes—such as passing a budget—and so it's very possible that the majority could flip after the 2024 election," Flavin said.

As for Texas, in the three battleground districts of South Texas, Republican and Democratic candidates alike fight for congressional seats.

Republican incumbent Monica De La Cruz and Democrat Michelle Vallejo

once again after De La Cruz's 53.3% to 44.8% win in 2022. De La Cruz was the first Republican to win the 15th District, but Vallejo returned to the race in hopes of turning the seat Democratic again.

In the South Texas District, De La Cruz said she is garnering support from the Hispanic community.

"Hispanics are also rejecting extreme Left-wing policies in urban areas like New York and Los Angeles. It's easy for elites to applaud utopian criminal justice

experiments from the comfort of gated communities. After all, it's not their bodegas that are being robbed. Nor do they suffer the consequences of reckless border policies," De La Cruz said in an opinion story for Newsweek.

As for the Democratic candidate, Vallejo vows to do whatever is necessary to secure the border—even if it crosses party lines, the Texas Tribune reported. Additionally, Vallejo is committed to providing abortion rights to women in Texas.

In District 28, the race heats up further as Democrat incumbent Henry Cuellar faces opposition from Republican Jay Furman. The race grew even more contentious after Cuellar was indicted on charges of bribery, money laundering and acting as an unregistered agent of a foreign government in May.

As another South Texas District, borders and immigration are hot topics in the race. According to Cuellar's campaign website, his goal is to "balance the interests of communities which are dependent both on international trade and small

town economies" on the U.S. and Mexico border.

U.S. Navy veteran Furman is challenging Cuellar for the seat and said he was shocked to return from the Navy to find "bad policies that are causing problems that are clear and present dangers to South Texan's safety, freedom and survival," according to his biography on Ballotpedia.

In District 34, Democratic incumbent Vincente Gonzales Jr. faces Republican Maya Flores. With Gonzales's narrow win in 2022, both Democrats and Republicans are pushing to hold the seat.

According to his campaign website, Gonzales wants to reinvest in the educational system to "keep classrooms open and children learning."

Flores's campaign focuses on securing the border, providing affordable healthcare and—like Gonzales—protecting the educational system.

While congressional elections often get overlooked by presidential elections, Associate Professor of political science David Bridge said that participation in congressional

elections is important for the American people.

"All 435 members of the House of Representatives are up for reelection, so it's the easiest way to make a quick dramatic change in American national politics," Bridge said.

Papillon, Nebr. senior Grayson Shirey did an internship in the House and said that participation in congressional elections is just as essential as participation in presidential ones.

"I think that a lower voter turnout in congressional elections is one of the most frightening things, at least for a young voter to look at," Shirey said.

Additionally, Flavin said that the lack of participation in young voters is one reason why the things they care about don't always get attention in Congress. Because seniors have a higher voter turnout, Congress doesn't make big changes in things like social security and Medicare.

"If it was flipped and younger people voted at the rates that older folks did, we'd probably see something totally different in Congress," Flavin said. "I think students should also think about that when they're thinking about why it's important to vote."

# Democrats aim to unseat Republicans on Texas Supreme Court

**MACKENZIE GRIZZARD**  
Staff Writer

The fate of the Texas Supreme Court is more uncertain than ever, as whispers begin of 74-year-old Chief Justice Nathan Hect potentially retiring after voters rejected a proposition to raise the mandatory retirement age for supreme court justices to 75-79 years old.

The Texas Supreme Court has a total of nine justices that deal with civil matters, with three justices running for re-election with opposition. According to Ballotpedia, all nine justices on the court are identified with the Republican Party as of April 2024. Justices Jimmy Blacklock, John Devine and Jane Bland are the three facing opposition on Nov. 5.

According to the Texas Court's official website, the Texas Supreme Court is the state's "court of last resort" for civil matters, and Texas is one of only two states with such a court.

The historically-red Texas Supreme Court battles to maintain its conservative tradition in the ballot box next month, making

this election especially important for Texas Democrats.

In Place 4, Democrat Christine Vinh Weems looks to unseat the Republican incumbent John Devine. Weems is the sitting judge on the 281st Civil District Court in Harris County. For Place 4 on the court, recent abortion rulings hang low on the red and blue battlefield.

In 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled to overturn Roe v. Wade, eliminating previous protection for abortion. This ruling strengthened the Texas Heartbeat Act, which included a "trigger law" that would ban abortion completely in the event of the U.S. Supreme Court overruling previous abortion precedents.

John Devine has served as a justice on the Texas Supreme Court since 2013 and re-announced his candidacy despite being involved in a number of controversies.

"It is a tremendous honor to serve the people of Texas and I look forward to continuing to do it for another term," Devine said in an official press release.

According to the Texas Tribune, a leaked audio contains Devine accusing his fellow justices of being "brainwashed."

"My concern is that they all bow down to the altar of progress rather than to the fidelity of the Constitution," Devine said in the recording.

In the face of this controversy, Weems takes an opposing stance to the court's ruling, issuing a court order in 2022 blocking the Texas from enforcing a 1925 abortion ban, allowing clinics to remain open for an additional two weeks after Roe v. Wade was overturned.

"I've spent my career fighting to protect the rights of Texans," Weems said in a social media post. "But right now, our justice system is on the line."

More recently, the Texas Supreme Court ruled against several plaintiffs in Zurawski v. Texas, which sought clarification from the Texas abortion ban in life-threatening cases for the mother or fetus. Justices Jimmy Blacklock, Jane Bland and John Devine are among those seated on the court during the ruling, and are the three facing Democrat opposition this November.

Bland, Republican incumbent for Place 6, has served on the

Texas Supreme Court since 2019, appointed by Gov. Gregg Abbott. She previously served as a justice on the Texas Court of Appeals from 2003-2018.

"Beyond faithfully applying the rule of law, I work hard to improve access to justice for low-income Texans," Bland said in an interview with the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.

Democrat Bonnie Goldstein is running against Bland for Place 6, who is currently serving as a judge on the 5th District Court of Appeals. According to her website, Goldstein was licensed in 1990, giving her 34 years of legal experience.

"Ensuring access to justice, addressing juvenile justice and mental health issues — which are often overseen by the Texas Supreme Court — are a continued priority for me and my judiciary," Goldstein said in an email.

Blacklock was appointed by Gov. Gregg Abbott in 2018 and previously worked under the governor at the Office of the Attorney General where he presided over several high-profile cases in the state of Texas.

"The Texas Supreme Court works hard in every case to understand Texas law as it is, not as we like it to be and to apply Texas law fairly and equally to all parties before the court," Blacklock said in an interview with the Texas Tribune.

Blacklock is facing opposition from Democratic nominee Judge DaSean Jones for Place 6 on the court. Jones currently sits as a Texas District Court Judge in Harris County.

"In Texas, the constitutional rights of everyday citizens across the state are being attacked by individuals you espouse far-right ideologies and engage in extremist actions to promote their beliefs," Jones said in his official campaign statement.

The remaining Texas Supreme Court justices — Jeff Boyd, Debra Lehrmann, Brett Busby, Rebeca Aizpuru Huddle and Evan A. Young — will continue their six-year terms and are not up for re-election this year.



**John Devine**



**Bonnie Lee Goldstein**



**Jimmy Blacklock**



**Dasean Jones**



**Jane Bland**



**Christine Weems**

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Baylor University

EQUITY, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND TITLE IX OFFICE



**THE ERAS CAMPAIGN** from A1

from voters from all political parties, Nichols said that parties have found little middle ground in recent years.

“People don’t want their politicians to compromise,” Nichols said. “Almost all Republicans agree with certain things like... tax cuts, and almost all Democrats agree with other things.”

**THE RACE IS ON** from A1

impacts in this role. According to West, every day a prisoner spends awaiting trial can cost taxpayers up to \$200. On top of this, it creates a better justice system.

“Justice delayed is justice denied. And the victims are out there suffering too. They’re suffering through this five or six-year wait,” West said.

West also said his career as a criminal lawyer gives him more relevant experience to the work of a judge.

“I know both sides of the docket. I know what games they are going to play. I know they’re going to use the stall tactic to help their case. It’s part of the gamesmanship that you have to do as a lawyer, and I know all of that.”

It’s his experience, West said, that separates him from Johnson. Johnson, whose career has been almost exclusively in civil law, would have to learn the procedures. Even more than knowing the rules, West said that in his experience he has “lived the rules.”

Although the job of the Judge of the 19th District Court is to handle criminal felony matters, Johnson said his experience still gives him the necessary skills to serve well.

“If you’re a practicing trial lawyer, which I have been, you’re constantly in the process of preparing

Despite this, D’Ambrosio said there has been an increase in historically blue voters such as ethnic minorities going red since Trump won the office. He said our current era depends on what happens in November’s election.

“If Trump loses this election, then I think it’ll prove that perhaps we’re not in a Trump era and that it may have just been a fluke,” D’Ambrosio said. “If he wins this election, though, I think that he’ll solidify himself as a very consequential figure, if not the most consequential figure of this century to date.”

to go to trial, or you’re going to trial. That’s where you develop the skills you need to be a judge.”

Johnson switched to the Democratic Party on the day he filed for the election. While Johnson acknowledged that much of this change was to give him a chance to run against West, the Democratic Party is not entirely foreign to him.

“I think like the majority of people out there,” Johnson said. “I’m moderate to moderate-right on some issues and moderate to moderate-left on some issues...I think the majority of people fall into that [category].”

Just a few years ago, Johnson served as the Republican district attorney before losing badly to Josh Tetens in 2022. Johnson said that the election of Tetens, who is further right than him, influenced him to leave the Republican Party.

“The more extreme right-wing faction of the party took hold of the party, and they jumped in full speed to defeat me and did so in a 70-30 defeat,” Johnson said. “Republicans didn’t like moderate Republicans anymore, and there was room for a moderate Democrat, and so here I am.”

However, when running for a position that relies more on competence and character than political views, the party label is unimportant, Johnson said.

“It’s my position that if there were an area of elected offices where it really wouldn’t matter if you say ‘I’m a Republican’ or ‘I’m a Democrat,’ it would be in the Judiciary.”

**CIVIL DISCOURSE** from A1

Chang argued.

“One of the best things you can do to prepare yourself as a Christian engaging in politics is to find someone who disagrees with you and try to listen to them,” Chang said.

In a time where many vie for political power, Rev. Aaron Zimmerman of St. Albans Episcopal Church in Waco warned against the pleasures of power.

“The scriptures as a whole are very skeptical of the long-term efficacy of political projects to really do anything,” Zimmerman said. “And you see this because Jesus Christ — twice recorded in the Gospels — rejects political power when it’s offered to him on a silver platter.”

Despite the separation of church and state famously outlined in the 1st Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, Zimmerman argues that Christians belong in politics. Or at least, Christian love does.

“Trying to make America a more moral place is an act of love,” Zimmerman said.

The idea of Christian love

is something woefully needed in this political landscape,

“All of politics now has been reduced to a binary choice of A or B. Don’t reduce [people] to that binary choice.”

**CURTIS CHANG | FOUNDER, REDEEMING BABEL**

according to Chang.

“Here’s the thing about love, especially the Christian version of love — love does not equal agreement,” Chang said. “[God] loved us while we disagreed with him.”

For Baylor students, voting and Christian values don’t always intersect, Rachael Murdoch, second year graduate student from San Jose, Calif., said

“I’ve experienced a lot of different perspectives politically, and I think that’s such an important part of the Christian call,” Murdoch said. “Loving other people is learning about them, knowing them and wanting to know them deeply.”

Political polarization is a wide-spread, pervasive issue dominating the minds of Americans. Chang says the solution to this is to treat others how “Jesus would.”

“All of politics now has been reduced to a binary choice of A or B,” Chang said. “Don’t reduce [people] to that binary choice.”

The panelists reassured listeners that despite what happens in November, hope will always fuel faith.

“Jesus is going to win out in the end over all forces of death, destruction and oppression,” Chang said.

**FREE FARMERS MARKET**



Rory Dulock | Staff Writer

**GREEN AND GOLD THUMB** The Baylor Free Farmer’s Market set up shop on Fountain Mall Wednesday, providing free fruits, veggies and more to the campus community.



Cameron McCollum | Photographer

**MUST POLITICS BE WAR?** Dr. David Corey (left) moderated the discussion on America’s divisive politics Wednesday night. He was joined by Curtis Chang (middle) of Redeeming Babel and The Rev. Aaron Zimmerman (right), rector of St. Alban’s Waco.

**GET OUT TO VOTE**



Emma Weidmann | Editor-in-Chief

**CIVIC DUTY** On Oct. 7 — the last day to register to vote in Texas — multiple student groups held voter registration drives on campus in order to boost voter turnout this November.

**FREE FARMERS MARKET**

Rory Dulock | Staff Writer

**GREEN AND GOLD THUMB** The Baylor Free Farmer’s Market set up shop on Fountain Mall Wednesday, providing free fruits, veggies and more to the campus community.

**SENIORS**

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