

Charles Kuffner

I'm speaking today with State Representative Vikki Goodwin, who represents the District 47 in Austin. She is one of the Democratic candidates for Lieutenant Governor, will be in the runoff in May. So, Representative Goodwin, thank you very much for speaking with me today. May I ask, why are you running for the Office of Lieutenant Governor?

Vikki Goodwin

Thank you, Charles. Well, I am running for the Office of Lieutenant Governor because after serving four terms as a State Representative, I recognize there are things that we can't get done as one single representative among 150 in the Texas Legislature. Some really significant things that need to be done.

We need to support our public schools, which is not what the current Lieutenant Governor is doing. We need to make sure people can get the health care that they need. We need to address housing affordability, and we need to plan better for our future water and energy needs.

So, those are things that the current Lieutenant Governor doesn't have a focus on, and I just decided that really what we need in Texas is someone who has legislative experience running for that very important position.

Charles Kuffner

Okay. As you said, you served four terms in the State House. What would you say are the accomplishments from that time that you're most proud of?

Vikki Goodwin

Gosh, I have really advocated for our public schools. In my first session, I tried to add an amendment to our school funding bill that would have kept the basic allotment, that part of the formula, increasing with inflation with a cap on it. I wish that had passed, and in fact, last session there was an amendment to the school funding bill that was just that, but it was proposed by a Republican this time.

So, across the board, people recognize that we aren't doing what we need to do in terms of funding our public schools, but some of the bills that I have been successful at getting passed, one was around mental health. There's been, again, bipartisan support for efforts around getting mental health treatment services to people that need it. The bill that I passed was brought to me by two licensed professional counselors in my district who had experience giving a treatment called Acudetox.

It's also called 5NP or 5-needle protocol. Prior to us passing the law, it could only be used on people that already had a diagnosis of a chemical addiction. So, in other words, someone who's an alcoholic or a drug user, but they already had to have that diagnosis, and what these licensed professional counselors discovered is that it's beneficial for so many things, depression, anxiety, sleep disorder, PTSD, and so they wanted to make the law expand so that they could treat these other illnesses without a diagnosis, and that's what we got done. In one session, in fact, I told the counselors that it might take more than one session to get it passed, but we had veterans come to the Capitol and testify in favor of it, and so that's

why we were able to get it passed and, you know, have a positive impact on some people with their mental health treatments.

Another one, I passed a drowning prevention law because of a family in my district who unfortunately lost their daughter to drowning. I passed a violence prevention law, again, because of a tragedy where a 21-year-old college student lost her life when a man she dated a couple of times shot her, and we wanted to make sure that other people knew how to keep themselves safe, that they can exit a lease agreement if they don't feel safe in their home, and that they can get a protective order if they don't have the money to hire an attorney. Here's some resources where you can get an attorney to help you out with that, so just providing information basically so people can keep themselves safe. Those are just a few of the laws that I passed.

I was successful at getting some things passed in a bipartisan manner, but then in 2025 when it became known that I was considering, strongly considering, running for lieutenant governor, the current lieutenant governor, Dan Patrick, decided that he didn't want me to be successful, so he told the chairman of the committees not to let my bills out of committee, which is really unfortunate because I had some good bills, a couple of them around housing affordability and helping people who one day might want to be homeowners.

Charles Kuffner

Okay, well we'll talk a bit more about the current lieutenant governor in a minute, but on your priorities, public schools, health care, housing, I think those are fairly broad and generally popular Democratic issues, but you've also talked about water and energy, and I want to talk a little bit about those two things because they're both very much in the news right now, and the first one with water, we're seeing what's going on in Corpus Christi. You know, Governor Abbott, you know, blames the locals for that, and I think some of that is true and there's more blame to go around, but what, you know, what would you advocate for as lieutenant governor to not just try and deal with this particular crisis, but as they're now drilling for water everywhere else, I think it's exacerbating problems in that region, so what's your vision for solving water issues?

Vikki Goodwin

Boy, it's such a big issue, it's hard to say what the one thing is. There's going to be a lot of things that we need to do. We just created this big water fund with a billion dollars a year.

Charles Kuffner

That's the SWIFT fund, I believe?

Vikki Goodwin

Yes, and you know, it got approved by voters and that will allow us to have some new water infrastructure, as well as replacing some of the leaky pipes in the state. However, the experts have told us that amount of money is just a drop in the bucket as far as what we really need, to meet the demands of the future, but in my mind, so the Corpus Christi example is one that I use a lot.

They were going to build a desalinization plant. It initially was going to cost somewhere in the \$100 million range, but then it became \$1.2 billion, and so the city council said we can't afford that. We can't put that price tag on our taxpayers, and so they voted it down.

To me, the issue there is that what needs the water is industry, so why aren't we having industry pay for that infrastructure when they are the ones that need it, and then they're using drinking water that should be going to households or perhaps should be going to agriculture, so I think in this state we aren't putting enough emphasis on these companies paying for the resources that they need. You know, these days we're seeing a lot of data centers and a lot of concern about the amount of water that data centers use. Again, we've just given in 2025 a billion dollars worth of incentives to data centers alone in one year, and that's going to grow, and we aren't doing the planning that's necessary to say how many data centers do we need?

How much water is each of them using? What are the trade-offs? You know, the trade-off is that they're going to be using this water, and who's going to end up paying for the infrastructure to bring the water to them it's going to end up being households and homeowners, and I think that we need to really take a look at that and perhaps readjust our incentives and say if this is a data center that has brought its own infrastructure, is paying for its own infrastructure, then maybe we'll incentivize them, but otherwise no.

Charles Kuffner

Okay, well, and you kind of anticipated my second question because I was going to ask, I am going to ask about data centers, which in addition to being big water users are also big electricity users, which is having downstream effects on municipalities and rate payers, and also turns out that a lot of this data center construction, which is being incentivized by the state, is not necessarily all that popular with localities where these things are being built because they take up a lot of space, they create a lot of noise, they don't generate a lot of jobs, and on the one hand you've got a number of, you know, rural Republican counties pushing back against this. You've also got Senator Paul Bettancourt trying to bully Ken Paxson into issuing an opinion saying that municipalities have no power to stop data center permitting and construction. So where are you on this issue? What would you do as lieutenant governor on the matter of data centers?

Vikki Goodwin

So there's two things. I think that we, I believe in local control. I think cities and counties should have the ability to say this is the right place in the right time for a data center to go in. I think it, when it's left to the locals, they're going to be listening to their constituents, whether it's in the city or the county. You know, right now, cities do have the ability to take a vote if it requires a permit, but if it goes outside the city into the county, there's really not much a county can do, and we've seen where people have really fought back against these data centers, but the county says, well, you know, as long as they meet very minimal guidelines, there's not anything that we can do to stop them from building it here.

So that, it's my second point of the state really needing to do better planning statewide. How many data centers do we need? What are they being used for? Are these all essential? Are we simply building them

to build them? And I think that we should take a step back, look at how, what the need is and what the trade-off is in terms of the amount of energy and water that will be used.

Charles Kuffner

Okay. All these things we're talking about are legislative matters, and as Lieutenant Governor, you would have a lot of power in presiding over the Senate, but you yourself don't introduce bills and don't vote for bills as Lieutenant Governor. So, you know, I think it seems clear that even on the presumption that Senator Rehmet is able to replicate his victory in November, it's still going to be a Republican majority in the Senate. There just aren't that many potentially competitive seats on the ballot in this cycle.

So if you're presiding over a Republican majority Senate, what's your strategy for getting things done that you want to get done and for not getting things done that you don't want to get done?

Vikki Goodwin

Well, I will say, I think that there is some corruption. That's one of the reasons that I'm running. We have both the Governor and Lieutenant Governor with tens of millions of dollars in their campaign accounts. Why is that? Because they get donations from rich donors, which tend to be business owners, which tend to have an interest in certain policy. And so that's why it gets passed.

But when it comes to Senators, individual Senators, even Republican Senators, they don't typically have that same donation history. And so they don't have the same ties. And I think that their policy is going to be more driven by the constituents in their districts.

There was even one of the Republican Senators that wrote a very nice letter about how vouchers were unconstitutional. And so I think when they have new leadership, when they have different leadership setting different priorities, and they can actually go to their constituents and say, what do you want? I think the majority of them are going to agree with the policies that I intend to prioritize. Again, supporting our public schools and education, even higher education, healthcare initiatives, water and energy planning.

So I think there are probably a lot of Senators that are hearing from their constituents about the concerns around data centers. And also now a lot of Senators and representatives throughout the state are hearing about huge transmission lines. I don't know if that has crossed your radar yet because it's more of a DFW to the Permian Basin issue, but landowners are going to lose their land. And these huge transmission lines are being planned from, like I said, the Permian Basin to the DFW area. And we're starting to hear some rumbling about a lot of concerns.

Charles Kuffner

Yeah. I mean, Texas does have an issue of needing more transmission capability, but obviously that has its downstream effects. I mean, one of the powers that the Lieutenant Governor wields is in procedural and administrative matters, assigning committees and chairs and setting the calendar for what bills get voted on.

Lieutenant Governor Patrick, especially in more recent sessions, has been very explicitly partisan. He is hewn to a line of no Democratic chairs, really limited the ability of Democrats to have an effect in the committee process. And also, you know, he has thoroughly deprioritized not only the Democratic Senators' bills, but Democratic House members' bills.

You know, you could, as Lieutenant Governor, give them a taste of their own medicine, or you could try to restore things back to more of a, shall we say, pre-Dan Patrick normal. What's the approach that you would take?

Vikki Goodwin

You know, I want to really dig into what is the experience and background of the Senators, and what makes the most sense. What does it make sense to have in terms of chairman of the committees and members of the committees? You know, I think a lot of it will go lean, obviously, when I'm Lieutenant Governor, I'm going to lean towards giving chairmanships to Democrats.

But there's a lot of committees and a lot of work that has to be done in the Senate, and there aren't as many Senators as there are Representatives. So I don't know what that would look like. There may be a case where I feel like a Republican Senator has the background and experience for one of the committees to be the head of it. But, you know, I certainly will want to give some opportunity to some of these senior Democratic Senators who haven't had that opportunity with Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick.

Charles Kuffner

Lieutenant Governor Patrick has certainly left his mark on Texas politics in the 20 years that he's been in the Senate, both as Senator and as Lieutenant Governor. It seems that he's out of step with public opinion on at least two fairly high profile issues, those being expanded gambling and, you know, cannabis hemp. He took a very strong position for outlawing hemp in the last session, you know, following a 2019 bill that perhaps unintentionally legalized it by the legislature.

You know, his bill passed and was, you know, his favorite bill passed in both chambers and was then vetoed by Governor Abbott. And then nothing happened in the special session. And then Governor Abbott issued this executive order, which is now being challenged in court by a coalition of businesses, or at least the DHS, DSHS interpretation of it.

So my question to you, let's break it down in two parts. Where do you stand on the cannabis hemp issue? And what approach would you favor as Lieutenant Governor? And where do you stand on expanded gambling? And what approach would you take?

Vikki Goodwin

Well, the simple answer to the hemp question is that I believe that we should treat it similar to alcohol, regulate it, have age restrictions, have marketing restrictions, make sure that people know what it is they're ingesting. But we had over 600 people come to the Capitol testifying against the all-out banning of hemp and THC. And I tend to agree with them.

I have friends and neighbors who've had cancer or MS and swear by the positive impacts that hemp products, cannabinoids and things like that have provided to them. And so I think we should make it legal again, and allow for testing and understanding of the impacts that it's having on people. I know there had been concern about some of the synthetic products and the process that you put the flowers through or what have you to get Delta A, Delta 9. I'm not an expert on all this. But let's make sure that what is being sold in these retail establishments is safe. Yes, I absolutely agree with that. But I don't agree with an all-out ban.

And when it comes to casino gambling, I think that because we travel freely across state lines, we can go to Oklahoma, Louisiana, New Mexico, Nevada, where gambling is legal, why not have it here. So I'm not against gambling, I would be okay with either putting it up to a vote of the people of the state, or simply coming up with a bill that provides for casino resorts to be here in Texas.

Charles Kuffner

And just to expand on the question about hemp, you know, you can't talk about hemp, but not also talk about marijuana. Where do you stand on that? Do you favor, like, changing up, you know, like, dialing back criminal penalties? Do you favor decriminalization? Where are you on this issue?

Vikki Goodwin

Yeah, I certainly think for small quantities of marijuana, we've been, the legislature has been trying to decriminalize that for many years. And I agree with that. Why are we putting people in jail or prison for small amounts? They're not drug dealers. They're just using it themselves.

When it gets to do we want to full out, make marijuana legal that I would probably consult with other folks and senators and experts and find out, you know, is this really what we want as a state? Certainly, what we did to legalize hemp in 2019, that created all this business that we have recently shuttered, I would like to take us back to where those businesses are legal again.

Charles Kuffner

Okay. And it's a federal issue, but it's certainly something the states are dealing with. We got to talk about immigration, immigration enforcement, the border. The state has spent a ton of money on border enforcement, whatever that means. It seems more like a boondoggle than anything else.

I'm not even going to get into specifics here. What's, what's, where, where are you on this? What's, what is your approach going to be? Again, bearing in mind that, you know, there's only so much you can do since the Senate is still going to be a Republican majority, no matter what else happens.

Vikki Goodwin

Yeah. Yeah. Again, this is a pretty complicated issue. We have a lot going on here. The most recent top of mind issue is building a border wall in Big Bend. There's been a huge pushback against that from both Republicans and Democrats because of the terrain of much of the area where they're suggesting a wall would go.

Of course, since in recent days, there's been some talk about, well, the administration has said that they're not going to put a wall inside Big Bend State Park or Federal Park. But I'm not sure I trust that until we see that, you know, no more movement on building a wall there.

Okay, let's talk about Operation Lone Star. The state of Texas, the legislature asked the federal government for reimbursement of billions of dollars spent on Operation Lone Star. We, that was meant for when there's a surge of people coming across the border, which we haven't seen in a long time, billions of dollars being spent very ineffectively. And admittedly, the Texas legislature asking for reimbursement is because this is a federal issue.

And we should not be taking that on as a state, billions of dollars that we could be spending on better things like education and healthcare. And so I would really want to take a deep look at what we're doing. There have been Republicans, even that say we're spending too much on Operation Lone Star.

So the idea should be that we want to make sure we're not allowing criminals into the state. But unfortunately, what's happening now is, is we have an administration that is detaining and deporting people who aren't criminals. We've heard story after story of folks who should not have been picked up and detained, but have been and children that are being really traumatized and harmed and not getting the medical care or food that they need. So there's a lot of issues in that one issue.

Charles Kuffner

And one more issue to talk about is vouchers. The voucher program is now open. You know, there are a number of questions like about what actually qualifies as school versus a vendor. You've got that Florida virtual school that seems to have snuck in. Questions about, you know, whether certain types of religious schools are being allowed, you know, with a lot of yapping about Islamic schools.

You know, we're not going to undo this program. I know you opposed it. Most Democrats did. What, you know, what sorts of things would you want to do with this program in terms of oversight in terms of changes that you think you could realistically get done as lieutenant governor?

Vikki Goodwin

Well, I feel very firmly and strongly about vouchers taking money away from our public schools. And I am firmly against sending our public tax dollars to private schools, oftentimes religious private schools. So my goal and objective would be to pass a budget that does not include any funding for a private school voucher program that I believe is something that the lieutenant governor has the ability to do.

Repealing the law, yes, I think that's important too. But if you don't fund something, it really can't happen. I just think we saw that with the applications, 75%, I believe were from families that didn't have kids in public schools already. And that was one of the concerns was that this is going to go to families who already send their kids to private school. And, you know, the claim was that this is to help kids that are in failing public schools. But unfortunately, we also are hearing story after story about how our school districts are having larger deficit budgets.

And Austin Independent School District, where my kids went to school, is facing over a hundred million dollar deficit. They've got to figure out, you know, which positions are we eliminating? What schools are we closing? It's really devastating our public school system. And so we've got to end the voucher program and really support our public schools.

Charles Kuffner

I'm going to ask you two campaign related questions before we finish up. Mike Collier, who has run as a Democrat for lieutenant governor in the last couple cycles, announced that he was going to run again as an independent. That's a hard thing to do, is you got to collect a lot of petition signatures from people who didn't run in primary, who didn't vote in the primaries. And a lot of people voted in the primaries. Have you heard anything about this? You know where he is? Do you have any insight into his thinking as to why this would be a good idea?

Vikki Goodwin

You know, there's a lot to unpack there. I heard about it. I actually had a good relationship with Mike Collier after, you know, I supported him when he ran previously. We had conversations after the defeat in 2022. I was so disappointed, you know, in those statewide races in 2022 that I reached out to the candidates and said, what do we need to do differently?

Well, you know, independents really just don't have the ability to win. So I don't know if what went through his mind is that there are some Republicans who just simply will not ever vote for a Democrat, and I'm going to peel away those voters. I don't know. I really don't know what his thinking is, because initially he had told me he was not going to run.

When he made the announcement that he would, he also went to a and mentioned the fact that he's got to collect these over 80,000 signatures, and how hard that would be, and he didn't, with that group, ask them for money, or he didn't ask them to not vote in the primary so they could sign his petition. It was just kind of a statement of, here's what it would take. I think it's a really high bar, and I will be surprised if he is able to get the signatures that he needs, again, given, like you said, the really high turnout in the primary this year.

Charles Kuffner

There's a lot of excitement behind the candidacy of James Tallarico, your colleague in the House for Senate. He's raising a bunch of money. This is not the first time we've seen Democratic Senate candidates raise a bunch of money. Colin Allred did. Beto O'Rourke did. MJ Hagar raised a decent amount of money. She was the weakest of the four, unfortunately.

Yet, while we've had strong or strongly funded Senate candidates, that tends to be the only candidate on the Democratic side that's raised any money, except for a year like when Wendy Davis ran for governor, and that didn't turn out so well. We've got, hopefully, some viable candidates for other positions.

Where are you on raising money, and what is the prospect for getting more funding specifically for the state races, governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, all very important? Talk to me a little bit about that, please.

Vikki Goodwin

Yeah. The one really exciting thing about this campaign cycle is that we have a Democrat running for everything, for every congressional seat, every state house, state senate, state board of education, which is great. But on the flip side, you have all of those candidates reaching out, calling, and asking for donations.

Democrats don't tend to have the same amount of money as the Republican donors do, and so it's been a challenge. A lot of us are hearing, well, I donated to James Talarico. Sometimes I hear, I've donated to Gina Hinojosa, and so therefore, I don't have more dollars for you. So it's been a struggle. I'm approaching \$1 million raised. Our goal is to raise around \$5 million, but we're not going to get the \$40 million that Dan Patrick has in his war chest.

I think that's problematic. I think we've got to have campaign contribution limitations. Here in Texas, any individual can give any amount of money they want to any candidate, and that just leads to corruption. We saw that Ken Paxton actually gave and loaned \$3 million to Dan Patrick before Dan Patrick was the head judge in the impeachment trial, and then, oh, gee, surprisingly, he was acquitted. So I think that we've got to put some rules around our campaign contributions.

But in the meantime, for this campaign cycle, I think Democrats are going to continue to do the work to reach out to donors and raise as much money as we can to get our names out there. I really wish that the media would pick up a little bit more on some of these stories about candidates such as myself. I recently heard on the news, I think it was NPR, that did a story on the runoff elections for Texas statewide races, and I was like, oh, good, they're going to talk about the lieutenant governor race. But no, it was about the attorney general race, and 90% of the time was on the Republican candidates that were in the runoff, that I think they mentioned the Democratic names of Nathan Johnson and Joe Jaworski, but just in passing, and they did not even mention the lieutenant governor runoff race. So it's almost as though it doesn't matter because people have this preconceived idea that Dan Patrick's going to win again. But I can tell you, that is not the case.

Charles Kuffner

All right. Well, in order to defeat Dan Patrick in November, you first have to win your primary runoff. I spoke to Marcos Velez before, he certainly seems like an earnest and well-intentioned, capable fellow. But people are going to have to choose between the two of you on May 26. So when they do that, when people vote in this primary runoff, why should they vote for you to be the Democratic nominee for lieutenant governor, and not your opponent?

Vikki Goodwin

It really comes down to experience. We have the same values and priorities, but we don't have the same experience. You know, I like what the Houston Chronicle wrote about the Senate being a snake pit and Representative Goodwin being ready to wrangle the snakes. You know, the legislature is a tricky place. It's not easy to pass laws. It's not easy to know how things work in the legislature and know who the personalities are. And that is such a huge advantage. Lieutenant governor is a very powerful position, and it's really not something that is meant for on-the-job training.

Charles Kuffner

Okay. Representative Vikki Goodwin, thank you very much for speaking with me today.

Vikki Goodwin

Thank you, Charles. Appreciate it.