

CANDIDATE FOR U.S. SENATE SURVEY

1. **Counsel:** Who do you turn to for advice and counsel when making decisions regarding services, programs and laws that could/do impact people with disabilities?

I turn to people with disabilities, and disability rights advocates for such counsel. I believe that persons who are disabled and their advocates are the best counsel concerning legislation, services, and programs to assist the disability community. Disability Rights of Texas is one such group I have worked with to seek counsel when making decisions impacting people with disabilities.

2. **Legacy:** What legacy and/or contribution do you hope the disability community remembers you for?

I would like to be remembered for always having an open door to the disability community, and for always being an advocate for their needs.

3. **Community Integration:** This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). What more, if anything, can the federal government do to fulfill the goals of the ADA to eliminate discrimination of individuals with disabilities and end unnecessary segregation?

First and foremost, we must look at the existing exemptions to the Americans With Disabilities Act and determine if those exemptions need to be narrowed to ensure that there is no unnecessary segregation of people with disabilities. I believe we also must look at the ADA to make sure it is properly protecting individuals who experience Autism and similar conditions. I believe we must also take a careful look the act to make sure it is doing what it is designed to do in terms of preventing workplace discrimination.

4. **Health Care:** The Affordable Care Act (ACA) provides critical protections for people with disabilities, including pre-existing condition protections, prohibitions on life time limits and annual caps and the inclusion of Community First Choice (CFC) services. What would be your policy response if the US Supreme Court repeals part or all of the ACA?

My response would be that we've got to look at making the modifications necessary to make sure that we can modify the ACA to pass constitutional muster. I also support a true public option healthcare plan to help more people gain access to affordable healthcare, which can work independently of the ACA.

5. **Housing:** What action, if any, would you take to increase access to affordable, accessible, integrated housing for Texans with disabilities?

I believe that any project that is funded in whole or in part with HUD or other state or federal dollars must not only have set-asides for low-income housing, but also for housing for the disabled, and that projects constructed with HUD funds are required to adhere to the best possible accessibility standards.

6. **Voting:** Federal laws such as the ADA and the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), provide that voters with disabilities are entitled to a safe, private and independent way to vote, just like voters without disabilities. What steps would you take to ensure that Texans with disabilities have the same access to voting (registering and casting a ballot) as Texans without disabilities?

For one thing, I believe vote by mail should be allowed to be universal in every single election, period. Second, I believe we must find a safe and secure way of allowing voters to register to vote and vote using online systems. Finally, I believe that we must take greater steps in Texas and in federal law to make sure that there are people who are trained to help people with disabilities available at every polling place in Texas. I believe election workers must be specifically trained on how they may best enable persons with disabilities to cast a ballot at a polling location.

7. **Transportation:** Accessible transportation is essential for people with disabilities to participate in community activities, work, and to obtain medical care. What actions would you take to increase accessible transportation options for people with disabilities in urban, suburban and rural America?

We must free up more federal funding for public transportation, specifically geared toward public transportation similar to Dallas' on-demand transport system for handicapped citizens. I also believe we must make sure that, in areas without public transportation, that Medicare and Medicaid fully cover the cost of medical transportation for people with disabilities.

8. COVID-19:

a. People with underlying medical conditions are at highest risk for a bad outcome from COVID-19. 100% of people with disabilities fit this description. Apart from the virus, people with disabilities are at risk in the federal policy response. What is your position on federal aid to the states to support impacted state budgets?

The federal government must step up to the plate, plain and simple, and provide funding to help those states severely impacted make their budgets whole so services to needy and disabled populations aren't impacted.

b. Early response to the pandemic included an increased in Medicaid federal funding. These funds may be used to increase services for individuals with disabilities. Do you support requiring states to utilize these additional funds to increase access to Medicaid and other community-based long term services and supports?

Absolutely!

9. **Special Education:** Under federal law, eligible students with disabilities in public schools are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE). What steps can the federal government take to ensure that public schools have the resources and training necessary to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities?

First, federal government must use its power of the purse strings to ensure robust compliance with FAPE and ADA in schools.

Additionally, I believe we must modify the code of federal regulations to require that a simple flier with a link to the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights--with a notice saying that if a parent believes their child's rights were violated that they should contact USDOEOCR--at every single ARD meeting. Additionally, the CFR must be modified to require USDOE to have the OCR complaint link on their website front page prominently and easily accessible. Further, early resolution through mediation by the USDOE OCR, which is currently offered, should be encouraged to ensure that these complaints are resolved in a quicker fashion.

We must address the issue of schools manipulating students who have turned 18 in to knocking their parents out of the process and ending their special education accommodations. Any school found to have manipulated a young person in to ending special education accommodations after they have turned 18 must be heavily penalized.

In all respects, there must be more stringent consequences for school districts who are found to have violated the rights of disabled students.

Finally, we must ensure that any school found to retaliate against a student who has made an OCR complaint to USDOE is held fully accountable under the law.

In terms of generally meeting student needs, we must ensure that more federal dollars are available for states and schools to assist students with disabilities, and we must ensure that the federal regulations governing disbursement of these funds are strict enough to prevent these funds from being used to fund administrative or other indirect-impact expenses. These dollars must go directly to the classrooms, programs, and equipment that will have an actual impact on a disabled student's daily life.

10. ADA: What actions would you take to maintain the original protections of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?

Fully fund the USDOE Office of Civil Rights, and the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Civil Rights, and other agencies' similar divisions to fully investigate complaints to ensure compliance.

11. Wages: What do you think about sheltered workplaces and sub-minimum wages for people with disabilities? What would you do to provide people with disabilities meaningful opportunities for integrated employment and fair wages?

Sub-minimum wages for people with disabilities should not be an option. I support a \$15 minimum wage for all people.

12. Community Attendants: In Texas, most community attendants receive less than \$10 per hour, and do not receive sick leave, vacation or health benefits. How do you plan to support policies and funding to increase the number of available community attendants to provide these critical in-home services and supports?

Advancing a \$15 minimum wage will help with this issue. Further, we must make sure Medicare and Medicaid are able to fund these services at a higher per hour level.

13. Census: What measures would you support to ensure that the information obtained from the 2020 Census affords sufficient funding to guarantee the fair apportionment of federal funds for community-based programs for people with disabilities?

We must require the Department of Commerce and Bureau of the Census to issue specific census reports for local communities concerning their disabled populations.

14. Community-Based Services: How will you work to ensure that individuals receiving Medicaid community-based services have full access to the broader community and are able to access services in the most integrated setting?

We must ensure, again, that the power of the government purse is used to make sure that people have access to these services in their preferred integrated setting. We must pass laws and regulations that not only promote and advocate this, but require it as a first option.

15. Electronic Visit Verification: The 21st Century Cures Act eliminated the free market choice of individuals with disabilities in consumer directed services to choose their method of reporting services by mandating the use of Electronic Visit Verification (EVV). Congress has delayed the implementation of EVV in consumer directed services twice already due to concerns. How would you support returning to the free market choice of people in consumer directed services?

We must amend the 21st Century Cures Act to ensure that we are able to return to the free market choice.

16. Social Security:

a. How do you support OR oppose cuts to and/or changes in, eligibility for Social Security to meet the needs of people with disabilities?

I oppose any cuts to Social Security. I believe we must increase SSDI payments/

b. People with disabilities who work and also receive social security are restricted to limited income before having to repay some social security benefits. The limits are very low and a disincentive to employed people with disabilities to accept raises and promotions. How would you support raising the limits to encourage true workforce participation for people with disabilities?

I absolutely support raising the limits, because the limits trap people with disabilities in poverty.

17. Medicaid: Why do you support OR oppose turning Medicaid into a system of “block grants” or imposing “per capital caps”? What improvements in the Medicaid program do you support?

I oppose turning it into a system of block grants and imposing caps. I support additional funding for the program and better transparency for recipients.

18. Cannabis: Would you support OR oppose changes at the federal level to protect medical cannabis patients and providers? Why do you support OR oppose federal prohibitions on cannabis research?

I support changes to protect patients and providers. I oppose prohibitions on cannabis research. I have authored medical cannabis legislation in the Texas Senate.

19. Engagement: A key slogan of the disability community is “nothing about us without us.”

How would you engage the disability community to become more effective and active in the policy decisions that affect our lives?

I would engage the disability community by making them a part of my decision making and policy process, and have quarterly virtual town halls solely with the disability community to make sure I am available to the community and hearing their concerns.