

CBS Mornings

03/04/26

7:10:59 a.m. Eastern

2 minutes and 14 seconds

ADRIANA DIAZ: Turning to other news, starting with the long awaited Texas Senate primary. CBS News projects Democratic State Representative James Talarico has defeated Congresswoman Jasmine Crockett, while longtime Republican Senator John Cornyn will face a runoff against state Attorney General Ken Paxton, while Paxton is an ally of President Trump, the President did not endorse any candidates in this primary. Ed O'Keefe is in Austin with the latest on this first key vote. It is officially midterm election season, Ed, Good morning.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Talarico Wins TX Democratic Senate Primary]

ED O'KEEFE: That's right. Get excited, Adriana. Good morning. Record Democratic turnout appears to have paid off in Talarico's favor. As you mentioned, CBS News projects that he has defeated Congresswoman Crockett with more than 50 percent of the vote and avoids a runoff in May. The 36-year-old is a state lawmaker from here in the Austin area who put off his seminary studies in order to launch this campaign, believing he can combine support from Democrats, independents in this state and Republicans upset with the President to make — to successfully win. Now, over on the Republican side, failing to get 50 percent of the votes, Senator John Cornyn is now in a runoff with State Attorney General Ken Paxton. The senator is saying last night he won't allow what he called a flawed, self-centered and shameless candidate like Ken Paxton to risk decades of GOP success. Paxton has spent years facing multiple investigations and impeachment attempts and allegations of corruption. He says, while national Republicans may be ready to spend tens of millions of dollars against him, "the people are on our side." Early polling shows Talarico could defeat Paxton in November. That's the nightmare scenario for Republicans. Remember, Democrats haven't won a statewide race in the Lone Star State since back in 1994. One other thing we're watching here in Texas, bad signs for members of the House of Representatives. Already, one of them has lost his job. Dan Crenshaw, he was not endorsed by President Trump, so his more conservative opponent prevailed in that primary and we are keeping an eye on at least two Democratic House incumbents in this state from the Dallas and Houston areas who either are headed to runoffs or may have lost their primaries, and they were in those districts that were redrawn by Republicans in this state at the request of President Trump. Redistricting, Kelly is indeed a factor in these races.

KELLY O'GRADY: It definitely is. Those were some very surprising results, Ed, thank you.

(...)

8:05:26 a.m. Central

4 minutes and 12 seconds

O'GRADY: Now here at home, in the first big vote of the midterm elections, CBS News projects Texas State Representative James Talarico has won the Democratic nomination for U.S. Senate.

Now, the top two GOP candidates, Senator John Cornyn and state attorney general Ken Paxton will now have a runoff. Ed O'Keefe is in Austin where he's been watching them count the votes all night, probably didn't get a wink of sleep before you joined us. Ed, want to ask you, I mean, this race in Texas has garnered so much attention which is rather surprising. Can you break down why?

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Breaking Down the Crucial Texas Primaries]

O'KEEFE: Yeah, it's a totally valid question, Kelly. Three hours of sleep, by the way. Because normally for the Senate contests, they think, Ed, why aren't you in Georgia or Michigan or Maine? Those are the states that have competitive Senate contests, not in Texas where they haven't had one of these since 1994 or even before then? Well, here's the thing. The incumbent Republican senator in this race, John Cornyn, seeking a fifth term had warned that if one of his more conservative, more MAGA-backed challengers got on the ballot, the way this state is changing, there's a chance the Democrats could pick off this seat and win a statewide race here for the first time since 1994, the same night George W. Bush was elected governor. And it's drawn more than \$130 million in ad spending on both sides of the aisle already, making them the most expensive Senate primaries ever, and it's only early March. If you've got another 12 weeks now of Republicans spending money against each other, Cornyn now in this special election — or runoff election with Ken Paxton, that's tens of millions of dollars that they would like to be spending in other states to pick off Democrats. And now, the Democrats get to sit back and make their case between now and November to the Democrats in this state, and what Talarico wants to do is pull support from independents and Republican voters in this state who may be upset with state and national Republican leadership. And we met some of those people here at this event in Austin last night, a signal he may have that support.

DIAZ: And Ed, what do you think Talarico's wins signals for Democrats, especially since he was up against Jasmine Crockett who's in the House?

O'KEEFE: Right. Well, what it is about the way he's approaching things is he is a state lawmaker in parts of Austin where we are and a seminarian who put off his studies for now to mount this campaign. And he's got this Christian progressive approach, that you can be rooted in your faith, in this case he's a Presbyterian, and make sort of a faith-based argument as to why the country needs to change. And he makes this argument that it isn't about left versus right in this country. It's about the top and the bottom, that the billionaires are squeezing the rest of us. And that sort of cross-partisan appeal that you're getting screwed by the wealthy in this country is one that he thinks will resonate, and the early polling suggests it could. So, the signal of the Democrats may be, look, in a time where you want to focus on everything that the President is doing wrong, and that works to build your base, you've got to find a way to, you know, cross over to the other side and pull people over, and one of the arguments that he believes could work is the idea that, you know, billionaires are running the country, corrupt politicians need to go, and, you know, we got to bring everyone together. We'll see.

O'GRADY: Ed, I was a little bit surprised to see that President Trump didn't endorse one of the candidates in the GOP race. Why, and do you think he will now do that that we've got a runoff

that we're going to see?

O'KEEFE: I suspect some of the calls going into the White House this morning, Kelly, are from Senate Republican leadership, saying, sir, now is the time to endorse John Cornyn. This man knows how to win statewide elections. It'll be an easier go for it — go for us in November against Talarico if Cornyn is the nominee. But, Mr. President, if you want us to have to spend tens of millions of dollars in Texas, instead of winning a seat in Michigan, winning back a seat in Georgia, holding on to a seat in North Carolina or up in Maine, then go ahead and endorse Ken Paxton. The thing is Paxton comes from that MAGA wing of the party, right? He was one of his earliest supporters in this state, and the President is always keen to keep his base happy. John Cornyn doesn't have the base of support that Ken Paxton does. It's a real tricky decision for the President to make, if he opts to get in at all.

DIAZ: All right, Ed, thank you so much.