

Meet The Two Candidates Poised To Become Texas' First Latina Congresswomen

BY CAITLIN CRUZ SEP 7, 2018



Texas has sent more than 300 people to the House of Representatives since its admission to the Union in 1845. And though the U.S. Census estimates Latinos make up nearly 40 percent of the state's population, not a single one of these representatives has been Latina. This November, two women are hoping to change that.

Veronica Escobar is a former teacher and county judge for the El Paso County Court who's vying for Rep. Beto O'Rourke's vacated seat in 16th Congressional District. State Sen. Sylvia Garcia, meanwhile, is gunning for the seat in the 29th Congressional District serving eastern Houston. Both candidates won their primaries handily in districts that are heavily Democratic, which means they're all but guaranteed to win in the general election this November.

So, Texas is about to send its first Latinas to Congress. There's nearly 175 years of representation to make up for — two is probably the least Texas voters can do (myself, as a Texas voter, included).

+ RELATED STORY



Beto O'Rourke Stands Up for Black Lives Matter

For Escobar, the 16th district is a homecoming of sorts. The first time she got involved in politics was by phone banking and canvassing for a Democratic candidate in the 1996 election for the 16th Congressional District. "I never stopped working for candidates since then," she told ELLE.com. "I've knocked on tens of thousands of doors in El Paso in 20 years."

Her next campaign was in support of Raymond Caballero for mayor in 2001. Then came 2006, and a coterie of like-minded allies

determined to change the city they loved. “A group of friends and I were uninspired by the way El Paso was going,” she said. (O’Rourke was a part of that group of friends.) While a number of people ran for city council, Escobar chose the Commissioners Court; she would later serve two terms as El Paso County Judge, the chief executive of the court.



Garcia at the NALEO conference in Dallas.

OMAR VEGA + GETTY IMAGES

The vision for a strong city and state is one of many things Escobar and Garcia have in common. Garcia has served in the Texas Senate since 2013, and before that held multiple elected offices in Houston city government and Harris County. “I grew up poor in south Texas, and I came to Houston with everything I owned in a little blue Volkswagen,” she told ELLE.com. “Houston was a welcoming city, and it still is.”

The historical nature of her primary win didn’t register with Garcia. “It didn’t hit me until the morning after the election when I saw the headline in the Houston Chronicle,” she said. The March 7th edition of the newspaper’s all-column headline read: “History in the making.”

Garcia and Escobar are a part of a small number of Democrats likely to be elected to federal office from Texas. Both women support abortion access and women’s right to choose. Garcia voted against Senate Bill 5 in 2-13, the analog to the infamous House Bill 2 that would morph into Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt.

Both women cited President Trump’s policies as motivating factors for their respective campaigns. The summer of the zero-tolerance policy is as clear a signal as any that immigration reform must come immediately, Garcia said. “These inhumane, heartless immigration policies of the Trump administration must stop,” she emphasized. “It is not what America stands for.”

Garcia also said that Congress must “Repeal & Replace ICE” as a part of immigration reform. “It’s out of control. We should not be about tearing families apart,” she added.

“These inhumane, heartless immigration policies of the Trump administration must stop. It is not what America stands for.”

ADVERTISEMENT - CONTINUE READING BELOW

Escobar’s approach is slightly different. To her, running to represent a border city means repealing ICE isn’t the solution when U.S. Customs and Border Protection seems to run virtually unchecked in her district. “I think it’s risky for us to tell supporters that we will abolish ICE when, here in El Paso, we’ve had CBP agency physically prevent asylum seekers from stepping foot on American soil,” she said, adding that every agency under the Department of Homeland Security needs to have “more rigorous accountability measures.”

Both women are eager to rise to the occasion of governing. Escobar talks passionately about the need for a “healthcare for all” system and improving veteran healthcare, while Garcia sees fair immigration reform as a necessary and important issue for Texas to lead on. But for either women to tackle their big plans, voters still have to fill in the ballots in November.

Proud to sit with the fierce, smart, amazing [@GinaOrtizJones](#) at the El Paso Labor Day breakfast, honoring the hard working women and men who fight for us every single day. Solidarity forever! pic.twitter.com/LWTGHIfoD2

— Veronica Escobar (@vgescobar) [September 3, 2018](#)

For Escobar, the fact that history will be made by communities filled with non-white populations is crucial. “If we achieve this,” she said of her potential victory, “then I love that it’s the border that made history.”

It almost seems silly that no Latinas have represented the state of Texas yet. Garcia put it much more succinctly: “It’s about time.”

Correction: A previous version of this article incorrectly stated that Sylvia Escobar phone banked for Sylvester Reyes in 1996. The error has been removed.

Want the latest beauty trend, TV show, or meme explained?

We've got you.

<input type="text"/>	SIGN ME UP.
----------------------	-------------

MORE FROM

POLITICAL NEWS 2021

Who Is Sarm Heslop?

Cori Bush on Bringing Her Activism to Congress

ADVERTISEMENT - CONTINUE READING BELOW

