

U.S. Senate

Open seat — incumbent John Cornyn lost the May 26 Republican runoff to Ken Paxton.

Ken Paxton

REPUBLICAN · OPEN SEAT

Texas attorney general since 2015; former state senator and state representative.

James Talarico

DEMOCRAT · OPEN SEAT

Texas state representative; former middle school teacher and Presbyterian seminarian.

Where the candidates stand on the issues Pope Leo XIV has raised, in their own words and votes. Bracketed numbers link to sources. We do not rate, score, or endorse candidates.

WAR & PEACE

POPE LEO XIV *Leo invited citizens of every country involved in the war with Iran to contact their leaders and members of Congress “to work for peace and to reject war and violence.”* [Remarks at Castel Gandolfo, Apr. 7, 2026 \(Vatican News via The Good Newsroom\)](#)

KEN PAXTON

Stood by President Trump’s strikes on Iran in March 2026, saying an open-ended war is not “Trump’s idea” and “He wants to get this over with.” Campaign backs an “America First” foreign policy that “promotes peace through strength.”

[1] AP via ADN: Texas candidates respond to Iran war

[2] Paxton campaign: Issues

JAMES TALARICO

Calls for ending the “forever war in Iran” while keeping Iran from a nuclear weapon; would halt offensive weapons sales to the Netanyahu government while funding Iron Dome; supports defending Ukraine.

[1] Talarico campaign: Foreign Policy

AI & THE DIGNITY OF WORK

POPE LEO XIV *“No one can be reduced to productivity, to cognitive performance, or to mere data.”* [Magnifica Humanitas presentation, May 25, 2026](#)

KEN PAXTON

As attorney general, opened an investigation into Meta AI Studio and Character.AI over allegedly deceptive marketing of AI chatbots as mental health tools to children.

[1] Texas OAG: Paxton investigates Meta and Character.AI

JAMES TALARICO

Proposes an “AI Dividend” taxing AI-attributable profits, human review of automated firing and discipline decisions, limits on workplace AI surveillance, retraining for displaced workers, and the PRO Act.

[1] Talarico campaign: Social Media, AI & Tech

[2] Talarico campaign: Labor & Business

THE POOR & THE SAFETY NET

POPE LEO XIV *The preferential choice for the poor is “a source of extraordinary renewal both for the Church and for society.”* [Dilexi Te, Oct. 4, 2025](#)

KEN PAXTON

Proposes tax-based health relief — a deduction of up to \$25,000 for out-of-pocket medical costs and a \$5,000 wellness credit — plus an expanded Child Tax Credit and permanent “Trump Accounts”; favors less government-run health care.

[1] FOX 7: Talarico vs. Paxton on health care

RECORD IN OFFICE

No HB 109 (2007), eligibility for and information regarding the Children’s Health Insurance Program

JAMES TALARICO

Would reverse 2025 reconciliation-law cuts to Medicaid and ACA tax credits, which he calls the “Big Ugly Bill”; backs a \$15 federal minimum wage and an expanded Child Tax Credit and EITC.

[1] Talarico campaign: Health Care

[2] Talarico campaign: Labor & Business

[3] Ballotpedia: James Talarico

RECORD IN OFFICE

Yes HB 12 (2023), extending Medicaid coverage for women to 12 months after pregnancy

LIFE OF THE UNBORN

POPE LEO XIV *Abortion “cuts short a growing life and refuses to welcome the gift of life.”* [Address to the Diplomatic Corps, Jan. 9, 2026](#)

KEN PAXTON

Campaign pledges to “defend the unborn.” As attorney general he sued to block federal emergency-abortion protections and threatened legal action against a hospital over a court-approved exception; he has indicated openness to restrictions on IVF, per The 19th.

[1] Paxton campaign: [Issues](#)

[2] KSAT/The 19th: [Abortion in the Senate race](#)

RECORD IN OFFICE

Yes HB 15 (2011), informed consent to abortion, requiring a sonogram beforehand

Yes HB 2 (2013, 2nd called session), regulating abortion procedures, providers and facilities (state Senate vote)

JAMES TALARICO

Supports federal legislation to codify Roe v. Wade and to protect access to contraception and IVF; opposed abortion restrictions in the Texas House.

[1] Talarico campaign: [Freedom, Family & Faith](#)

[2] Ballotpedia: [James Talarico](#)

RECORD IN OFFICE

No SB 8 (2021), Texas Heartbeat Act: abortion after detection of fetal heartbeat; private civil right of action

THE DEATH PENALTY

POPE LEO XIV *Someone who opposes abortion but favors the death penalty “is not really pro-life.”* [AP via PBS NewsHour, Sept. 30, 2025](#)

KEN PAXTON

As attorney general, took over the Robert Roberson capital case and asked a court to set a new execution date in 2025.

[1] KWTX: [Paxton requests new Roberson execution date](#)

RECORD IN OFFICE

No SB 60 (2005), punishment for capital felonies, adding life without parole as sentencing option

JAMES TALARICO

No campaign statement found. See voting record below.

RECORD IN OFFICE

Yes HB 727 (2023), barring the death penalty for defendants with severe mental illness (passed House; not enacted)

Yes HB 1340 (2021), limiting death-penalty liability of coconspirators in capital murder cases (passed House; not enacted)

IMMIGRANTS & REFUGEES

POPE LEO XIV *“Defending human life also includes welcoming, protecting and assisting immigrants.”* [Letter on the 250th Anniversary of the United States, June 25, 2026](#)

KEN PAXTON

Pledges to help President Trump “finish the border wall,” secure the border and deport “criminal illegal aliens”; as attorney general he sued the Biden administration over border policies.

[1] Paxton campaign: [Issues](#)

RECORD IN OFFICE

Yes HB 12 (2011), enforcement of immigration laws by local governmental entities (passed House; not enacted)

JAMES TALARICO

Wants ICE to prioritize “criminals, gang members, and human traffickers,” bar agents from masking, add Border Patrol agents and immigration judges, and create a path to citizenship for long-term immigrants, spouses and Dreamers.

[1] Talarico campaign: [Immigration & Border Security](#)

RECORD IN OFFICE

No SB 4 (2023, 4th called session), creating state offenses for illegal entry and authorizing state-ordered removal

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY & EDUCATION

POPE LEO XIV *Religious freedom is “the right of every person to worship according to conscience.”* [Letter on the 250th Anniversary of the United States, June 25, 2026](#)

KEN PAXTON

As attorney general, defended Texas’ 2025 law (SB 10) requiring the Ten Commandments to be displayed in public school classrooms.

[1] Texas OAG: [Paxton defends SB 10](#)

RECORD IN OFFICE

Yes HB 3678 (2007), voluntary student expression of religious viewpoints in public schools

JAMES TALARICO

Backs the Do No Harm Act to “protect religious liberty and prevent religious discrimination”; opposes policies that “force religion” into public schools and opposes private school vouchers.

[1] Talarico campaign: [Freedom, Family & Faith](#)

[2] Ballotpedia: [James Talarico](#)

RECORD IN OFFICE

No SB 2 (2025), establishing a state-funded education savings account program

No SB 10 (2025), requiring display of the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms

CARE FOR CREATION

POPE LEO XIV *“We cannot love God, whom we cannot see, while despising his creatures.”* [AP, Oct. 1, 2025](#)

KEN PAXTON

Pledges to “remove harmful regulations designed to hurt our energy companies” and backs President Trump’s economic and energy agenda.

[\[1\] Paxton campaign: Issues](#)

JAMES TALARICO

Supports an “all-of-the-above” energy strategy protecting oil and gas jobs while growing wind, solar and geothermal; would restore clean-energy tax credits, strengthen the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts and make data centers pay for grid upgrades.

[\[1\] Talarico campaign: Energy & Environment](#)

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