



SARAH DEPEW

DEMOCRAT

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Residence: Plano, Texas

Current Job/Profession: Stay-at-home mom

Education: Bachelor of Science in Psychology and Master of Science in Psychology - Texas A&M University- Commerce

Highlight of Current Civic Involvement/Accomplishments:

Established a free food pantry
CASA volunteer
Project Transformation volunteer
Red Cross Disaster Action Team volunteer

Why are you running for office?

During the 2016 election I became more and more alarmed about the state of our political discourse. I'm not talking about the outcome of the election, but how toxic and counterproductive our polarization had become. Politics feels broken, and I don't know where this level of divisiveness will lead us if we don't correct our course. I chose to run for the Texas House of Representatives because it has the greatest impact on the issues I care the most deeply about. The safety of children in the foster care system, the education our children receive, the integrity of our elections, the quality of the air and water we consume, the health of our economy, access to health care, and the future of our constitutional protections- all of these issues will by and large be decided on the state level.

The 2017 legislative session was dominated by the "bathroom bill" debate. Do you believe the state should require people to use the bathroom designated for the biological sex listed on their birth certificate?

This is not a good priority for Texas. Sexual assaults do happen in bathrooms, and it is a serious crime when they do, but I have not heard any evidence of it happening by a transgender individual or someone impersonating one, in public restrooms. It's difficult to see this as either a meaningful or least restrictive approach to preventing sexual assault (which is already a crime). That leaves animus towards transgender individuals as the likely motivation behind these efforts, and indeed transgender individuals would be less safe in our state if bills like this are successful. I don't believe the absence of a "bathroom bill" signals to sexual offenders that there's an open season for assault in Texas bathrooms, as we've managed this far in our history without regulating this aspect of public life. However, I would welcome this vigorous of an effort towards preventing sexual assaults in any number of locations, including on college campuses, marital beds, childhood beds, and everywhere else.



**VOTER GUIDE
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Why should voters choose you over your opponent?

I know in my heart I would make a great legislator. Service has been the theme of my adult life. I've served children in the foster care system for nearly a decade and I've served my community in a variety of other ways. I've volunteered with the Red Cross Disaster Action Team, Project Transformation, CASA, and I've established a free food pantry. My priority is advancing good outcomes for Texans. I am honest, even when it's difficult, and I have a strong work ethic. Over the last 14 months I have personally knocked on thousands of doors. I've knocked on doors walking over ice, in more than one flash flood, in 100+ degree heat, I have broken a bone at the start of a block walk, and I resumed block walking literally the day after being released from physical therapy. When I get to someone's door I introduce myself and ask them a simple question: What do you want from your government? I've yet to come across someone who has been asked that before. I love meeting people at their door and asking them that question and I am so grateful to the people who let me in on their anxieties and their hopes for their family and their community. I have run this campaign in a way that I can be proud of because I've grounded it on three values: common sense, decency, and liberty for all Texans. I believe being strong, principled, well-informed, and respectful are not in conflict with each other, but they actually reinforce each other.



GALA CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

During the last legislative session, Texas passed the Freedom to Serve Children Act which allows foster homes and adoption agencies, including those that receive public funds, to choose to only place children in homes with a mother and father. This coming session we anticipate once again seeing “Religious Liberty” bills which offer protection to businesses that deny services such as counseling, wedding planning, etc. to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Texans when based on “sincerely held religious beliefs.” Would you support such legislation? If so, please explain your justification of the expenditure of state funds defending such a law, as several similar laws are already actively involved in court cases and have been found to be discriminatory and unconstitutional? If you do not support such a proposal, please explain how you would justify your decision to a business that doesn’t wish to provide a specific service, such as baking a wedding cake, to an LGBT individual.

I do not support so-called religious liberty bills, especially the Freedom to Serve Children Act, which I'd like to elaborate on because this bill is much more damaging than most people realize. Over the last several legislative sessions we have changed how we place children in foster homes. We have created "single source continuum contractors" to absorb all of the foster care placements for a region. There's only a little more than a dozen regions for the entire state of Texas, so they are each massive territories. We are selecting a single contractor to absorb the placement needs of all children within that region. Some of these contractors are religious organizations. The Freedom to Serve Children Act not only allows these organizations to refuse to license families that do not fit into their religious structure (for being LGBT, non-Christian, and so on), but they allow them to dictate to their subcontracted agencies who they can and cannot license. They can prevent LGBT or non-Christian families from being licensed in the entire region. They also can, if they choose, hire only service providers such as therapists that agree with their religious beliefs. They can make medical and educational decisions for the children based entirely on their religious beliefs. It is already bad enough to refuse safe and loving LGBT families from becoming foster/adoptive parents, especially during a time when placement options for children are already dangerously low, but it also puts LGBT youth in a position to have to have non-affirming foster parents, therapists, and potentially educational settings. LGBT youth are already at a significantly higher risk for suicide and other adverse outcomes. This is a "religious liberty bill" that offers no protections for the religious liberties for subcontracted agencies or the children and/or biological families that are being served, including their right to not to be religious at all.

A recent study by the National Center of Transgender Equality found that 82% of transgender youth feel unsafe at school and 44% report having been physically abused. This coming legislative session, we anticipate that we will once again see the introduction of a “Bathroom Bill” which requires transgender students use the bathroom that matches their sex assigned at birth. Would you support such legislation? If you support such legislation, what steps would you include to ensure that transgender children are not bullied or physically attacked when they enter a bathroom? If you oppose such legislation, how would you explain your stance to a constituent concerned about their child’s right to privacy in the school bathroom?

No, this is not a good priority for Texas. Sexual assaults do happen in bathrooms, and it is a serious crime when they do, but I have not heard any evidence of it happening by a transgender individual, or someone impersonating one, in public restrooms. It's difficult to see this as either a meaningful or least restrictive approach to preventing sexual assault (which is already a crime). That leaves animus towards transgender individuals as the likely motivation behind these efforts, and indeed transgender individuals would be less safe in our state if bills like this are successful. I don't believe the absence of a "bathroom bill" signals to sexual offenders that there's an open season for assault in Texas bathrooms, as we've managed this far in our history without regulating this aspect of public life. However, I would welcome this vigorous of an effort towards preventing sexual assaults in any number of locations, including on college campuses, marital beds, childhood beds, and everywhere else.



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During the last legislative session, the State Legislature attempted to pass a record number of bills considered anti-LGBT. Several states that have passed similar anti-LGBT laws have faced business boycotts. Conversely, cities/municipalities wanting to be more attractive to business relocations, have passed Equal Rights Ordinances (EROs). These ordinances typically prohibit discrimination in city employment and city services, city contracts, public accommodations, private employment, and housing based on an individual's sex, race, color, ethnicity, national origin, age, familial status, marital status, military status, religion, disability, sexual orientation, genetic information, gender identity/expression or pregnancy. Do you support the right of local governments to pass EROs? Please explain your position.

Yes, I support local governments passing EROs. By their very nature, local governments are more connected to and responsive to their communities, and we should defer to them as much as possible. EROs are not just economically wise and morally correct, but they are also consistent with my understanding of the Equal Protection Clause in the US Constitution.

What would you like LGBT constituents and our families and friends to know about you as a candidate? Why should this large voting community support your candidacy?

I want LGBT constituents to know that I have their back. I am bisexual, but even if I weren't, I would still be fully committed to defending everybody's civil liberties. I take very seriously the promise that all people are entitled to equal protection under the law and I will fight any bill that fails to live up to that promise.



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JEFF LEACH

REPUBLICAN

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Residence: Plano, Texas

Current Job/Profession: Attorney (Gray Reed & McGraw, LLP); State Representative

Education: B.A. in Political Science – Baylor University; J.D. – SMU Dedman School of Law

Highlight of Current Civic Involvement/Accomplishments:

Born and raised in the heart of House District 67, I am a proud graduate of Plano Senior High School. I then attended Baylor University and went on to earn my law degree from Southern Methodist University's Dedman School of Law. I currently practice at the law firm of Gray Reed & McGraw, LLP. I most recently was a Member of the Board of Trustees for the Medical Center of Plano and I currently serve on the Board of Trustees of Houston Baptist University, and the Advisory Board of Meals on Wheels of Collin County. Recently, I was selected for inclusion in the 2017-2018 edition of Texas Super Lawyers' Rising Stars (a Thomson Reuters publication).

As Vice-Chair of the House Committee on Urban Affairs, I am proud of our bi-partisan, collective work to adequately address our state's response to recovery efforts from Hurricane Harvey - specifically as it relates to the housing needs within our coastal communities. Further, I proudly serve on the House Committee on Economic & Small Business Development and am a Member of the Texas House GOP Caucus. I previously served on the House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence, the House Committee on Government Transparency & Operation, and the House Committee on Rules & Resolutions.

Becky, my high school sweetheart and wife of over 13 years, and I are the proud parents of Brady (age 10), Charlotte (age 7) and Landry (age 3) and are active members of Prestonwood Baptist Church, where we first met at the young age of five! Becky and I have served for several years together in the Young Families Ministry.

Since taking the oath of office, I have been on the front lines in the fight for a more honest, open government and a smarter, more transparent state budget that funds the priorities of our state. I understand the challenges that come with meeting the essential demands of our rapidly growing state and have supported policies that work to responsibly invest in critical infrastructure – including water resource development and transportation. This includes adequately investing in border security and public safety, public and higher education, CPS and family services, and our criminal justice system, among other priorities.

During my first legislative session, I championed a landmark provision to limit the state's ability to recklessly expand Obamacare, while successfully authoring legislation resulting in substantial tax relief for small businesses. In 2015, after hearing from a concerned constituent, I authored and passed legislation to rein-in intrusive and reckless HOAs – a landmark achievement for the private property rights of Texas homeowners.

Further, for the past three legislative sessions, I have worked aggressively to advance legislation aimed at addressing the problem of sexual assault and domestic violence. Specifically, in 2015, I successfully authored legislation providing tougher penalties for sexual offenders who threaten our neighborhoods, in addition to working diligently to author and pass legislation advocating for victims of domestic violence. Most recently in 2017, I led the bi-partisan charge in the Texas House to address the growing epidemic of sexual assault on college campuses by successfully authoring legislation that works to empower both victims and witnesses of sexual assault. Further, I worked collaboratively with law enforcement, child advocacy groups and various non-profits to initiate bold reforms within CPS while adding much-needed funding towards our state's crippled foster-care system.



Why are you running for office?

Simple: I serve at my own home to prepare my children for the world. I serve in the Texas House of Representatives to prepare the world for them.

The 2017 legislative session was dominated by the “bathroom bill” debate. Do you believe the state should require people to use the bathroom designated for the biological sex listed on their birth certificate?

We should do everything we can to ensure the safety, security and dignity of all Texans - including, importantly, Texas' women and children.

Legislative History on LGBT Issues:

Equality Texas Statement Regarding Rep. Leach, Ranked Third Most Anti-LGBT Legislator in 2016

Leach was one of the four Collin County lawmakers who wrote a letter to Plano City Council last year full of misinformation and scare mongering in an effort to end consideration of the city's non-discrimination ordinance. He followed up by authoring HB 1911, which tried to do at the state level what he was unable to do at the city level and repeal all city non-discrimination ordinances via legislative override. The business community was swift in responding, pointing out that top job candidates and companies weren't moving to Texas because of the lack of such protections and that repealing the existing ones would damage the state's business friendly reputation. Fortunately HB 1911 and the other 7 anti-LGBT bills Leach co-authored all failed. Still, give him credit – Leach did vote for Mary González' Romeo and Juliet equalization legislation in committee (before voting against it on the floor). The guy has a heart and he genuinely does care about kids. With a little more time and a little more exposure to people who've had different experiences than himself, he might just come around. Only time will tell.

Representative Leach co-sponsored the following bills in 2016:

HB 623 would amend the Texas Family Code to prohibit the use of taxpayer funds for the “the licensing or support of same-sex marriage.” It would also bar government employees from recognizing, granting or enforcing same-sex marriage licenses. Any government employee who violates the provision would be barred from collecting “a salary, pension, or other employee benefit.”

HB 1745 would ban the use of state or local tax money to license, register or support a same-sex marriage — nor could that money be used to follow a court order requiring state recognition of gay unions.

HB 4105 would prohibit state or local funds from being used for an activity that includes the licensing or support of a same-sex marriage. State or local funds could also not be used to enforce an order requiring the issuance or recognition of a same-sex marriage license.

HB 3602 would permit a “conscientious objector” to freely act or refuse to act in accordance with a sincerely held religious belief without the threat of a person or government agency taking any adverse action against them. The bill defines “conscientious objector” to include a person with a sincerely held religious belief that: marriage is or should be recognized as only the union of one man and one woman;

HB 3864 would allow child welfare providers that contract with the state to discriminate based on sincerely held religious beliefs.

HB 3567 would allow religious organizations and clergy to not celebrate same-sex marriages, including providing goods and services related to a marriage

GALA CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Candidate did not respond.