

# Congressional campaign pits Mavericks Fletcher, Hunt



Lizzie Pannill Fletcher ('93) and Wesley Hunt ('00), as they appeared in their SJS senior yearbook portraits. Fletcher was a features editor for the Review and head cheerleader. Hunt captained the football and basketball teams. (Design based on the New York Times "Debatable" column.)

By Ella West

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION AND DESIGN BY Grace Randall

In a marquee election for Texas' 7th Congressional District, a traditionally Republican stronghold until 2018, St. John's alums Lizzie Fletcher and Wesley Hunt went head to head on Nov. 3, with Fletcher winning reelection by over 10,000 votes.

Congresswoman Fletcher ('93) was victorious in her first-ever campaign when she defeated John Culberson as part of the "Blue Wave" of 2018 that shifted the majority in the U.S. House of Representatives. The district had been represented since 1967 by Republicans, including future president George H. W. Bush.

One of Fletcher's proudest accomplishments in her first term has been teaming up with Republican colleagues to pass the Hazard Eligibility and Local Projects Act, a bill that sought to accelerate disaster recovery funding by cutting federal red tape. The bill passed in December with bipartisan support, 409 to 7, during one of the most politically charged sessions of Congress.

"This bill is just one example of common-sense, meaningful legislation," Fletcher said in a phone interview with the Review. "And this was a result of a partnership with our community in Houston in order to address challenges that we saw after Hurricane Harvey to come up with a solution that would benefit all Americans."



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The emphasis on intellectual curiosity, on learning, on community and on selfless service is really central to my values and my worldview today.

LIZZIE FLETCHER

Hunt ('00) is a newcomer to politics who won the Republican primary outright in March. A West Point graduate, he spent eight years in the Army as an Aviation Branch Officer. He touts his military experience as preparation for seeking elected office.

"I have been engaged by the enemy, and I have had to

engage the enemy with lethal force as well," Hunt said in a phone interview. "When you are in a position like that, you have to be very cautious and judicious with what you do because your life and other people's lives are on the line. That experience is similar to what running for office is like."

Fletcher has campaigned against other SJS alums before. She won the 2018 Democratic primary against a crowded field that included Alex Triantaphyllis ('02) in the first round and Laura Moser ('95) in the runoff.

"The number of St. John's students involved in politics really speaks to the engagement of the students and the emphasis on service that was such an important part of our time at St. John's," Fletcher said.

Hunt agrees that having two alums running in the same district is a reflection on St. John's.

"It just goes to show that [St. John's] is a very special place because you have two people running for Congress from the same high school that come from very different backgrounds. Yet here we are, from the same high school, running for the same seat, but from different parties," Hunt said. "St. John's [teaches you] how to think, not what to think."

Including Fletcher, three members of her Washington D.C. team are SJS alums: Chief of Staff Sarah Kaplan Feinmann ('07) and Senior Legislative Assistant Cameron Hull ('14).

"We have the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s covered," Fletcher said. "I'm really proud of what our team has done during my first term in office."

Fletcher cited the Big Bend trip in eighth grade as the most meaningful experience in her 13 years at St. John's. As a senior, she was the features editor for the Review and head cheerleader.

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Fletcher took her experiences from both SJS and Houston to the Capitol during her first term.

"My campaign has always been about taking Houston values to Washington," Fletcher said. "Our core community values in Houston are inclusion, innovation and collaboration, and that is exactly what my campaign has really been about. I have been committed to working to ensure that these values result in progress in equality and opportunity for all Americans."

As a student, Hunt was captain of both the football and basketball teams. He still frequents the St. John's weight room to stay in shape.

Hunt credits St. John's with providing him a safe space to become the person he is despite being only one of a handful of Black students.

"Being a minority in a predominately white environment, I got used to believing who I was as a person and not seeking validation from others," Hunt said.



What I will forever be indebted to St. John's for is that SJS taught me how to think, not what to think.

WESLEY HUNT

Hunt, who is also a member of the St. John's Board of Trustees, said he values his St. John's community ties.

"Running for Congress in a city like Houston, the connections that I have made here have formed the most important network of my entire life now that I am running for office," he said.

Hunt's time in the military influenced his political beliefs as well.

"My experiences, in particular my military service, church and values, guided me to being a Republican," Hunt said. "I am less focused on divisions of race and less engaged in that because I have been trained over time to look at values and character way before I am concerned about someone's race, religion or sexual orientation."

Hunt is also connected to the School through his sister D'Hania, who is an Associate Director of Admission.

Hunt was the 2014 Commencement speaker and most recently spoke at Veterans Day Chapel last year.

Fletcher has organized class reunions and kept in touch with classmates and former teachers. She has spoken to WHEE and SPEC, and in 2018, she participated in a Review podcast with sisters Shelley Stein ('88), a French teacher, Review adviser and SJS parent, and author and fellow SJS parent Katherine Center ('90). Together, they keep Fletcher up-to-date on campus news.

Fletcher will be sworn in on Jan. 3.

Additional reporting by Max Beard