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Election 2020: Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice Nathan Hecht Faces Challengers Amy Clark Meachum, Mark Ash

Here are the Q&As for the chief justice of the Texas Supreme Court.

By Angela Morris | September 03, 2020



(l-r) Texas Supreme Court Republican incumbent Chief Justice Nathan Hecht, Democratic challenger Judge Amy Clark Meachum, and Libertarian challenger Mark Ash. Courtesy photos

In a three-way battle for chief justice of the Texas Supreme Court, Republican incumbent Chief Justice Nathan Hecht is defending his bench from Democratic challenger Amy Clark Meachum and Libertarian challenger Mark Ash.

Texas Lawyer is publishing Q&A articles with judicial candidates running in contested races in November. Early voting runs from Oct. 13 to Oct. 30, which is longer than normal because Gov. Greg Abbott extended the period due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Here are the Q&As for the chief justice of the Texas Supreme Court.

Read more: Texas November 2020 Election Guide: Read This Before Voting for Judge (<https://www.law.com/texaslawyer/2020/09/03/texas-november-2020-election-guide-read-this-before-voting-for-judges/>)

Nathan Hecht

Nathan Hecht is the incumbent chief justice, running as the Republican candidate in the race.

What is one major thing about your career experience that most qualifies you for this position, and why?

My solid record of 31 years' service on the Supreme Court, the longest in history. With my experience, I've been able to help the court clear its docket of argued cases the past five years, provide strong support for access to justice and legal aid for the poor, adopt procedural reforms, and provide guidance for courts through the present pandemic.

What is the main reason that Texas voters should pick you instead of your opponents?

Texas voters can be confident of my proven dedication to the Supreme Court's work, my track record of helping ensure legal aid to hundreds of thousands of our most vulnerable Texans each year, and my ability to help lead the judiciary through crises like Hurricane Harvey and now the coronavirus pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a technological revolution in Texas courts. If you were elected—and keep serving after the pandemic—what technology would you keep using or eliminate, and why?

Debuting on the pandemic stage, video conferencing technology, making it possible to meet and work remotely, is here to stay. It will continue to change the operation of the justice system and the legal profession profoundly. Making electronic records in trial courts directly available to appellate courts can automatically provide records on appeal.

The protests across the country this summer have shown that many people perceive that the justice system is unfair to people of color. What would you say to voters regarding your plans, if elected, to ensure the equal administration of justice for all people?

Not long ago, I helped the Supreme Court produce a "Beyond the Bench Summit," successfully convening hundreds of judges, lawyers, community activists, and teachers to discuss how to ensure that the justice system is, and is perceived to be, fair and equal to all. I plan to repeat such summits. As chair of the Texas Judicial Council, I am working to improve implicit bias training for all judges.

Where can voters go for more information about you?

- Campaign website (<https://justicenathanhecht.com/>)
 - Campaign social media (<https://www.facebook.com/hechtyes>)
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Mark Ash

Houston solo practitioner Mark Ash is running as the Libertarian candidate in the race.

What is one major thing about your career experience that most qualifies you for this position, and why?

I have worked diligently to protect civil liberties of all of my clients as a lawyer.

What is the main reason that Texas voters should pick you instead of your opponents?

I strongly believe in protecting individual civil liberties and property rights for all.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a technological revolution in Texas courts. If you were elected—and keep serving after the pandemic—what technology would you keep using or eliminate, and why?

Technology is a work in progress. I will be open to any reasonable changes suggested by the bar, the court and others.

The protests across the country this summer have shown that many people perceive that the justice system is unfair to people of color. What would you say to voters regarding your plans, if elected, to ensure the equal administration of justice for all people?

Every person's life, liberty and pursuit of happiness that does not infringe on the life, liberty and pursuit of happiness of another individual must be protected. All persons regardless of the person's racial or ethnic background are equal before the law and must be treated with respect. Litigants who do not have a lawyer should be referred to legal aid groups. Also, the courts must make more pro se forms available online that are user friendly for litigants who can't afford an attorney or do not want to have to pay for the services of an attorney.

Where can voters go for more information about you?

- Campaign social media (<https://www.facebook.com/markashfortexascourtofcriminalappeals>)
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Amy Clark Meachum

Judge Amy Clark Meachum of Travis County's 201st District Court is the Democratic candidate in the race.

What is one major thing about your career experience that most qualifies you for this position, and why?

These past six months, I have served as civil presiding judge in Travis County during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our goal was to continue our commitment to due process, access to justice, and equal justice under the law during a pandemic.

Along with the other judges on our leadership team and court administration, we managed to transfer our entire courthouse operation to 100% online to protect the safety of our staff, litigants and the public. We are proud that we are running our dockets at pre-COVID levels on both the civil and family side, and we are doing so safely and remotely. We are trying bench trials, having hearings and handling emergencies, utilizing multiple platforms and retraining judges, staff and lawyers on how to try cases in these difficult times. We are working on a pilot program for jury trials—and one of our Travis County judges recently tried a case to jury—all remotely. I am proud of our commitment to finding 21st century solutions to a 21st century problem.

It is time for a new generation of judicial thought leaders to bring much-needed balance, fairness and common sense to the all-Republican Texas Supreme Court. I am proud to be the first woman in Texas history to run for this position, and I think my long history of fair, reasonable and balanced rulings (and commonsense solutions to complex problems) is important for a state that is changing and a judiciary that is changing with it.

What is the main reason that Texas voters should pick you instead of your opponents?

I have a record of impartiality, good judgment, common sense and fairness. After winning a contested Democratic primary in 2010, I have never been challenged by a primary or general election opponent for my current bench. I believe that speaks to the fairness of my rulings and the quality of my work.

In this moment of cultural, social and legal unrest, I think it is imperative we have someone with a trial-judge's sensibility leading our highest court. We need to remember that laws and legal rulings affect real people and working families.

Moreover, I can serve the entirety of my term for this office. My opponent is required by the Texas Constitution to resign in the middle of his term. We need a new generation of judicial leaders to bring much-needed fairness and impartiality to this all-Republican court.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a technological revolution in Texas courts. If you were elected—and keep serving after the pandemic—what technology would you keep using or eliminate, and why?

Our courts in Travis County transitioned quickly to remote hearings by Zoom and YouTube back in March. We also transitioned to using Box for evidence. But the truth is these are technological stopgaps—not ongoing substitutes—for in-person hearings and trials. The best, fairest, and most efficient proceedings will

always be in-person proceedings. In the meantime, courts and judges will utilize technological solutions available for remote courts—and request that our Legislature and county governments fund these temporary solutions.

We will continue to seek out new software developments that make these proceedings easier to access and fairer for all. Courtroom-specific software is being developed, and I will anxiously await these better solutions and implement them when developed. We have adapted Zoom, YouTube and Box to fit our needs, but there are still aspects of these applications that are less than ideal fits for the courtroom experience.

That said, trial judges need to be back in courtrooms when it is safe. Perhaps these technology solutions will continue in the future for big-dollar cases and where one or both lawyers are out-of-state, but they will be the exception rather than the rule. The issue right now is courthouses are some of the riskiest places to be with an airborne pandemic: crowded, incapable of socially distancing, loud and often emotional public speaking, poor ventilation, etc. But when the federal and state governments manage to get this virus under control, then we will primarily return to in-person proceedings, utilizing the software and technological developments to supplement in-person proceedings—not to supplant them.

The protests across the country this summer have shown that many people perceive that the justice system is unfair to people of color. What would you say to voters regarding your plans, if elected, to ensure the equal administration of justice for all people?

As we work to reform criminal justice and policing issues that disproportionately have negative affects on communities of color, we must broaden that discussion to include ways that lawyers and the courts can help make our civil justice system more fair and just for all Texans. As the Democratic nominee for chief justice of the Supreme Court of Texas (the highest civil court in our state), I believe there are tangible things that we could be doing right now to support the Black Lives Matter movement.

Housing is one area where communities of color have historically suffered immensely from racial discrimination. The Texas Supreme Court needs to immediately reissue the moratorium on debt collections and evictions.

We need to require every judge and lawyer in the state to take implicit-bias training. This is simple and achievable. When I am elected chief justice this fall, we will make this part of the Texas justice system's mission on Day 1.

The State Bar of Texas, at the Supreme Court of Texas' direction, should develop two toll-free hotlines: one hotline to inform Texans about their constitutional rights of free speech and assembly, and a second hotline to inform Texas families about their options concerning access to health care and various COVID-19 relief programs.

Finally, it may seem symbolic, but we need to add a pledge of "equal justice under the law" to the lawyer oath. It is past time to create a more fair and just Texas for all Texans, and every lawyer should commit to "equal justice under the law."

Where can voters go for more information about you?

- Campaign website (<https://www.amymeachum.com/>)
- Campaign social media (<https://www.facebook.com/JudgeAmyforChiefJustice>)

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