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Daily OPINION

BUILD-A-DEM: WHY JAMES TALARICO IS TEXAS'S PERFECT CANDIDATE



James Talarico speaks at the University of Texas at El Paso. Talarico said that "Texas is not for sale" on Oct. 26, 2026.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JAMES TALARICO ON FACEBOOK

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It's 2018. Beto O'Rourke has lost the Senate seat to incumbent Ted Cruz in a hotly contested midterm election season by just 2.6%. A rising star in the party, O'Rourke was seen as Texan Democrats' best chance for a win in a statewide election.

It's 2026, eight years later, and James Talarico is running against former Attorney General Ken Paxton for the Senate seat once held by John Cornyn. A rising star in the party, James Talarico is seen as Texan Democrats' best chance for a win in a statewide election.

But this time, it feels different. This time, the Democrat could actually win.

Why? How could this race bring about long-awaited change in Texas, where Beto O'Rourke and the best of the Texas Democratic Party have failed?

There are a few reasons this race is set to be the closest Senate race Texas has had in years. First, Talarico's opponent. The scandal-ridden Ken Paxton was Trump's endorsement for the Senate over incumbent John Cornyn, despite many state Republicans objecting. Paxton has been a rotating door of scandals throughout his political career. Most recently, leaked videos show Paxton in Dubai partying with an extramarital girlfriend and two fugitives indicted on fraud charges — one of whom donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to the Paxton campaign. An old-but-gold personal favorite of his scandals is when God allegedly came to a tech entrepreneur in a McKinney, Texas Dairy Queen and told him to give 100,000 company stock shares to Paxton.

Second, the Republican presidential administration is deeply unpopular. A recent Reuters Ipsos poll found Donald Trump's national approval rating at 32% — and that's slightly up from last week. In Texas, Trump has a net -21% approval rating, despite winning in 2024 by 13.7 percentage points. Paxton has made no effort to separate himself from the unpopular administration, even comparing his "political persecution" to the scandals surrounding Trump himself.

However, in the Republican stronghold of Texas, this race could not be so close without the political star that is James Talarico.

James Talarico is everything Texas Democrats have dreamed of. He has strong appeal to both Latino and Black voters. He is a devout Christian and Presbyterian seminarian; much of his political inspiration comes from his faith, even stating that "politics is just another word for how we treat our neighbors." Most of all, however, he is a force of unity across party lines, race and class.

Talarico knows that, in Texas, a scandal-ridden GOP opponent isn't enough. Talarico's campaign messaging does not focus on his opponent's scandals or on the unpopular Trump administration. These are just an afterthought — he wants voters to vote for him, rather than against Paxton or the Republican Party. He speaks to the working class by platforming his stances on affordability; cost-of-living is the issue at the forefront of voters' minds this midterm cycle. In his speeches, Talarico drives home his points against billionaires, calling out Elon Musk, the world's first trillionaire, and other members of the 1%. He fights against super PACs and proposes bipartisan bills banning Congressional stock trading and gerrymandering. In his ads targeting Latino voters — a major voting bloc in Texas — he rejects ideals about specified interests based on race and ethnicity and instead focuses on the economic issues that unify us all.

Talarico's messaging is signaling a refreshed Democratic Party; a party that does not just care about defeating Trump or holding off the "other side," but a party with defined ideals and voters that are energized to get out and vote blue. If Talarico wins, Democrats will find their footing in Texas and look to replicate his messaging in a way that ensures a presidential victory in 2028.

Election Day is looming, and Texans have already begun turning out in record numbers, surpassing even the turnout for O'Rourke vs. Cruz in 2018. These numbers bode well for Talarico. Although he is by no means guaranteed a win, Democrats have a fighting chance for the first time since 2018, and they picked the perfect person to take it.