

CD 18 Potential Nominee Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Sylvester Turner

If you currently hold or have previously held public office, please list and describe those positions here.

Mayor of the City of Houston (8 years)

Texas State Representative, District 139 (26 years)

Are you currently a resident of the 18th Congressional District?

Yes

If you live in CD18, how long have you resided there?

My entire life

If you are not currently a resident of CD18, which Congressional District do you reside, and how long have you lived there?

N/A

Background, Education, and Qualifications

High School attended and date of graduation

Klein High School, 1973

College attended, degree obtained, major, and year of graduation

University of Houston, Bachelor of Arts degree in political science, 1977

Graduate or other degrees obtained and year of graduation

Harvard Law School, Juris Doctor degree, 1980

Any Board Certifications. If you are an attorney, please list the states in which you are admitted to the bar and years admitted.

State Bar of Texas, 11/24/1980

What uniquely qualifies you to represent the constituents of CD18 as their Representative in Congress?

I have 26 years of legislative experience in the Texas House of Representatives, where I served as Speaker Pro Tempore for six years. I served as Mayor of Houston for two terms. I have worked closely with the late Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, U.S. Presidents, Cabinet secretaries, and federal departments at the highest levels to bring federal resources into the 18th Congressional District.

Congressional District 18 has been my home for my entire life. In addition to fulfilling the Washington duties of a member of Congress, I will meet the high bar of compassion, caring, and humanity that was the hallmark of the Congresswoman's leadership and public service.

What is your best quality or attribute? What is your least favorable trait or working habit?

I am dogged and determined when it comes to meeting a challenge. For example, I took on pension reform – which previous mayors had been unable to accomplish – and saved the City of Houston from a very real threat of bankruptcy.

I have very little patience for those who seek to exploit the political process for personal gain.

What prior elective office have you run for and what was the result?

I have served as a Texas State Representative for District 139 for 26 years and as Mayor of Houston for eight years.

Describe any community service you have been involved with over the past ten years.

I started Family Day in the Park, a completely free event that draws 12,000 – 15,000 people each year, including seniors and families, for 17 consecutive years. I have raised the money for this event during my service as a State Representative, as Mayor, and as a private citizen.

I raised \$3 million for Sylvester Turner Park in Acres Homes and built that city park out.

I have sponsored the Juneteenth Pride Parade in Acres Homes for 17 years.

As Mayor, my signature initiative was Complete Communities, which focused on ten underserved and under-resourced neighborhoods, seven of which are in CD18. The Congresswoman worked directly with me on this initiative.

I have always been an active member of my church. I have actively sponsored numerous community events and fundraising drives to benefit many communities in Houston.

Affiliations, Tributes, and Awards

Are you a member of or affiliated with any professional organizations? Please list here.

I am a member of the Texas State Bar, the American Bar Association, National Bar Association, Houston Lawyers Association, and the Houston Bar Association, and am admitted to practice in the State of Texas, federal District Court for the Southern District Court of Texas and the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Have you held any leadership positions with those groups, and if so, what was your position?

During my service as Mayor of Houston, I served in leadership capacities in a number of national organizations, including:

- U.S. Conference of Mayors, Trustee, Advisory Board member, Standing Committee on • •
- African American Mayors Association, President
- Metro Economies member
- U.S. Climate Mayors, Chair
- Resilient Cities Networks, Inaugural Chair
- National Climate Action Agenda (Climate Mayors), Co-Chair
- Environmental Protection Agency, Local Government Advisory Committee member

Have you received any honors or recognitions that may be relevant to the positions of United States Representative? If so, please describe here.

I have received many national and local awards that speak to my experience and relationships that will benefit the 18th Congressional District. Some examples include:

- President's Award, National Urban League Conference
- Local Arts Leadership Award, Americans for the Arts and The United States Conference of Mayors
- University of Houston Master of Public Administration Program Pioneer of Public Service Award
- Legacy of Leadership Award, The Ensemble Theatre

- Stephen L. Klineberg Award, Rice Kinder Institute
- Inspire Change Changemakers Award, Houston Texans
- Community Ambassador Award, Alliance for Multicultural Community Services

Philosophy and Issues

Should you become the Representative for CD18, what do you hope to accomplish during your first term in office? Before the completion of your service as a member of Congress?

Given all the uncertainty at the national level, I believe the 18th District needs stability and continuity in leadership.

We must keep federal resources flowing into the district to address challenges such as the cancer cluster in Fifth Ward and Kashmere Gardens, and continued funding for local organizations for health care, flood mitigation and education.

Our next representative must also meet the high bar of compassion, caring, and humanity that was the hallmark of Sheila's leadership and public service. Comforting families who have lost loved ones, spending quality time with seniors while offering a helping hand – for me, these commitments deserve equal attention as the Washington duties of a member of Congress.

If you are elected to this position, on which committee(s) of Congress would you most like to serve and why?

Judiciary Committee: I want to continue the strong representation of Congressional District 18 on the House Judiciary Committee, where many issues important to our district are heard.

Appropriations Committee: I want to continue and expand on the federal resources coming into our district.

Education and the Workforce Committee: We need a strong and continuing federal response to Gov. Abbott and Texas Republicans' plans to privatize public education.

In what way do you believe your individual philosophy may impact your service as a member of Congress?

My philosophy in governing is this: If you're standing still, you're moving backwards. I will work as hard as a member of Congress as I did as a State Representative and as Mayor. I am proud to stand on my record as I seek your support for this nomination.

Why do you want to be a member of Congress?

Congressional District 18 is my home. I've lived here all my life, and I've represented many of its people in the State Legislature and as Mayor. I have significant concerns about the uncertainty at the national level and the chaos that Republicans continue to create. I am best positioned to ensure the ball is not dropped on servicing the needs of the entire 18th Congressional District.

In what ways do the principles of the Democratic Party inform or reflect your personal philosophy?

The principles and values of the Democratic Party completely inform and are aligned with my personal philosophy. My lifetime of public service has been, and continues to be, focused on the pursuit of justice – social justice, racial justice, economic justice, environmental justice, reproductive justice, justice for

women, justice for LGBTQ+ people, justice for differently abled people, justice for immigrants, justice in health care, and more.

What are the three most important issues Congress must deal with and what is your proposal for doing so?

There are so many pressing issues that Congress must deal with. If I am limited to only three, I would say:

Protect women and families. I will work to pass a federal law to codify Roe v. Wade and protect all reproductive health care. I will also work to increase services and funding for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and sex trafficking, including funding for programs under the Violence Against Women Act, reauthorized through the work of the Congresswoman.

Health Care. I will work to protect the Affordable Care Act from Republican attacks, continue to lower the price of prescription drugs, and work for full participation in Medicaid expansion by the State of Texas, to cover millions of uninsured Texans.

Criminal Justice Reform and Community Safety. Everyone deserves to be safe in CD18. I will work to pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, reintroduced by the Congresswoman in May. The act would limit qualified immunity, strengthen civil rights protections, improve training, ensure transparency, and invest in innovative approaches to public safety. I will also work to pass strong reforms to end the epidemic of gun violence: requiring universal background checks on all gun purchases; requiring mental health background checks and restrictions for gun ownership (red flag laws); raising the minimum age to purchase a gun; and requiring gun safety storage laws.

How can Congress (with Presidential support) better and more humanely control illegal immigration across the Southern Border or elsewhere?

I support comprehensive immigration reform with a pathway to citizenship. There are two imperatives that we must accomplish this year: elect Kamala Harris as President and restore Democratic control to the U.S. House of Representatives. While getting 60 votes in the U.S. Senate will remain an obstacle to comprehensive reform, bipartisan reforms are still possible. For example, we can increase funding to reduce the shortage of immigration judges, which will decrease the average time in custody for immigrants, and increase resources to provide for safe and sanitary conditions for migrants arriving in the U.S.

What, if anything, should Congress do to restore and protect abortion rights and rights of reproductive autonomy?

We must pass – and I will fight for – a federal law to codify Roe v. Wade. Only federal legislation can invalidate Texas' abortion ban. I also support the Supreme Court reforms recently proposed by President Biden and Vice President Harris.

What do you plan to do to protect and expand voting rights and protect the basic tenets of democracy?

I will continue to fight for the passage of the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, to modernize and revitalize the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and strengthen legal protections against discriminatory voting policies and practices. The Supreme Court's gutting of the Voting Rights Act must be undone. I will also work to pass a constitutional amendment to overturn the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision, which allowed corporations and special interest groups to spend unlimited amounts to influence elections. Congress and state legislatures should be permitted to put sensible limits on political spending.

What policies and initiatives will you advocate to reduce student debt? What would be your approach to making higher education more affordable and accessible?

I support the Biden-Harris administration plans to forgive student debt and will work to pass legislation to authorize student loan forgiveness to overcome the Supreme Court decision that struck down the first Biden-Harris plan. We also need to increase funding for Pell Grants and other subsidies to make higher education more affordable and accessible.

What policies will you advocate to reduce poverty in our district? What are your strategies for economic development to lift individuals and families out of poverty?

I have worked my entire adult life to improve the circumstances of people and communities who have too often been overlooked and underserved. In Congress I will work to restore and expand our safety net programs, bring family-sustaining jobs to our district, raise the federal minimum wage, pass paid family and medical leave, make the child tax credit and earned income credit permanent, expand access to affordable health care, and support workers with equal pay laws and laws that protect the rights of workers to organize.

What can be done to lower the price of basic necessities such as food, shelter, healthcare, and other costs of living?

I support proposals to expand and improve the low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) program which will help increase the supply of affordable housing and lower the cost of rent. I also support legislation to provide downpayment assistance to first-generation homebuyers. I also support legislation to invest in affordable, high-quality child care and early childhood education. We need to expand on the progress made in reducing the price of prescription drugs - like insulin - so that everyone benefits, not just seniors. And here in Texas, we must continue to press the state to expand Medicaid, which is the single quickest and most dramatic act the state could take to get health insurance for millions of uninsured Texans.

What is your view about the necessity (or lack thereof) for gun safety legislation and what proposals would you support (and which, if any, of them would you oppose)?

I will work to pass strong reforms to end the epidemic of gun violence, including: Requiring universal background checks on all gun purchases; requiring mental health background checks and restrictions for gun ownership (red flag laws); raising the minimum age to purchase a gun; and requiring gun safety storage laws.

The U.S. has used foreign policy to fight inhumane practices abroad and also to further our security and economic interests. What goals should the U.S. be furthering through foreign policy, if any? What tools should the U.S. use in accomplishing those goals (i.e., economic sanctions, military intervention, etc.)?

Our overriding foreign policy goals should be to protect and advance America's security, prosperity and values. While all options to further our goals should be on the table, diplomacy should always be our preferred option. We must strengthen our alliances and international institutions that promote freedom and Democracy, including advancing foreign aid. Engaging the world, rather than isolating ourselves from it, will make America safer, stronger, and more prosperous. Finally, our interests must be broader than the necessary tasks of defending our borders. Climate change, human rights, and the global economy are all vitally important to our security.

How, specifically, do you plan to help the people of CD18?

As I have outlined above in more detail, it is my plan to provide stability and continuity in leadership during these uncertain political times. If we take back the U.S. House, and elect Kamala Harris, we will be able to accomplish great things.

But if we are not successful in those endeavors, we must continue to protect all people of the 18th District and continue to service the needs of the entire district. As I have done throughout my career, I will provide strong constituent services, fight for resources to help my constituents, always fight for those who are challenged in fighting for themselves, and be relentless in the pursuit of justice.

What do you plan to make your signature issue as a member of Congress and how do you plan to address it?

There are three: affordable housing, community revitalization and environmental equity.

As I mentioned above, I support proposals to expand and improve the low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) program which will help increase the supply of affordable housing and lower the cost of rent. I also support legislation to provide downpayment assistance to first-generation homebuyers.

I will build upon the success we have had in our Complete Communities initiative at the City of Houston. Through a combination of community engagement and planning, leveraging private and government funding, economic development, job creation and training, and intentional addressing of food and health care deserts, we can help revitalize communities without the harmful impacts of gentrification.

I will continue my work to champion environmental equity and justice. Examples include continuing the federal investigation of the Union Pacific contamination in Fifth Ward and Kashmere Gardens, and bringing federal resources to the district for relocation and mitigation, and championing more projects like the Sunnyside Solar Farm, which replaced the Sunnyside Dump, which was a poster child for environmental injustice.

Campaign Plans

How will you convince voters of CD18 to support you before November 5, 2024?

I will ask respectfully for their votes, based on my record of public service, my accomplishments, and my platform. As you know, in this district, the Democratic nominee is extremely likely to win. I will concentrate much of my efforts in the district to increasing voter turnout to elect Kamala Harris as President and Democrats from the top to the bottom of the ticket.

How will you support down-ballot Democratic candidates?

I will work to turn out more Democrats on November 5 and actively campaign for the entire ticket – both in person and with financial resources.

How much money do you expect to raise for your campaign?

It is unknown, given such a short time window. Our goal at this point is \$250,000.

How do you plan to raise the amount of money you have indicated in the previous question?

As I have in all my campaigns, I am reaching out personally to donors in a very organized and aggressive effort. In addition, I will pursue a small-dollar contribution effort to allow everyone to participate, regardless of their financial circumstances.

Democratic Credentials, Experience

When and why did you become a Democrat?

The Democratic Party has been my home for my entire life. I grew up in a Democratic family and have never considered leaving. I will repeat what I said above: I believe in and have always fought for justice – social justice, racial justice, economic justice, environmental justice, reproductive justice, justice for women, justice for LGBTQ+ people, justice for differently abled people, justice for immigrants, justice in health care, and more.

Which Democrat in your lifetime has most impressed you and why?

I've lived too long to select only one. :) My heroes include Barbara Jordan, Barack Obama, Joe Biden, and Sheila Jackson Lee. Each inspires me in his or her own way. But all inspire me to find dignity and humanity in all people, and to keep fighting for those who cannot fight for themselves and their families.

What involvement have you had in grassroots Democratic activities?

I've worked in Democratic politics at all levels for most of my adult life. I've knocked on doors, worked phone banks, worked closely with precinct chairs, served as a convention delegate, helped raise money, and supported and volunteered on many campaigns.

Have you ever been a Republican or voted in a Republican primary? If so, when and why did you become a Democrat?

No.

Is there anything else about your background, experience, philosophy, leadership qualities, or skills as a campaigner which you would like to bring to the attention of the Democratic precinct chairs of the 18th Congressional District of Texas?

I am proud to stand on my record, which is well known.

I would like to say that, while I respect the argument that candidates from our next generation of leaders are willing to step up now, we are in a time when experience and relationships matter. No other candidate that has stepped forward – as of the time I am writing this response – has the ability to work with officials at the very highest levels of the federal government to make sure that balls are not dropped and Congressional District 18 does not suffer during this transition.

I refer you to a pair of statements put out by our next generation of leaders:

Jason Lee and Erica Carter Lee:

“Our mother had no greater partner than Mayor Turner and he honors her with his willingness to dutifully and humbly serve as a sturdy bridge to the next generation of leadership for the historic 18th Congressional District of Texas.”

County Judge Lina Hidalgo, County Attorney Christian Menefee, City Controller Chris Hollins, City Council Member Abbie Kamin, City Council Member Tiffany D. Thomas, and Texas Democratic Party Treasurer Odus Evbagharu:

“Some have called us the next generation of Democratic leaders in Texas. We are proud to endorse Sylvester Turner for Congress, because Democrats need our best and brightest from every generation to take back the House, elect Kamala Harris, and bring the promise of America to future generations. Please vote on August 13 for Sylvester Turner as the Democratic Party nominee for the Historic 18th Congressional District.”

Is there any other question which we have not asked you but which, in the interests of understanding why you would be the best person to succeed Sheila Jackson Lee, you would like to address?

I would like to address questions that have been raised by some about my health: I am in excellent health.

I have been very open about having had cancer in my jaw more than two years ago. When I had surgery on June 30, 2022, the doctors used bone from my leg and a metal rod to reconstruct my jaw. On February 8 of this year, they removed the metal rod and replaced it with a skin flap to connect the tissue in my jaw. That is still visible, but will shrink with time. It is not cancerous. I am periodically scanned and monitored. No no more surgery is required.

I specifically asked my doctor if there were any reasons I should not run for or serve in Congress. He responded quickly with an emphatic No.