



CIVICS IN REAL LIFE

Special Elections

Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how “We the People” interact with the government and each other. Let’s help each other expand our civic literacy.

The United States House of Representatives is the “People’s House.” As such, all who serve in it are elected by the people from the respective states. Regardless of whether a U.S. representative is from Florida or Alaska, the time, place, and manner under which they are elected is the same. This is also true if a vacancy should arise because of death or resignation. When these circumstances arise, and they do, [Article I, Section 2, Clause 4](#) of the U.S. Constitution, requires that a state’s governor issue a writ of election for the people to fill the vacancy. When this happens, it is called a [special election](#).

So far, the [119th Congress will undergo four special elections](#). Florida’s 1st congressional district and 6th congressional district will be decided by a special election on April 1, 2025. Arizona will have a special election for its 7th congressional district on September 23, 2025. Florida’s special elections are occurring because members of the House resigned to join the Trump Administration as either cabinet members or presidential advisors (although Florida’s Matt Gaetz later withdrew himself from consideration for attorney general). Arizona’s special election is occurring because of the [death of Rep. Raul Grijalva \(D\)](#) on March 13, 2025. Texas will be scheduling one in the near future due to the [death of Rep. Sylvester Turner \(D\)](#). If history is any indication, there will be more special elections to come. From the 113th Congress to the 188th Congress, 80 special elections were held.

As the Constitution grants the governor of each state the power to issue a writ of election, it is solely in their power (or determined by state statute) to decide when the special election is scheduled, and its timing may have political implications.

For example, the most recent special elections to take place will occur in Florida and Texas. While both states are led by Republican governors, Florida is filling seats formerly held by Republican representatives while Texas needs to fill a vacancy in a Democratically held congressional district.

In Florida, the special elections taking place on April 1, 2025 are to [fill the vacancies](#) in the 1st and 6th congressional districts. Within days after U.S. Reps. Matt Gaetz and Mike Waltz resigned from those seats, Governor DeSantis [called for special congressional elections](#) with a January 28th primary election and an April 1st general election. In the 2024 general election, Republican Gaetz won the 1st congressional district with 66% of the vote. Republican Waltz won the 6th congressional district with 67% of the vote. Republican candidates have won those two congressional districts for the past 25 years.

In Texas, [Rep. Sylvester Turner](#), a Democrat, passed away on March 5, 2025. This means that Governor Abbott can issue a writ of election in the very near future for the people of Texas’s 18th congressional district to elect their next member of the U.S. House of Representatives. As the 18th District leans Democratic in heavily Republican Texas, pundits have [implied](#) that Governor Abbot has been in no rush to call for a special election, suggesting that delaying the special election to replace the late Rep. Turner is an attempt to support the narrow Republican majority in the U.S. House of Representatives. In the meantime, this vacancy leaves the Democratic Party with one fewer vote in the U.S. House of Representatives.



Under [Texas law](#), there is not a deadline for the governor to call a special election. The law states, “if a vacancy in office is to be filled by special election, the election shall be ordered as soon as practicable after the vacancy occurs...” Once Governor Abbot issues his writ, the special election must take place on the next uniform election date. The governor does have the power to call for an “emergency” special election which allows it to take place outside the May or November uniform election dates.

The next uniform election date for Texas is May 3, 2025. But given other requirements in state election law and time needed to prepare voting materials, Abbot would have had to order the special election by March 18th for it to take place in May. So unless Abbot declares an “emergency” special election, the next opportunity for voters in the 18th Congressional District will not be until November.

When one political party has just a slim majority in the U.S. House of Representatives, special elections can play an important role. However, congressional elections are a central tenet of our republic, so no matter the circumstances under which they occur, or the politics that may be played, it is because of constitutional guarantees that the people of the respective states always elect their representatives.

To Think and To Do: Go to your [Secretary of State’s website](#) (select your state) and research the election laws for your state. How do special elections for congressional seats work in your state? Do the election statutes of your state set parameters under which the governor must call a special election? Explain.

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