

DANICA ROEM

b. September 30, 1984

TRANSGENDER STATE LEGISLATOR

“What I hope people across the country are able to see in [our victories] is that transgender people can be really good at doing their jobs in elected office; we can make really good legislators.”

She is the first openly transgender person in the U.S. to win a seat in a state legislature.

Danica Roem is a journalist and the first openly transgender person in the United States to win a seat in a state legislature. On November 7, 2017, she was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates.

Roem was born male and raised in Manassas, Virginia. Her father committed suicide when she was 3, and her maternal grandfather, Anthony Oliveto, helped raise her. Oliveto instilled in Roem a passion for reading newspapers, which influenced her interest in journalism.

In 2006 Roem graduated with a degree in journalism from St. Bonaventure University in New York. Her college professors described her as a student who

worked for those whose voices were ignored. Her interest in politics was sparked initially in 2004 when President George W. Bush proposed a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage.

Roem secured her first job after college at the Gainesville Times in Virginia. She worked for the paper for nine years as a lead reporter and also wrote for the Prince William Times in Manassas, Virginia. The Virginia Press Association honored her with seven awards.

In 2012, 28-year-old Roem began the transition to female—from Dan to Danica. Three years later, she became a news editor at the Montgomery County Sentinel in Rockville, Maryland. She left the paper in 2016 to pursue a career in politics.

Rip Sullivan, state delegate and recruiting chair of the Virginia House Democratic Caucus, reached out to Roem to run for state delegate. She accepted the challenge and successfully defeated Republican incumbent Bob Marshall, who had represented the district for 13 years. As the state's self-described “chief homophobe,” Marshall sponsored Virginia's “bathroom bill,” designed to restrict the use of public restrooms by transgender people, along with a bill to end same-sex marriage.

Progressives endorsed Roem, including former Vice President Joe Biden and groups such as the Victory Fund, EMILY's List, the Human Rights Campaign and the Progressive Change Campaign Committee.

Roem's campaign raised over \$500,000—three times more than her opponent. She received more than a thousand donations under \$100, the second highest number of any Virginia delegate candidate.

Roem defeated Marshall by approximately eight percentage points. Her victory was hailed nationally as a milestone for transgender rights. In January 2018 she and other newly elected female politicians appeared on the cover of TIME magazine.



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