

Vote411 Voters' Mini-Guide

Primary Election April 23, 2024

Pennsylvania State Representative District 34 Democratic Primary

This Voters' Mini-Guide is an excerpt of the Vote411.org online Voters' Guide -- a project of the League of Women Voters. All information in Vote411 Voters' Guides is submitted by the candidates and has not been edited or altered in any way.



***You must be registered as a Democrat to vote in this Democratic Primary contest.
The winner of this election will be the Democratic nominee on the November ballot.***

The 34th Legislative district contains Wilkins Township, Braddock, Braddock Hills, Chalfant, Churchill, East Pittsburgh, Edgewood, Forest Hills, North Braddock, Rankin, Swissvale, Wilkinsburg and a few neighborhoods in the City of Pittsburgh, including Park Place, and parts of Homewood, and Point Breeze.

To vote in this election, you must register by April 8, 2024.

Description of office: The General Assembly is the legislative branch of government in Pennsylvania. It is composed of two houses: the Senate is the upper house, and the House of Representatives is the lower house. A majority vote in both houses is necessary to pass a law. The PA House of Representatives consists of 203 members representing one district each, with an equal number of constituents. Representatives must be at least 21 years old, have been a citizen and a resident of the state four years and a resident of their respective districts one year before their election, and shall reside in their respective districts during their terms of service. The House develops budget packages, makes taxation decisions, allocates spending, and passes laws (including redistricting in collaboration with the Senate). The House also has the exclusive authority to impeach public officials. Representatives also serve on various policy committees that may propose legislation.

Abigail Salisbury

Party: Democratic

Biographical Info:

Occupation: State Representative, Nonprofit Attorney

Education: B.A. Case Western Reserve University, J.D. Pitt Law, MPPM Pitt GSPIA

Qualifications: Incumbent of 1 year, nonprofit attorney, small business owner for 9 years, taught classes on First Amendment Law, international human rights law experience, 5 years on Swissvale Borough Council, former nonprofit executive director.

Campaign Website: <http://salisburyforpa.com>

Facebook URL: <http://facebook.com/SalisburyforPA>

X Handle: twitter.com/SalisburyforPA



Questions:

Q: *What do you see as the most pressing issues facing Pennsylvanians, and how would you address them?*

A: (1) Unconstitutional system of funding public education. On the Appropriations committee, I focus on shifting from a system based on local property taxes, which exacerbates structural inequities. We must instead pool resources at the state level and invest heavily in basic education funding. (2) Infrastructure. Massive state investment in roads, water, and sewage systems is necessary. (3) The burden on 2,560 municipalities to provide public services. I hold intermunicipal meetings for my 13 communities' elected officials, I am working on providing free grant-writing services to low-income municipalities to give them access to state grants. I work on intermunicipal cooperation efforts to help leverage small boroughs' resources.

Q: *What changes would you support making to Pennsylvania's voting laws to expand access, ensure security, and support local election officials and processes?*

A: This year, the primary falls on the Jewish holiday of Passover. As a Jew, I worked hard to try to change the date of the primary so that it would not disenfranchise anyone based on their religion, but ultimately I failed. We must work harder to ensure that scheduling issues known far in advance do not harm voting rights. We must also make it as easy as possible to vote, so that small mistakes on mail-in ballots do not disqualify votes and so that people can leave work to vote in person if they choose.

Q: *What legislation would you support to comply with the Commonwealth Court's ruling that Pennsylvania's school funding system is unconstitutional and must be reformed?*

A: We attempted to work on this last year and failed, so right now the legislation I am focused on will be the budget bill. We just finished up education budget hearings yesterday on Appropriations and I am encouraged to see the increased state investment in school districts with lower incomes and property values, but it is not enough. Once we get through the budget period for this year, it is time to tackle the larger structural issue anew on a caucus level, and new legislation will be developed to do so. I look forward to working with our Education Chair and our leadership to accomplish that goal.

Q: *What changes, if any, would you support making to Pennsylvania's abortion laws?*

A: I support maintaining the right to choose, but that right is meaningless if people do not have the ability to pay for their reproductive healthcare choices. Abortion is healthcare. We must therefore ensure that people have affordable or free access to healthcare in PA.

Ashley Comans

Party: Democratic

Biographical Info:

County: Allegheny

Occupation: Non-Profit Manager

Education: Bachelor of Arts Degree in Mass Media Arts and Communications Studies

Qualifications: Working Mom, Current Wilkinsburg School Board Director, Progressive political organizer, and advocate for addressing maternal and child health outcomes

Campaign Website: <http://ashleycomans.com>

Facebook URL: <http://facebook.com/AshleyRComans>

X Handle: twitter.com/ashleyrcomans

Instagram URL: www.instagram.com/ashleyrcomans/



Questions:

Q: *What do you see as the most pressing issues facing Pennsylvanians, and how would you address them?*

A: The biggest priority should be making life easier for poor and working families because I believe a rising tide lifts all boats. This is connected to all of the struggles that residents in my district know. For me, it means fairly funding our public schools, taking on corporate polluters, investing in clean air and water, and expanding the power and wages of workers. I know that all of these are fights and will require someone who uses this office as an organizing space both in the community and among fellow representatives and other elected officials. We need to bring more people in and engage with them to move the priorities of their community because we have the numbers to win all of these things—we just need to get organized.

Q: *What changes would you support making to Pennsylvania's voting laws to expand access, ensure security, and support local election officials and processes?*

A: I believe that our right to vote is sacred. Voting and registering to vote needs to be made easier and not harder. I applaud our new Allegheny County Executive bringing back voter drop boxes; we should expand them to be available all around the state. I furthermore support automatic voter registration for those who turn 18. I also would push Pennsylvania to join the 11 other states who have already made election days holidays.

Q: *What legislation would you support to comply with the Commonwealth Court's ruling that Pennsylvania's school funding system is unconstitutional and must be reformed?*

A: The court ruling that we are not funding our public schools to our required and equitable amount may be new, but the case was filed in 2014, and this issue goes back even further. We must follow the court's ruling and increase the state's investment for our public schools by \$200 million a year. In addition, we must recognize the years of disinvestment in our schools and begin to remedy it with hundreds of millions more a year invested over a period of time to update our facilities. Property taxes must not be the only way of funding our public schools because our zip codes should not determine our opportunities.

Q: *What changes, if any, would you support making to Pennsylvania's abortion laws?*

A: The overturning of Roe v Wade is one of the most traumatic political events I, and many others, have experienced. In Western PA, we are a beacon for women and birthing people in other states who need or want an abortion. As a state legislator, I will work to enshrine

abortion protections into our state constitution and legislate the appropriate amount of resources for those seeking an abortion - because abortion is healthcare. And as a mom of a young daughter, I will use all of my energy, power, and strength to fight until abortion is legal and safe across the county.