News



Candidates for the as-yet uncalled special election for Texas' 18th congressional district seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, from left: Amanda Edwards, Isaiah Martin, and Christian Menefee. (Black Catholic Messenger)

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The Texas race for a vacant seat in the U.S. House of Representatives will feature a number of Black Catholics, including former Houston city councilwoman Amanda Edwards and Democratic consultant Isaiah Martin.

The heavily Democratic 18th congressional district was represented by former Houston mayor Sylvester Turner for just two months before his unexpected death in Washington on March 5. He succeeded the late Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, who herself died from cancer following a successful primary campaign in 2024.

Three Texas Democrats have officially declared their candidacy for the seat, including Edwards, Martin, and Harris County Attorney Christian Menefee — whose announcement triggered his pending resignation from the county-wide office.

Martin, a 26-year-old former Jackson Lee staffer, ran in the 2024 Democratic primary before withdrawing to endorse his former boss. He filed campaign papers on Monday and is emphasizing his opposition to the policies of the Trump administration and his blueprint for a strong Democratic response.

"Donald Trump has done nothing for you. Not for your family, not for your paychecks, and not for your future," he said in a viral video on social media announcing his candidacy.

"Things are bad right now. You know that, and I know that. They're throwing everything at you, so now's the time to be bold and fight fire with fire."

Edwards — who narrowly lost to Turner in the Harris County Democrats' special vote in August 2024 for a nominee to fill the seat — also ran against Jackson Lee in the primary earlier that year, losing in a relatively close race. She announced her new campaign on Wednesday.

"We are standing in a critical moment, a moment where our jobs, our schools, healthcare, economic opportunity, and the very essence of who we are are being attacked by President Trump," she said in her own social media video.

"Some say that in this moment, we should just lay back or roll over and play dead, but being raised in the 18th congressional District, I happen to know that this is a moment where we need to stand up and fight."

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The three Democratic frontrunners for the seat appear to represent a youthful shift for the seat, which was held by Jackson Lee from 1995 until her death at the age of 74. Turner died at 70, while Jackson Lee's daughter, Erica Lee Carter, was elected in November to serve for just two months to finish out her mother's term.

Edwards, 43, has yet to announce any major endorsements, while Menefee, who is 36, has secured at least one of Edwards' supporters from her 2024 primary campaign, former Rep. Beto O'Rourke of Texas. Menefee's other supporters include Rep. Lizzie Fletcher of Texas and former Reps. Carter and Collin Allred.

The 18th district seat has been held by African Americans since 1973, when Barbara Jordan became the first Black woman in Congress from the South. She was succeeded by a Black Catholic in Mickey Leland, who died in office in 1989. He was followed by Craig Washington, who last year endorsed Edwards' primary campaign.

There is uncertainty as to how soon (or if) someone will fill the remainder of Turner's term, which expires in 2027. Gov. Greg Abbott could call a special election for the next eligible date, May 3, but that would require an announcement by the end of next week, March 29.

Abbott could also leave the seat vacant — as it was for four months in the 1980s following Leland's death. This would involve the GOP governor delaying an election to November or even 2026, giving his party a stronger advantage in Washington for at least the rest of the year.

Under the Texas Constitution, there is no deadline for the governor to act in such circumstances, potentially leaving the 18th district without representation for the foreseeable future.

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