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Texas Senate District 9 Special Election Candidates Speak on THC, Gambling, Top Priorities

Taylor Rehmet, John Huffman, and Leigh Wambsganss are running to fill the seat vacated by state Sen. Kelly Hancock.

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(left to right) Taylor Rehmet (campaign photo, Facebook), John Huffman (campaign photo, Facebook), and Leigh Wambsganss (campaign photo, Facebook)



Three candidates, two Republicans and one Democrat, are vying for an open state Senate seat in North Texas.

When state Sen. Kelly Hancock (R-North Richland Hills), who represented Texas Senate District 9, resigned his position to [join the Office of the Comptroller General as its chief clerk](#) and announced his candidacy for the office, Gov. Greg Abbott announced a [special election](#) for November 4 to fill his seat.

The three candidates that have announced they are running to fill the seat are Democrat [Taylor Rehmet](#) and Republicans [John Huffman](#) and [Leigh Wambsganss](#). The final day to file for a place on the ballot is September 3. Armin Mizani, mayor of Keller, had previously announced he was a candidate, but is now running for the state House District 98 seat being vacated by Rep. Giovanni Capriglione (R-Keller), who has announced he will not run for reelection.

According to The Texan's [Texas Partisan Index](#), Senate District 9 leans Republican with a rating of R-60% for 2022–2024.

Rehmet is a “veteran, union president, and working class Texan.” He is an aircraft technician at Lockheed Martin and has lived in the district for seven years.

Huffman is the former mayor of Southlake, a small business owner, and homeschool father of three children. He ran in the Republican primary for the U.S. 26th Congressional District in 2024, and he and his family have lived in the district for 17 years.

Wambsganss has lived in the district for 25 years; she is the chief communications officer for Patriot Mobile, and has led its [political action committee](#). She has worked as a television news anchor, reporter, and producer and has been involved in

Republican politics for 30 years.

The Texan asked each of the candidates a series of questions about their positions. Their answers are provided below, lightly edited for readability.

What do you think makes Senate District (SD) 9 unique?

Huffman: Senate District 9 represents the best of Texas — strong families, thriving businesses, excellent schools, rich Texas history, and deeply rooted conservative values. Our communities believe in hard work, limited government, and freedom — and they expect their leaders to protect those principles, not just talk about them.

Rehmet: Senate District 9 sits at the crossroads of where Texas has been and where it's going. It's where the engines of industry meet the quiet dignity of small towns, where innovation collides with tradition, and where working families are fighting like hell to hold the line. What makes this district unique is that it embodies the full complexity of Texas, urban sprawl, rural grit, economic power, and political urgency. It's a district with no time for performative politics, only real challenges that demand real solutions. And in this moment, SD 9 has the chance to do something extraordinary: to flip the script, reject the extremists, and prove that bold, working-class leadership still wins in Texas.

Wambsganss: Nestled in the nation's most populous Republican county, District 9 serves as a true microcosm of Texas. Its landscape seamlessly blends urban vitality, suburban charm, and rural serenity — all wrapped in a dynamic tapestry of residential, retail, commercial, and industrial development. From bustling Cowtown to the heart of downtown Fort Worth, District 9 features a hub of commercial, military, and private aviation and exceptional higher education opportunities. Its thriving economic development coexists with peaceful, family-friendly neighborhoods. Whether you're drawn to high-rise city living or watching the sunrise

over the sweeping Texas prairies, District 9 embodies everything that makes Texas special — a unique quality of life well worth preserving.

As a candidate in the special election to fill Senate District 9, what do you think are the top three issues facing the district? Please explain each.

Huffman: Property Tax Reform and Fiscal Responsibility: I fully support efforts to rein in out-of-control local spending that's driving up property taxes across Texas. Homeowners are being crushed while some local governments grow bigger and less accountable. It's time for serious reform that puts taxpayers first. We need to cap runaway spending, demand transparency, and shift power back to the people, not the bureaucrats. Texans deserve real, permanent property tax reform.

Restoring the American Dream of Homeownership: Young families are being priced out of the communities they grew up in. Excessive regulation and out-of-control property taxes are part of the problem. I support smart reforms that protect local control but also remove unnecessary barriers to building homes people can actually afford. Our kids deserve the same chance at investing in communities through home ownership that we had.

Protecting Economic Growth and Our Business Climate: Tarrant County is one of the most dynamic economic engines in the country — low taxes, business-friendly policies, and an entrepreneurial spirit. We can't take that for granted. I'll work to preserve the environment that attracts investment, grows jobs, and keeps Texas the economic envy of the nation.

Rehmet: Fully Funding Public Education: Our schools are under attack. Teachers are underpaid, classrooms are under-resourced, and extremist politicians are pushing voucher scams to bleed our public schools dry. I will never support any plan that sends public dollars to private schools. We need actual investment in our teachers, students,

and classrooms, not political grift.

Eliminating the Broken Property Tax System: Property taxes are crushing working families. The current system is rigged where regular homeowners carry the burden while billion-dollar corporations exploit loopholes. We need to overhaul it from the ground up and replace it with a fairer, more sustainable model that doesn't punish people for simply owning a home.

Expanding Access to Healthcare: Healthcare access remains out of reach for too many. Whether it's a veteran trying to get care, a single mom skipping appointments to pay rent, or a senior choosing between groceries and prescriptions, it's unacceptable. We must expand coverage, lower costs, and put people before profits. These aren't abstract issues. They're the reasons folks are struggling.

Wambsganss: Border Security & Public Safety: President Trump and Border Czar [Tom] Homan have done an amazing job of securing our southern border. But Texas must remain vigilant regardless of who is in the White House. Biden's reckless border policies proved to Texas that we must protect our own border. I have been a strong supporter of Operation Lone Star. I will fight to keep our border strong, and our citizens protected. As the daughter of a municipal police officer, I have always been a supporter of law enforcement. I fully support school resource officers because every child deserves a safe and secure classroom. Public safety and the rule of law are not just priorities — they're essential values for Texans.

Property Taxes: Civil government comes at a cost, but that cost is growing too fast for too long. I have a record of fighting for lower tax rates at every level of government. I support increasing the homestead exemption and expanding compression, on the road to abolishing school property taxes, while maintaining school funding. I fully support the Texas Constitutional ban on state income tax.

Life, Family & Culture: The left is waging a war on American Judeo-Christian values. I have dedicated much of my adult life to standing strong for pro-life, pro-family public policy. I will continue that fight in the Texas Senate.

What makes you uniquely suited to represent District 9 in the Texas Senate?

Huffman: I bring a combination of conservative leadership experience, private sector success, and deep roots in this district. As Mayor of Southlake, I cut taxes, balanced budgets, defended families, and pushed back hard against woke ideology. I've also built and run businesses in real estate and construction, so I understand firsthand how government policy affects jobs, housing, and growth. And I've led in crisis and in times of rapid political change — not just talking about conservative principles, but actually governing by them.

Rehmet: I've lived the same struggles as the people I'm running to represent. I'm a machinist by trade, a union president, and an Air Force veteran. I've clocked in on factory floors, working on B-52 Bombers. I've fought for better wages and safer working conditions and I've sat at the bargaining table when no one else would stand up. I know what it's like to work a full-time job and still feel like you're falling behind. As president of the Texas State Council of Machinists, I lead one of the largest [International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM)] coalitions in the state, representing more than 30,000 hardworking men and women. I've gone toe-to-toe with corporate greed and walked away with real wins for working families. I've fought back against corporate greed and won tangible victories for working families. I've also seen how politicians in Austin treat folks like us. Far too often we are treated like we're disposable — like we don't belong at the table. I'm not a career politician or a trust fund baby playing dress-up in a suit and tie. I'm the guy who's had to fix planes, fight the bosses, and figure it out with my sleeves rolled up. That perspective matters because the Texas Senate needs someone who knows what it means to serve and who's never forgotten where he comes from.

Wambsganss: Senate District 9 encompasses about half of Tarrant County, the largest red county in the nation. My legislative and policy work on the federal, state, county, and local levels over the last three decades gives me a unique and experienced perspective. Through my background in the media as a TV reporter, anchor, and producer, working in Congress during the Republican Revolution, owning a small business for 20 years and now being a company executive, I've gained unique insights into Texas' economic, business and infrastructure needs, politics, and public policy.

Please name three endorsements you have received that you'd like to highlight.

Huffman: We have been overwhelmed by the positive response to our campaign and the wave of endorsements, from elected officials to business champions to community leaders across the district. We will be rolling out our list of endorsements in the coming weeks, so I don't want to announce any spoilers right now, but I will highlight that I've already received the four most important endorsements I could ever ask for: my wife and three amazing teenage kids. Without them, none of this happens.

Rehmet: International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, Rep. Chris Turner (D-Arlington), and Sen. Roland Gutierrez (D-San Antonio).

Wambsganss: Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX), Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, Tarrant County Judge Tim O'Hare, and Tarrant County Sheriff Bill Waybourn.

What is your position on the THC proposal currently being handled in the Legislature?

Huffman: I oppose efforts to legalize recreational marijuana in Texas. But I do believe we need clear, enforceable laws when it comes to THC products, especially those being sold to kids under the guise of "hemp" or "CBD." Right now, there's a patchwork of confusing regulations that make enforcement difficult and put public safety at risk. I support cracking down on bad actors, protecting children, and giving law

enforcement the tools they need. If THC remains legal, it needs to be tightly regulated, not a free-for-all. I support compassionate use for Texans suffering from serious medical conditions (including PTSD in our veterans communities) especially when THC provides a safer alternative to addictive pharmaceuticals. Any exception must be narrowly tailored, doctor-supervised, and focused on helping patients, not opening the door to recreational use.

Rehmet: If Dan Patrick really cared about protecting children from “harmful substances,” he’d be just as eager to pull alcohol from the shelves as he is to ban hemp and THC. If he gave a damn about their well-being, he wouldn’t have stood by while Greg Abbott slashed funding for summer meals that fed hungry kids. Dan Patrick can spare me the hypocrisy. The same party that screams about small government suddenly wants to play morality police. And they’re willing to destroy small businesses, wipe out Texas hemp farmers, and kill an entire industry to do it. Senate Bill (SB) 5 is simply a worse version of SB 3, pushed by culture warriors who are out of touch with everyday Texans. It won’t make us safer but it will put people out of work, it will shutter small businesses and it will hurt veterans. This isn’t about public health, it’s about control. Dan Patrick is the biggest buzzkill in Texas.

Wambsganss: The testimony provided by law enforcement, educators, and parents is compelling and overwhelming. The new synthetic THC is a clear and present danger to Texans. We must protect our children. Adult consumption should be a matter between a person and their physician.

What is your position on the expansion of gambling in Texas?

Huffman: I believe Texans should have the right to decide this issue for themselves. I support putting the question of expanded gaming on the ballot for voters to consider. That said, I’m firmly opposed to a future where we have slot machines on every street corner. If voters choose expansion, it should be limited, well-regulated, and focused

on a small number of high-end destination resorts that create jobs and bring tourism — not neighborhood gambling operations that hurt our communities.

Rehmet: I'm not opposed to the expansion and heavy regulation of gambling in Texas, but let me be clear, not a single penny of public money, like subsidies or tax breaks, should go to casinos or resorts until every public school in Texas is fully funded. Our teachers are paying out of pocket for basic supplies while billion-dollar resort developers line up for handouts. That's backwards. Before we even think about sweetening the deal for gambling interests, we need to make Texas the national leader in teacher pay. We need to give our educators the tools and support they need, not bury them under bureaucracy and blame. And if these casinos and resorts do come, they better come with living wages, strong benefits, and protections for the workers who keep them running. No poverty-wage jobs, no broken promises. That includes protecting veterans. Too many come home to a system that forgets them. We've got veterans in this state sleeping on the streets while billionaires cash out tax breaks. If we're going to expand gambling, that revenue better go toward housing veterans, cutting red tape for benefits, and making sure they get the care and dignity they've earned. Economic development should lift up the communities it lands in, not extract from them. If you want to do business in Texas, you'd better be ready to take care of Texas workers, Texas kids, and Texas veterans first.

Wambsganss: Gambling can be very destructive to individuals and families. The promises of jobs and tax revenue have not materialized in other states. I do not support expansion of gambling in Texas.

Why do you want to serve in the Texas Senate?

Huffman: Because I care deeply about what kind of state we're handing off to the next generation. I've seen what happens when conservatives stop showing up. I want to bring proven leadership to Austin — the kind that protects our freedoms,

strengthens our economy, and defends Texas values with backbone, not just rhetoric.

Rehmet: I'm running for the Texas Senate because I'm tired of watching the same people get left behind. I've spent my life fighting for working families, on the shop floor, at the bargaining table, and in the streets when we had to. I didn't grow up dreaming of politics. I grew up watching my neighbors struggle to make rent, choosing between prescriptions and groceries, and praying the AC wouldn't go out in the middle of a Texas summer. I served this country in the Air Force because I believed in the promise of democracy and I'm running now because that promise is being broken every damn day by politicians who treat public office like a game. I want to serve because I know what it means to fight for something bigger than myself. And right now, Texas needs fighters. Everyday Texans need people who won't sell out, won't back down and won't forget who they work for. I'm not joining the Senate to play politics. I'm running to kick the doors in for the people who've never had a seat at the table.

Wambsganss: I never saw myself as a candidate. I've been in the trenches, behind the scenes, fighting for good government for decades. As an empty nester, I've reached a stage in life where I can take my many years of experience as a small business owner, and policy and legislative advocate, and put it to work for the citizens of Texas. I am ready to serve.

Will you impose a term limit on yourself?

Huffman: Yes. I believe in public service, not political careerism. Our founders never intended for elected office to become a lifelong profession. We need new leaders who are willing to do the hard work, then step aside and make room for the next generation.

Rehmet: Yes, I will impose a term limit on myself and will introduce legislation to

make term limits the law. I'm not running to make a career out of politics. I'm running to do the damn work required at this moment, deliver results, and make room for new leaders to step up. This seat belongs to the people of SD 9, not to me or any one person. I believe in public service, not self-preservation.

Wambsganss: I support the ideals of term limits. No one is irreplaceable and there are others who will rise up to fill the gap. But I do not support the idea of unilateral disarmament. If the entire Legislature is term-limited, I say good. But one district simply means that district is underrepresented in terms of seniority and experience. I will not penalize this district.

Kim Roberts

Kim Roberts is a reporter for The Texan in the DFW metroplex area where she has lived for over 20 years. She has a Juris Doctor from Baylor University Law School and a Bachelor's in government from Angelo State University. She graduated all three of her young adult children from home schooling and now enjoys life with her husband and two dogs.