

Subject: RE: Public Information Request (TX-SOS-22-0155) PIR 22-0221
Date: Monday, March 7, 2022 at 3:51:19 PM Eastern Standard Time
From: GeneralCounsel
To: 'AO Records'
CC: GeneralCounsel
Attachments: 3-7-22 15 Day Letter to OAG - American Oversight PIR 22-0221.pdf, 3-7-22 15 Day Letter to Requestor - American Oversight PIR 22-0221.pdf, 3.7.22 Documents.zip, How to appeal the withholding of information under 552.136.pdf

EXTERNAL SENDER

Good afternoon,

Please see the attached letter, with enclosures, in response to your request for information under Chapter 552 of the Texas Government Code.

The responsive documents contain email addresses of the general public. An email address of a member of the public is confidential under section 552.137 of the Texas Government Code. The attorney general authorized all governmental bodies to withhold an email address of a member of the public without first requesting an attorney general opinion in Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009). Thus, this information has been redacted.

The information you requested also contains an access device number that is collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental body. This information is confidential under section 552.136 of the Texas Government Code. Section 552.136 allows us to withhold this specific information without requesting a ruling from the attorney general. You have the right to appeal our decision to withhold this information from you. Instructions for appeal are attached. If you do not want to appeal, you do not need to do anything else.

As stated in the letter, we require more time to continue reviewing our records and produce additional responsive information. We will provide you additional responsive documents—to the extent such information is not excepted from disclosure under state or federal law—by 5:00 p.m. on April 4, 2022. *See* Tex. Gov't Code § 552.221(d).

Kind regards,

Jennifer Williams
Legal Assistant to the General Counsel
Office of the Texas Secretary of State

How to appeal the withholding of information under Government Code Section 552.136

If you wish to appeal the withholding of information discussed on the previous page, you must send the following to the attorney general:

- 1) a signed, written statement indicating your wish to appeal the withholding of information;
- 2) the name of the governmental body that withheld information from you;
- 3) the date you made your original request for information; and
- 4) a copy of your original request for information, or if you are unable to provide a copy, a description of your original request for information.

You may also submit written comments stating why you think the information should be released to you, but you are not required to do so.

Send your appeal by mail to the attorney general at:

Open Records Division
P.O. Box 12548
Austin, Texas 78711-2548

Within forty-five business days after receiving all of the above-listed items necessary to file your appeal, the attorney general will issue a written ruling on the matter. You will receive a copy of this ruling in the mail.

From: John Scott
Sent: Wednesday, February 9, 2022 1:20 PM
To: Scott Marvel
Subject: Accepted: Texas Election Integrity working session

From: [Sam Taylor](#)
To: ["michael.scarpello@dallascounty.org"](mailto:michael.scarpello@dallascounty.org)
Cc: [John Scott](#); [Keith Ingram](#)
Subject: Dallas County - Partial Manual Count - November 2020
Date: Wednesday, December 29, 2021 4:37:08 PM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[Dallas County Partial Manual Count November 2020 Election.xlsx](#)
Sensitivity: Personal

Hi Michael,

Thanks for chatting earlier and apologies for bothering you on your travels! I've attached the chart of the partial manual count numbers that your office provided us after the November 2020 election.

You'll see the red highlighted cells (J15 and K15) show that the electronic count for candidate Matt Sterett was 1, while the manual count was 11. We presume this was because of a data entry/clerical error, but wanted to make sure and confirm with your office.

Please let us know if y'all have any information on this you'd like to provide so we can note it in our progress report.

Much appreciated!

Best,

Sam Taylor

Assistant Secretary of State for Communications

Office of the Texas Secretary of State

smtaylor@sos.texas.gov

Office: 512-463-6116

Cell: 512-538-5293



From: Sam Taylor
Sent: Monday, January 10, 2022 8:41 AM
Subject: SOS Morning News Clips 1/10/22

Sensitivity: Personal



Texas Secretary of State Morning News Clips January 10, 2022

[**GOP push for handing-counting paper ballots is latest effort to cast doubt on elections**](#), *CNN*, January 10, 2022

[**Getting ready for the Texas primary elections**](#), *KBTX-TV*, January 7, 2022

[**Lubbock Co. making the switch to paper-based voting system**](#), *KAMC-TV*, January 7, 2022

[**New voting system will cost Lubbock County around \\$4 million up front**](#), *KCBD-TV*, January 7, 2022

[**Texas GOP's voting meme shows how Trump-style messaging wins internet's attention**](#), *Texas Tribune*, January 8, 2022

[**Voter registration deadline looms**](#), *Kerrville Daily Times*, January 7, 2022

[**Mosley Hired As County Elections Administrator**](#), *Graham Leader*, January 8, 2022

[**Community groups promote the importance of voting to those who were formally incarcerated**](#), *WOAI-TV*, January 8, 2022

[**Court rejects state Rep. Art Fierro's effort to rule Rep. Claudia Ordaz Perez ineligible to challenge him in Democratic primary**](#), *El Paso Matters*, January 7, 2022

[**Texas Supreme Court denies GOP challenge to Harris County's redistricting plan**](#), *Houston Public Media*, January 7, 2022

[**Shelley Luther, anti-lockdown activist and GOP candidate, said Chinese students should be banned from Texas universities**](#), *Texas Tribune*, January 7, 2022

[Invoking Jan. 6, Dems pivot to fight for voting legislation](#), *Associated Press*, January 10, 2022

['More soul searching:' Facebook's former elections boss speaks out about the platform](#), *CNN Business*, January 9, 2022

[Democratic elections lawyer Marc Elias fights court sanctions as he gears up for midterm elections](#), *Washington Examiner*, January 7, 2022

[Jury selection underway in trial of alleged U.S. consulate employee assassin, accomplice](#), *Border Report*, January 7, 2022

[Mexico charges 7 in 'Fast and Furious' weapons trafficking](#), *Associated Press*, January 9, 2022

[Human smuggling continues to be on the rise in South Texas](#), *KENS-TV*, January 7, 2022

[Mexico cracks down on migrants from Venezuela, will require travel visas](#), *Border Report*, January 7, 2022

[Moderna gives Mexico 2.7 million shots as deaths top 300,000](#), *Associated Press*, January 8, 2022

[Abbott: I'm supporting a billion dollar electrical power line to the RGV](#), *Rio Grande Guardian*, January 9, 2022

[Analysis: A Texas election in the shade of government's third branch](#), *Texas Tribune*, January 10, 2022

[Editorial: The strange silence around Texas election audit](#), *Dallas Morning News*, January 9, 2022

GOP push for hand-counting paper ballots is latest effort to cast doubt on elections

Kelly Mena

CNN

January 10, 2022

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/10/politics/republicans-push-for-hand-counting-paper-ballots/index.html>

(CNN) – After more than a year of baselessly questioning the results of the 2020 election, some Republicans are casting doubt on how ballots are counted, part of a broader movement inspired by former President Donald Trump's lies about election fraud that is undermining confidence in America's vote.

In at least three states -- Utah, New Hampshire and Texas -- Republicans have pushed for banning traditional ballot scanning machines in favor of hand-counting paper ballots, an antiquated process that experts fear could inject error into an election system where very little has been found. Critics also worry that the inevitable delay in results from hand counting would be an opportunity for those looking to sow doubt about the outcome of future contests.

Republicans have already seized on Trump's unfounded claims to launch partisan audits and enact restrictive voting laws ahead of this year's midterms. And now they're targeting the tabulation of votes by suggesting, without evidence, that there's a problem -- even in places where Trump or down-ballot Republicans won in 2020.

One GOP county chair in Texas, for example, said he has "concerns" about the election, even though Trump won the Lone Star State by more than 630,000 votes, and there's no evidence that fraud or irregularities influenced results there or anywhere else.

"I trust people. I don't trust electronics," Daniel Rogers, chair of the Republican Party in Potter County in the Texas Panhandle, told CNN in explaining his push for hand counting ballots. "I have computers; they don't always do what we want."

Returning to hand counting ballots is not a new concept. Punch-card ballots, which were miscounted by voting machines in Florida due to hanging bits of paper ("hanging chads") became a point of contention in the disputed 2000 election. Since then, voting machines have come under increased scrutiny, which Republicans have intensified after Trump began launching baseless allegations of fraud.

But the premise behind moving back to hand-counting -- that it's somehow more secure -- isn't supported by much evidence.

Douglas Jones, a retired professor of computer science at the University of Iowa and a voting machine expert, said there are rare instances in which voting machines could cause major election issues. But it usually takes a human to mess things up.

"In the United States, the mechanical voting machine doesn't make any clerical errors unless someone makes an error in configuring the machine, and then they are huge," Jones told CNN.

Hand counting only works in elections where there is one issue on the ballot, like special elections or in off-cycle election years, he said. In larger elections where there are multiple candidates and positions to fill, Jones said, voting machines are best because hand counts are then subject to "clerical errors," such as the possibility of election officials forgetting to include a precinct in the final results or counting a precinct twice.

Jones characterized the isolated instances of vote discrepancies that some Republicans have seized upon -- none of which have influenced results -- as no more than "sloppiness."

"They tend to be reporting sloppiness that's quite real. But it doesn't amount to a systematic deal. It amounts to people under high pressure, trying to get things done quickly and making mistakes," Jones said.

Those "same mistakes you can make when you're hand counting," he added.

Republicans seize on small-town New Hampshire controversy

Republicans in the New Hampshire state House have pre-filed proposed legislation that would ban the use of ballot-scanning machines in favor of hand counting ballots.

State Rep. Norman Silber, one of the sponsors, told CNN that the bill is about restoring what he thinks is lost confidence in the voting process. But the bill is sparking criticism from Democrats, like state Rep. Matt Wilhelm, who told The New York Times last month that drawing out time to announce results could create more opportunities for challenges to the election's legitimacy.

"If they've got an additional window of time of hours, days, weeks when Granite Staters don't know the results of the election that they just participated in, that's going to cast doubt on our democratic institutions," Wilhelm told the newspaper.

In making the case for the bill, Silber pointed to a discrepancy over 2020 state legislative results in the small town of Windham, which Trump and his allies had seized on to cast doubt about the election. (Trump lost the Granite State by nearly 60,000 votes -- a much more significant deficit than the votes in question in Windham.)

The controversy began when a hand recount requested by one of the losing candidates found that decades-old machines had undercounted ballots for four Republican state legislative candidates by about 300 votes and overcounted by 99 the votes for a Democratic candidate. Those small discrepancies, however, didn't make any difference in the overall results -- the four Republicans still won and the Democrat lost.

GOP Gov. Chris Sununu then signed a measure authorizing an audit, but even he said at the time that an isolated incident like the one in Windham was not a reason to worry about the state's elections. "New Hampshire elections are safe, secure, and reliable," he said last April. "Out of the hundreds of thousands of ballots cast this last year, we saw only very minor, isolated issues -- which is proof our system works."

The audit revealed the cause of the discrepancy to be "folds" through vote bubbles on some absentee ballots resulting from election officials using "a machine to fold absentee ballots," according to a report from the secretary of state and attorney general's offices.

"We found no basis to believe that the miscounts found in Windham indicate a pattern of partisan bias or a failed election," read the state's report.

And Deputy Secretary of State David Scanlan, a former Republican state representative, pushed back against the notion that the Windham incident was a problem with the scanning machines, saying it stemmed from the decision by the local election officials to use a "folding machine that was in the office" due to the large workload.

Under state law, towns and cities have the right to decide if they want to use ballot counting machines, according to Scanlan, but he added that vote-counting discrepancies are most likely to occur in a hand count.

Still, some voters in other Granite State towns like Hampton, Greenland and Kensington, have pushed to move to hand counting.

Douglas Wilson, who led the failed effort in Greenland, said in introducing his petition in November that he had "faith in poll workers and it's the machines that are the problem." Wilson pointed to concerns he had about the handling of memory cards and microchips inside the voting equipment and possible tampering.

But those doubts were quickly dispelled by the town's chief elections officer, Dean Bouffard, who explained that memory cards and microchips are handled by election officials only and are tested and sealed before use. Bouffard also said that voting machines aren't connected to any wireless network and thus can't communicate through the internet. Greenland voted last month against banning voting machines with a final vote of 1,077 to 120.

AccuVote machines have been used in New Hampshire since the mid 1990s, according to Secretary of State's office, and Scanlan said there's no evidence any have been hacked, echoing Bouffard that they are "are stand-alone devices with no wireless capability, and all external ports have been disabled."

Other voters like Hampton Selectman Regina Barnes have raised concerns over the age of the machine's software, calling it a "big concern" at an October meeting. Scanlan admitted to CNN that the software is old but that "he is not aware of any glitches," saying the machines are "very accurate, provided the voter properly marks the ballot with them."

Petition drive in Utah

A proposed ballot initiative in Utah, where Trump won handily in 2020, aims to return the state to in-person voting at local precincts, with all ballots, including absentee ballots, being hand counted by election judges on election night.

Utah is one of a handful of states that conducts its elections almost entirely by mail, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. All registered voters are sent a ballot without needing to request one. Most of the state uses ES&S machines for tabulating votes, according to Ryan Cowley, the state's director of elections.

The initiative to ditch those machines is being spearheaded by Secure Vote Utah, an organization led by Lew Moore, who managed the 2008 GOP presidential campaign of former Texas Rep. Ron Paul.

Moore emphasized that he isn't "making any allegations about anything that might have happened" in Utah or accusing anyone of "malfeasance." But he went on to baselessly cast doubt on the machines tabulating votes.

"They're just machines whirling around you. I mean, you don't know what's going on with these machines," he said.

But Cowley does know. Every county conducts a pre-election test on its voting machines to ensure that they are properly reading ballots, he told CNN. And after an election, he added, each county performs a "public audit," which takes about 1% of each county's ballots and compares how the machines read the ballots with how the ballots were cast.

"There has never been a discrepancy in those totals and how those ballots were counted," Cowley said.

Concerns about hand counts in Texas

Trump also won by a large margin in Texas, where Rogers, the county chairman, wanted the March Republican primary in his county to be counted by hand.

His proposal was met with surprise and logistical concerns from Melynn Huntley, the elections administrator for Potter County, who said the full count could take as long as 20 to 22 hours.

She also raised concerns that it would lead to confusion among voters because of rules about where primary voters could cast their ballots in the primary versus in the general election. Primary voters would have to go to their neighborhood polling place as opposed to voting centers around the state where any registered voter can go.

Rogers ultimately abandoned his plan after county commissioners failed to pass his resolution -- and although his statement at the time acknowledged some of those same logistical concerns about GOP voters having to use two different voting methods in the primary and the general election -- he hasn't given up.

He has vowed to keep pushing for a hand-marked and hand-counted ballot process, repeating unfounded claims about its superior security.

"We will continue to further advocate for ideas and solutions voters can be confident in that require hand-marked ballots and are cost-effective, reliable, secure, and superior in preventing fraud," said Rogers.

Regardless of Rogers' efforts, some changes are coming to the county's current Direct Recording Electronic system, in which voters make their choices on a digital terminal that records vote totals directly into computer memory. Huntley said the county is moving toward a voter verified paper system in which voters' choices will include a paper back up. Mail-in voting is the only method that currently uses paper.

Amid its 2021 efforts to make voting harder in the state, the GOP-led legislature passed a bill that requires all counties to start moving toward voting machines that offer a paper trail by 2026.

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Getting ready for the Texas primary elections

Megan Calongne

KBTX-TV

January 7, 2022

<https://www.kbtv.com/2022/01/08/getting-ready-texas-primary-elections/>

BRYAN, Texas (KBTX) - Early voting for the Texas primary elections is coming up on Valentine's Day. Here's what you need to know about the races.

After two weeks of early voting, Texas will hold its 2022 primary elections March 1. Each party will choose its candidate for seven statewide seats — governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, land commissioner, agriculture commissioner, comptroller and one of three seats on the Railroad Commission. Republicans and Democrats will also choose their candidates to face off in November for district-based congressional and legislative offices, the State Board of Education and judicial seats.

If no candidate receives a majority of the vote in the primary, those with the top two votes will compete in a runoff May 24. Texas is an open-primary state, so voters can decide every two years whether to pick Republican or Democratic nominees. Remember, you can only vote in one party's primary, and in that same party's runoff. You do have the choice to vote for either party's candidate during the general election, despite whoever you voted for in the primary.

We were joined by Ross Ramsey, executive editor of the Texas Tribune who informed us that redistricting could hinder the election date. He explained the legislature just did new redistricting maps and “the opponents of those maps sued in federal court. Every once in a while we get a delay in the election because the courts find a problem in the maps.” Although he admits “this looks less likely now than it did probably a month ago.”

When asked about Governor Greg Abbott's campaign Ramsey noted that his emphasis this time is on south Texas. The reason for that being that in 2020 Republicans did “unusually well” in south Texas. He clarified that “they won in a lot of counties they had not won before, and they lost by less than they lost by before.”

When asked about Abbot's Republican competitors, Ramsey did not think he had anything to worry about. He explained the problem for these other Republicans is that “the people who are most unhappy with Greg Abbot are Democrats and won't be voting in the March primaries.”

According to Ramsey one race to watch is House district 31. The incumbent, Ryan Guillen, was elected as a democrat but the Republicans got him to switch parties. So this year he will be running as a Republican.

On the question of if redistricting will have an effect on elections, Ramsey said it will make a difference race by race, but looking at the maps it leans a little bit more to the Republicans. He explained that “if your looking at the whole picture the Republican majorities in the Texas house and Senate and in the Congressional delegations should hold.”

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Lubbock Co. making the switch to paper-based voting system

James Clark

KAMC-TV

January 7, 2022

<https://www.everythinglubbock.com/news/local-news/lubbock-co-making-the-switch-to-paper-based-voting-system/>

LUBBOCK, Texas — Lubbock County Commissioners will vote Monday “to move to a paper based voting system” in future elections.

Commissioner Jason Corley said the current voting machines, including the touch screen interface, will remain the same but simply be connected to a printer for a paper record.

The Texas Legislature passed the Election Integrity Protection Act of 2021 which requires auditable voting systems. Auditable means it creates a paper record that the voter can see.

“[In some ways,] it’s kind of like getting a receipt,” Corley said. But the receipt stays with the election staff. Voters can look over the ballot before turning it in. But state law does not allow the paper record to be “retained by the voter.”

The new law says, “Electronic voting machines may not be used in an election unless the system is an auditable voting system.”

There are provisions which allow for the electronic counting to be used as the official result. But it requires an audit and “strong evidence” that the electronic results are consistent with the paper records.

The commissioners will vote on two provisions. One is to make the changes to the voting machines, and the other is to seek state money to pay for the changes. The cost was not listed in the commissioners’ meeting agenda for Monday.

Corley said the timing is still not entirely certain, but state law requires the change to be no later than September 1, 2026.

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New voting system will cost Lubbock County around \$4 million up front

Joshua Ramirez

KCBD-TV

January 7, 2022

<https://www.fox34.com/2022/01/08/new-voting-system-will-cost-lubbock-county-around-4-million-up-front/>

LUBBOCK, Texas (KCBD) - Lubbock county will change its voting process this year to comply with new state regulations involving election integrity. Senate bill 598 requires all elections in Texas to use an auditable system. That means Lubbock county will have to move to a system using both electronic tools and paper ballots. It’s a switch that will cost the county millions of dollars up front.

“This is mandated by the state,” County Judge Curtis Parrish said. “This isn’t something that we decided to do. This is something that the state is ordering us to do, and it’s going to cost the citizens of Lubbock about \$4 million to do.”

That money will update the county’s voting machines with new equipment to print out ballots when they’re submitted. Lubbock county must foot the bill for the changes in hopes that the state will pay it back.

“We do this as a grant application,” Parrish said.

Commissioners plan to approve that application Monday. After that, the ball will be in the state's court.

"We have to pay for it up front," Parrish said. "Then we have to depend on the state to follow through with their promise to reimburse us the cost."

Under the new system voters will still fill out their ballots digitally, but now, when they are finished, they will receive a printed version of that ballot. That is what administrators will use to determine winners. That will create both a digital and a paper trail. Which state lawmakers claim will ensure voting integrity.

"If there is a challenge, or if there is a recount now we're able to go back to both systems," Parrish said. "Both the hard copy and the electronic copy to make sure that our votes are verified."

That's an issue Judge Parrish says Lubbock hasn't had to deal with. He says the county has gone above and beyond to ensure all votes are counted, and counted accurately. Errors, Judge Parrish says, are not tolerated.

"Zero. That's my standard of error," Parrish said. "At the end of the day you know when you go to the polls, and you vote for your candidate that vote is counted accurately fairly."

Parrish says Lubbock has always maintained a gold standard when I come to elections, and a new process won't change that.

"Lubbock's election system is accurate, it's fair and it works," Parrish said. "I also believe this. That this new system that we will be putting in place will also be accurate and fair and will work."

Once it is approved, the switch from the current system to the new one will start immediately. It must be completed before November elections later this year.

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Texas GOP's voting meme shows how Trump-style messaging wins internet's attention

Erin Douglas

Texas Tribune

January 8, 2022

<https://www.texastribune.org/2022/01/08/texas-gop-voting-covid-meme-trump/>

A Twitter meme posted on Friday by the Republican Party of Texas that compared waiting in line for COVID-19 tests to waiting in line to vote quickly provoked anger from the left, giddiness from the right, and rose to one of the top trending posts on the platform that day.

In other words, experts on propaganda and internet misinformation said, the meme did exactly what it was intended to do.

“The goal is to further divide people, but divide them by making them feel they’re part of a group,” said Sam Woolley, an assistant professor at the University of Texas at Austin who also serves as the project director for propaganda research at the Center for Media Engagement.

He added that such an approach is “driven by a perspective that other people who don’t believe what you believe are the enemy, rather than fellow Americans.”

The meme, which came from the official account for the Texas GOP, used a photo of a COVID-19 test site line in New York and included the text, “If you can wait in line for hours for testing ... You can vote in person.” It was a message that some critics said suggested that excessive waiting times are acceptable and that made light of issues that disproportionately affect communities of color.

Such memes, according to experts, are part of a growing political social media strategy that has become successful in recent years: Package complicated information into short, simplified bites, and use it to divide people into distinct groups that are opposed to one another.

“You are being rage farmed,” John Scott-Railton, a senior researcher of disinformation and cyberattacks at the University of Toronto’s Citizen Lab, wrote in a tweet to people who were reacting angrily to the meme. He said that responding to the tweet was providing the GOP with a bigger megaphone: “Your angry quote tweet = the goal.”

Polarizing memes have become more prominent in American politics since the election of former President Donald Trump, said Woolley, adding that social media accounts for Republicans and Democrats have used them as tools. On the left, Occupy Democrats, a group that publishes wide-reaching political posts on its website and social media accounts, has utilized such polarized memes to build a social media following on Facebook. Far-right Republican groups have used politically divisive memes to attack supporters of expanded voting measures, Black Lives Matters protestors and to push against masks and vaccines.

But Woolley said the Texas GOP’s meme is distinct because it was released from the official social media account of a political party. The meme marks a departure from the account’s typical photo posts, which tend to focus on legislation, events, and announcements.

“It’s uncommon, and especially concerning, that this comes from the official Texas GOP account,” Woolley said.

Earlier this year, the Texas Legislature passed new restrictions on voting, supported by the Republican Party, that banned 24-hour voting and added new voter ID requirements. GOP leaders also unsuccessfully pushed Gov. Greg Abbott to call state lawmakers back for a fourth special session to ban vaccine mandates. The governor instead issued an executive order banning vaccine mandates.

A spokesperson for the Republican Party of Texas said in a statement to the Tribune that it’s hypocritical for the Biden Administration to allow people to stand in line to get a COVID-19 test, but endorse voting-by-mail as a means to reduce the spread of COVID-19 from standing in line and in-person interactions.

“If one is safe, so is the other,” James Wesolek, spokesperson for the Republican Party of Texas, wrote in a statement. “We enjoyed watching liberals lose their minds when confronted with the truth yesterday.”

Similar rhetoric to the one used in the Texas GOP meme on Friday emerged in far-right social media posts as early as spring 2020. Public health experts and election security experts had recommended that states use mail-in ballots as an alternative to in-person voting to avoid spreading the coronavirus to vulnerable populations. In response, far-right groups began sharing memes that compared waiting in line to vote to other common activities for which people have to wait in line.

One meme that was reposted by Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller showed a photo of a line of customers waiting outside of a store with carts and another that showed a line to vote. “If you can do this six feet apart ... you can do this six feet apart,” the meme stated.

The formula evolved in the summer of 2020 when Black Lives Matter protests swept the nation in response to the police killing of George Floyd. Former President Donald Trump tweeted on Aug. 19, 2020: “IF YOU CAN PROTEST IN PERSON, YOU CAN VOTE IN PERSON!”

The Friday meme, which followed the same formula, drew criticism from several Democrat politicians, policy experts and other Twitter users who said COVID-19 testing and voting should be made more accessible by the government, and that lines create delays and challenges that disproportionately disenfranchise voters of color.

The tweet garnered more than 12,000 retweets and more than 52,000 likes by 9 p.m. Saturday on Twitter. The angry reactions increased attention on the meme, something the Republican Party recognized in a later tweet, pointing out that “Texas GOP” was Twitter’s No. 4 trending topic in the U.S. on Friday.

“Cry more,” another post by the Texas GOP stated, after saying that the meme made “pronouns in bio people” mad.

The anger tends to overly simplify what may otherwise be a complex bipartisan issue, said James Slattery, a senior staff attorney at Texas Civil Rights Project, which advocates for equal access to voting in elections.

“No one really enjoys wasting time in lines for hours,” Slattery said. “You shouldn’t have to wait in line to vote, and you shouldn’t have to wait in a long line to get tested for COVID.”

Long voting lines disproportionately impact voters of color, research has found. A 2020 University of California at Los Angeles study found that people who live in predominantly Black neighborhoods wait 29% longer to vote than those who live in predominantly White neighborhoods.

The longer voters must wait to cast their ballots, the less likely they are to vote, Slattery said. He said the leading causes of long voter lines in Texas in recent elections stemmed from staffing shortages during a surge of voter turnout, lack of resources or training for poll workers that causes machine malfunctions and logistical problems, and polling place closures in the state. Texas counties have closed more polling places than any other state, according to a 2016 analysis by the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights.

“State and local governments should make it easier for people to vote because at the end of the day it’s about holding those governments accountable,” Slattery said. “Voting is not like almost any other activity in our society. You have a fundamental right to vote that is critical to the survival of our democracy.”

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Voter registration deadline looms

Sean Batura

Kerrville Daily Times

January 7, 2022

https://dailytimes.com/promotions/article_4c00b20a-7034-11ec-8176-ebd9693975fc.html

Those who are registered to vote by the Jan. 31 deadline will have an opportunity to select who will receive the Republican Party’s nomination in two contested county races: district clerk and precinct 2 county commissioner.

Those who are not registered to vote can do so at the Kerr County Courthouse, 700 Main St., Suite 124; request a postage-paid voter registration form at <https://webservices.sos.state.tx.us/vrrequest/index.asp>; or download an application at <https://vrapp.sos.state.tx.us/index.asp> for submission in-person or by mail to the county elections office at the courthouse.

The most contested county race this year is for county commissioner Precinct 2, in which five Republicans are seeking their party’s nomination. Two Republicans are vying for the post of district clerk. No Democrats are seeking either office or any other county office this year, according to data from the Texas Secretary of State’s Office.

The Republican candidates for Precinct 2 commissioner are Sonya Hooten, Stan Kubenka, Richard Paces, Jack Pratt and John Sheffield. Kubenka and Paces filed last August, Hooten filed in October, Pratt filed sometime before Dec. 1 and Sheffield in late December.

Sonya Hooten

Hooten, the executive assistant to Kerr County Sheriff Larry Leitha, is a fifth-generation resident of Kerr County who was a long-time secretary at Center Point Independent School District before retiring in 2019. She worked for then-Sheriff Rusty Hierholzer as an administrative assistant and stayed on at the agency after Leitha took office in January. Hooten has been married to her husband for more than 30 years and is the mother of a 27-year-old son.

Her website can be found at <https://bit.ly/3DYMHao>.

Stan Kubenka

Kubenka, who lives south of Kerrville, graduated in 1976 from Southwest Texas State University — now Texas State University — with an accounting degree, and he participated in the Stanford University Executive Management Program in 1982. He was a manager for decades of the Kerrville branch of Inesco Distributing, which is one of the largest HVAC distributors in the state. A brochure on his candidacy reads that he worked for Inesco for 41 years.

Kubenka is a member of the NRA and the Texas Public Policy Foundation. He is a licensed plumber, and he's served as a Republican precinct chair and a delegate to the state Republican convention.

Kubenka's site can be found at <https://bit.ly/3phmAHH>.

Rich Paces

Paces, who lives in Center Point, graduated from Ohio State University in 1979 after studying chemical and petroleum engineering. He went on to gain 36 years of experience in the oil and gas industry, according to his website.

He has worked for various companies, serving as a director of development and operations, a chief operating officer on three occasions, a vice president and country manager and a petroleum engineer. He's been involved in projects ranging from \$50 million to \$2 billion, according to his website.

Paces' site can be found at <https://bit.ly/3ziRFx3>.

Jack Pratt

Pratt, a former mayor of Kerrville and veteran of the U.S. Army, has served on the boards of the Kerrville Economic Improvement Corp. and the Headwaters Groundwater Conservation District. His campaign website describes him as a no-nonsense, Christian conservative who favors less government. The site also describes him a strong leader and a patriotic visionary who is supportive of maintaining Second Amendment rights and who is pro-life and transparent in his dealings in public office.

Pratt's website can be found at <http://pratt4pct2.com/>.

John Sheffield

Sheffield, who owns and runs Ole Ingram Grocery with his wife, has lived in Kerr County since 1992 and has owned the store for 21 years, he told The Kerrville Daily Times. He has a stepson and two daughters.

Sheffield has seen first-hand what family businesses have dealt with due to COVID-19-related challenges, and his role at the store in downtown Ingram puts him in the position to talk with many members of the public on a daily basis about other important issues facing the county, he said.

He's been critical of recent property tax increases and salary increases for county employees. Sheffield said the first thing he'd do if elected is take a pay cut as an elected official.

Sheffield didn't have a website as of Thursday.

District clerk race

Those vying for the Republican Party's nomination to run for district clerk are incumbent Dawn Lantz and Francisco "Frank" Galvan. Galvan works at the Kerrville Police Department supervising dispatchers as the public safety communications manager. More about Galvan and Lantz can be read at <https://bit.ly/3f0l8mS>.

More information on all candidates will be released in the near future.

Stay abreast of other races at <https://dailytimes.com/election/>

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Mosley Hired As County Elections Administrator

Mike Williams

Graham Leader

January 8, 2022

<https://www.grahamleader.com/news/mosley-hired-county-elections-administrator>

Young County will have a new elections administrator next week. After a closed meeting Tuesday at the Young County Courthouse, the Young County Election Commission voted unanimously on the hiring of Kaitlyn Mosley.

Mosley, who will start Monday, replaces Lauren Sullivan who left the position last month. She takes the position after two years as an assistant to Jack County Elections Administrator Lynn Casteel.

“Experience is the prime factor here,” Young County Judge and commission chair John Bullock said during the meeting Tuesday. “It’s basically that the interviewee had the experience on the system we use.”

Both Young and Jack counties use the Hart Verity Duo Touch Auditable Ballot System. Bullock said before Tuesday’s meeting that he was hoping for a quick hiring process.

“Like county government, in general, elections have become more and more complicated each time the legislature convenes,” Bullock wrote in an email to The Graham Leader. “We need to act (as soon as possible) but experience will play a big factor.”

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Community groups promote the importance of voting to those who were formally incarcerated

Amanda Henderson

WOAI-TV

January 8, 2022

<https://news4sanantonio.com/news/local/groups-promote-the-importance-of-voting-to-those-who-were-formally-incarcerated>

SAN ANTONIO — Community leaders want to make sure everyone has the opportunity to vote in 2022’s elections.

With some just months away these community advocates are getting a head start on their outreach.

“Today’s about organizing our voting rights and our voting power,” All of Us or None Texas Executive Director Steve Huerta said.

Voting is a power Huerta hopes those formally incarcerated will also use.

That's the message behind Saturday's gathering.

"We don't tell people who to vote for. But we informed them about who's running and what the principles are. And we let them make that decision. We have to start taking up the responsibility of being more civically engaged," Huerta said.

In Texas, you can regain your right to vote after finishing your sentence, which includes parole and/or probation.

Huerta, as well as everyone we spoke with for this story, was formally incarcerated.

As Bennie Price and Leonora Walker explain being able to help people in this situation is something they value.

"This is a country that will give you a second chance, the greatest country in the world will give its heavily populated, formerly incarcerated population, a second chance," Price said. He is the CEO of Bib Mama's Safe House.

"So many of us that have been through incarceration, don't have the education and knowledge about voting and our voting rights and what it does to help our people get the resources and education and have the platform to speak," CEO and Founder of FREED Texas said.

It's a platform Chivas Watson hopes everyone realizes can help make change happen.

"Like people evolve, the city evolves, the climate of voting evolves, you know. So, if anything to all that a formerly incarcerated here in Bexar County, stand up, get involved," Watson said. Watson is with Working Group 512.

They also announced there will be a march in San Antonio on March 19, 2022 to "organize and encourage participatory democracy and civic engagement of communities impacted by mass incarceration."

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Court rejects state Rep. Art Fierro's effort to rule Rep. Claudia Ordaz Perez ineligible to challenge him in Democratic primary

Molly Smith

El Paso Matters

January 7, 2022

<https://elpasomatters.org/2022/01/07/state-rep-art-fierro-asks-appellate-court-to-rule-claudia-ordaz-perez-ineligible-to-challenge-him-in-democratic-primary/>

A Texas appellate court ruled late Friday that state Rep. Claudia Ordaz Perez is eligible to run in the Democratic primary election for Texas House District 79, rebuffing an effort by incumbent state Rep. Art Fierro to remove her from the March 1 Democratic primary ballot.

Fierro claimed Ordaz Perez will not have resided in District 79 for the required one year prior to the Nov. 8 general election and six months before the Dec. 13, 2021, filing deadline. The El Paso County Democratic Party refused to declare Ordaz Perez ineligible, so Fierro took his removal effort to court.

Ordaz Perez's current Texas House District 76 seat was drawn out of the new state legislative boundaries the Texas Legislature approved this fall. Her then-address became part of the redrawn Texas House District 77, held by state Rep. Lina Ortega, D-El Paso.

Rather than challenge Ortega, Ordaz Perez moved to a home in District 79 so she could run against Fierro. She changed her voter registration on Oct. 12, 2021, to that new address.

No other Democratic or Republican candidates filed for the District 79 seat.

Reached Friday before the court ruling, Ordaz Perez called Fierro's claim that she's ineligible to run "frivolous" and "a desperate attempt" to cast doubt on her candidacy.

Fierro did not return a request for comment.

In his initial Dec. 30 petition to the state's 8th Court of Appeals, Fierro argues Ordaz Perez is days short of meeting the one-year residency requirement for Texas of House Representatives candidates because it takes 30 days for a change of residence to take effect. Fierro sought a legal action known as a writ of mandamus, where an appeals court compels a public official — in this case El Paso County Democratic Party Chair Dora Oaxaca — to properly fulfill their duty.

But Oaxaca's attorney, John Mobbs, disputed that argument. Fierro named Oaxaca in his petition because she did not reject Ordaz Perez's application for a place on the ballot as he requested of Oaxaca two days after the filing deadline.

"Fierro simply has it backwards," Mobbs' filing states. "A person's qualification to vote follows their residency, it does not establish their residence."

"It is legally established that voter registration and voting records do not conclusively prove a candidate's residence for purposes of evaluating eligibility for office," the filing notes. "Moreover, the fact that a change to a voting registration record is not immediately effective does not establish that the voter is not a resident at their new address until the effective date of that change."

The six-month residency requirement Fierro cites does not apply to candidates for state representative, Mobbs said.

In a response filed Friday before the court's ruling, Fierro's attorneys — Rene Ordoñez, Daniel Ordoñez and Jenée A. Durán — appeared to narrow their claim alleging that Ordaz Perez was ineligible. The response focused solely on a state Election Code provision establishing a six-month residency requirement before the filing deadline. It didn't mention the earlier claim that Ordaz Perez does not meet the Texas Constitution requirement that a candidate reside in a district at least a year before the election.

The three justices on the appeals court unanimously agreed with Mobbs' arguments, saying in a 10-page ruling that "Ordaz Perez satisfied the constitutional residency requirement to run for

House District 79, and the Election Code provision Fierro cites as an alternative basis for ineligibility does not apply to the office of state representative.”

The justices said the state law establishing the six-month residency requirement before a filing deadline applied to many offices, but not to state legislative seats. “In short, Ordaz Perez is not required to show she resided in-district for at least six months prior to the primary election filing deadline, only that she began her residence within the district one year immediately preceding the general election as required by the Texas Constitution,” the justices wrote in their ruling.

“I’m trying to figure out the real intent on why (Fierro) filed this and I can’t quite figure it out,” Ordaz Perez said. “He’s on the (House’s) elections committee and the law is pretty clear — I feel very confident about the case.

“The legal costs in all of this are very expensive. Are taxpayers going to have to foot this bill or is Art going to take on those costs when it comes back where it’s dismissed?”

Early voting for the March primaries begins Feb. 14.

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Texas Supreme Court denies GOP challenge to Harris County’s redistricting plan

Andrew Schneider

Houston Public Media

January 7, 2022

<https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news/politics/2022/01/07/416818/texas-supreme-court-denies-a-republican-challenge-to-harris-countys-redistricting-plan/>

The Texas Supreme Court rejected an effort by Republican commissioners and voters to block Harris County’s recent redistricting plan on Friday, suggesting another challenge still in the works will meet a similar fate.

In their challenge, the petitioners argued that the new maps amounted to illegal Democratic gerrymandering. The new precincts approved by Harris County leaders last year resulted in dramatic shifts that the challengers argued would disenfranchise voters in the upcoming primaries.

But in a narrow ruling, the justices found that they likely couldn’t provide any relief to the challengers because the wheels of the election were already in motion.

“(N)o amount of expedited briefing or judicial expediency at this point can change the fact that the primary election for 2022 is already in its early stages,” their opinion read. “This Court and other Texas courts are duty-bound to respond quickly to urgent cases that warrant expedited proceedings, but even with utmost judicial speed, any relief that we theoretically could provide here would necessarily disrupt the ongoing election process.”

The result is that the new precinct maps will be allowed to stand. The Democratic majority on commissioners court adopted the maps on a 3-2 party line vote in October.

The new county map – the third proposed by Democratic Commissioner Rodney Ellis — redrew the county’s precinct boundaries in such a way that shifted Republican Commissioner Tom Ramsey’s Precinct 3 from western Harris County to the northern tier, and switched Republican Commissioner Jack Cagle’s Precinct 4 from the north to the west.

The result is a less conservative constituency for Cagle: his precinct now includes more territory inside the 610 Loop and less within northwest Harris County than the current Precinct 3. Crucially, the new Precinct 4 is majority-minority, with a combined non-Anglo population of more than 70%.

Cagle is up for reelection in 2022. The new map has encouraged a crowded Democratic primary field, with four candidates vying to challenge the Republican incumbent. They include former civil court judge Lesley Briones, former state Rep. Gina Calanni, former county elections official Ben Chou, and Alief ISD board president Ann Williams.

If Cagle loses, Democrats would have a 4-1 supermajority, essentially eliminating the possibility of a quorum break. Just three votes are needed for a quorum in commissioners court, but four votes are needed in order to raise taxes.

Republicans on the court did break quorum in 2019 to stop a property tax rate hike. They threatened to do so again last year before reaching a deal on another rise in taxes.

Former Republican Commissioner Steve Radack has filed a separate lawsuit, arguing that the court took up the redistricting plan in violation of the Open Meetings Act. But the high court's ruling suggests it is unlikely to involve itself at this late stage.

County commissioner elections for even numbered and odd numbered districts are staggered every two years under Texas election law. In their lawsuit, Cagle, Ramsey, and three Republican voters charged that the Ellis map would disenfranchise 1.1 million voters who would not be able to vote in the upcoming election.

Ellis responded that his map was designed to correct a previous gerrymander by the then-Republican-led commissioners court, which he said effectively discriminated against minority voters.

“I’m grateful the Texas Supreme Court took a careful look at this case and reached the just decision,” read a statement from Ellis. “Looking forward to proceeding with an orderly election that ensures the people of Harris County have the opportunity to elect representation that reflects their values.”

Both Cagle and Ramsey's office's deferred to their attorney, Andy Taylor, for an official statement.

In a statement, Taylor said the legal battle would continue to invalidate the map for future elections.

“Because the candidate filing period commenced on November 13, 2021, which was only a mere two weeks after the unconstitutional redistricting plan was passed by the Democratic majority on the Harris County Commissioners Court, the Court refused to intervene at this time simply because the upcoming March primary election was already in progress and it would be disruptive to do so,” he said. “Once the primary election is over, we expect the Court to give our case a second look.”

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Shelley Luther, anti-lockdown activist and GOP candidate, said Chinese students should be banned from Texas universities

Patrick Svitek

Texas Tribune

January 7, 2022

<https://www.texastribune.org/2022/01/07/shelley-luther-chinese-students-texas/>

Shelley Luther, a Republican candidate for Texas House and hairdresser who became a hero of the anti-lockdown movement during the coronavirus pandemic, recently said in a since-deleted tweet that Chinese students should not be allowed to attend Texas colleges.

"Chinese students should be BANNED from attending all Texas universities," Luther said in the Wednesday tweet. "No more Communists!"

In a follow-up tweet that is still online, Luther said the state's taxpayers "should not be subsidizing the next generation of CCP leaders," referring to the Chinese Communist Party. In a subsequent tweet, she said it is "common sense" that CCP members "should not have access to our schools."

On Friday, state Rep. Gene Wu, a Democrat from Houston who is Chinese-American, condemned Luther's comments and asked her to publicly apologize.

"Luther's statements are ignorant, hateful, and incite violence against not only Chinese Americans, but all Asian Americans," Wu said in a statement. "To casually conflate all Chinese students in America with actual registered members of the ruling party in the People's Republic of China is not only ignorance of an extreme nature, it is also the type of rhetoric that drives anti-Asian hate crimes."

Asked for comment Friday, Luther declined to apologize and attacked Wu, who was among the House Democrats who broke quorum and went to Washington, D.C., last year in protest of Republicans' priority elections bill.

"It doesn't surprise me that a socialist Democrat who doesn't even know how to show up to work thinks the position that communist Chinese citizens should not access taxpayer funded state institutions is racist," Luther said in a statement to The Texas Tribune.

Luther's comments came as anti-Asian hate crimes have been on the rise. They increased by more than 73% in 2020, according to recent FBI data, far outpacing all hate crimes, which increased 13%.

Luther is challenging state Rep. Reggie Smith, R-Sherman, in the March primary. The district favors Republicans, so whoever wins between Smith and Luther is set to hold the seat after November.

Luther became nationally known at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020 when she refused to shut down her Dallas salon in defiance of emergency orders. She was sentenced to a week in jail but was released after only a few days, via a motion granted by the Texas Supreme Court.

She became a vocal critic of Gov. Greg Abbott, a fellow Republican, and ran unsuccessfully for a state Senate seat in a special election later that year.

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Invoking Jan. 6, Dems pivot to fight for voting legislation

Associated Press

January 10, 2022

<https://spectrumlocalnews.com/tx/south-texas-el-paso/ap-online/2022/01/10/invoking-jan-6-dems-pivot-to-fight-for-voting-legislation>

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats are mounting an impassioned bid to overhaul Senate rules that stand in the way of their sweeping voting legislation, arguing dark forces unleashed by Donald Trump’s falsehoods about the 2020 election demand an extraordinary response.

In fiery speeches and interviews, President Joe Biden and top congressional Democrats have seized on the one-year anniversary of the Jan. 6 insurrection as a reason to advance their long-stalled voting, ethics and elections package. Senate Republicans, who have repeatedly blocked the legislation, excoriate the measures as a “partisan power grab” and warn that any rule changes will haunt Democrats someday under a GOP majority.

Trump’s false claims of a stolen election not only incited the mob that stormed the Capitol, Democrats say. His unrelenting campaign of disinformation also sparked a GOP effort to pass new state laws that have made it more difficult to vote, while in some cases rendering the administration of elections more susceptible to political influence.

Democrats’ voting legislation would usher in the biggest overhaul of U.S. elections in a generation, striking down hurdles to voting enacted in the name of election security, reducing the influence of big money in politics and limiting partisan influence over the drawing of congressional districts. The package would create national election standards that would trump the state-level GOP laws. It would also restore the ability of the Justice Department to police election laws in states with a history of discrimination.

Many Democrats say the moment has come to act decisively in what they view as the civil rights fight of the era. Changing Senate rules early in 2022 offers perhaps the last best chance to counteract Republicans’ state-level push before the midterm elections, when Democrats’ House majority and slim hold in the 50-50 Senate could be wiped out.

“If Republicans continue to hijack the rules of the chamber to prevent us from protecting our democracy, then the Senate will debate and consider changes to the rules,” Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Friday.

Yet what action they will take remains highly uncertain, depending on the often elusive support of Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va. Key Democrats have been meeting with Manchin for weeks, brainstorming options while also enlisting outside allies to lobby his support.

Manchin has made no firm commitments. He has repeatedly said he will not support lowering the filibuster’s 60-vote threshold for passing most legislation, a stance shared by fellow centrist Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz. Until the threshold is lowered, enacting election legislation could prove difficult, if not impossible.

But Democrats say they are focused on what's achievable now, amid escalating pressure from allies for action. Even modest changes to Senate rules, they say, would be a significant step forward.

Leaning into the fight, Biden is set to deliver a speech in Atlanta on Tuesday focused on voting rights. And Schumer has added to the civil rights symbolism by setting the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, on Jan. 17, as the deadline to either pass the voting legislation or consider revising the rules. The Senate is likely to hold a series of test votes this week intended to underscore Republican opposition.

"I'm not going to say 'yes' or 'no,' because I don't know what votes will come to the floor," Manchin said last week, noting that he has supported some changes to Senate rules in the past. One proposal Democrats are discussing would eliminate the filibuster on the so-called "motion to proceed" that is needed before a bill can be debated on the Senate floor.

Republicans say invoking the Jan. 6 insurrection is offensive. The voting bills, they say, were largely written before the attack and include a liberal wish list of priorities that will do little to combat vulnerabilities in the law exposed by Trump's attempts to overturn the election.

"It is beyond distasteful for some of our colleagues to ham-fistedly invoke the Jan. 6 anniversary to advance these aims," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky. "The fact that violent criminals broke the law does not entitle Senate Democrats to break the Senate."

The renewed focus on voting rights comes as much of Biden's agenda has stalled out in Congress. Before Christmas, Manchin singlehandedly halted work on Biden's roughly \$2 trillion package of social and environmental initiatives, delaying the bill indefinitely.

Civil rights activists are deeply frustrated by the turn of events, saying precious months have been wasted. They view the GOP-backed changes in voting laws as a subtler form of ballot restrictions like literacy tests and poll taxes once used to disenfranchise Black voters, a key Democratic constituency.

"Unfortunately many policymakers have not truly appreciated the gravity of where we are in this nation at this moment," NAACP President Derrick Johnson said in an interview, singling out both Biden's White House as well as Senate Democrats. "African Americans have seen this before. We've experienced this before. We must get beyond procedural conversations and get to the substance of protecting this fragile thing called democracy."

McConnell has ridiculed "scary stories that liberal activists keep repeating about how democracy is at death's door." He recently dangled the possibility of narrower bipartisan action to shore up a convoluted 19th century law called the Electoral Count Act that governs the certification of presidential elections — a law Trump sought to exploit to overthrow his 2020 defeat. A compromise on that could be attractive to Manchin, who has said any election legislation ought to be enacted on a bipartisan basis.

Last week, Republican Sen. Susan Collins of Maine held bipartisan talks with Republican Sens. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, Thom Tillis of North Carolina and Mitt Romney of Utah, as well as Manchin and fellow Democrats Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona. An update to the Electoral Count Act was part of the discussion, according to a person familiar with the discussion who insisted on anonymity to reveal details about the deliberations.

Democrats have blasted the GOP overture on the Electoral Count Act as a “cynical” political maneuver aimed at doing the bare minimum at the federal level while leaving laws in place in GOP-controlled swing states like Georgia.

“What good is it to certify the election, if I don’t get to cast my vote in the first place?” said Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock, the first African American to represent Georgia in the Senate. He is up for reelection this year.

Republicans warn that Democrats will come to regret any changes to the filibuster, which is intended to foster compromise by making legislation intentionally difficult to pass.

“They barely have a majority now,” said Sen. John Thune, of South Dakota, the chamber's No. 2 Republican. “Even the strongest majorities eventually end up back in the minority.”

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'More soul searching:' Facebook's former elections boss speaks out about the platform

Ramishah Maruf

CNN Business

January 9, 2022

<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/01/09/media/facebook-reliable-sources-katie-harbath/index.html>

New York (CNN) – Katie Harbath worked for 10 years inside Facebook, where she was most recently the company's public policy director managing elections. Now, she's the founder and CEO of Anchor Change, and on "Reliable Sources" Sunday, she spoke out about her old company and its role in democracy.

Harbath said Facebook shouldn't get the sole blame for Jan. 6 — there's a massive problem across the media ecosystem in how people get their information.

"I do think there needs to be more soul searching around how (Facebook) could have done better as a company," Harbath said. "How could we have potentially prevented this, going as far back as December 2015 with President Trump."

Harbath was working at Facebook during the insurrection last year. Stelter said critics pointed out she had a long time to leave amid the revelations about company's harmful policies.

"I'm not here to say that I shouldn't be held responsible for the decisions and the actions I made inside the company," Harbath said. "But what I'm trying to do now is trying to actually rethink and try to go back and learn from those mistakes."

Harbath had hoped she could bring about changes within the company after 2016, and acknowledged the platform's increased transparency and civic integrity team. But in the past five years, she said the company got much larger, exacerbating some of the challenges.

"In terms of some of the decisions that the company was making, as it got larger, there were more leaks," Harbath said.

Harbath wants to see more long term planning at Facebook in 2024. There will be major election around the globe, including in the United States, India, Indonesia, Ukraine and Taiwan.

"That's a lot of elections to prepare for, and to build up the language capabilities, to build up the products, to build up the teams. That takes time," Harbath said.

CNN's chief media correspondent Brian Stelter said there's a sense that the rhetoric on Facebook and other social-media platforms "supercharges the worst impulses of lies and disinformation" around the world.

"We need to start thinking about more nuanced views of this," Harbath said, "and also [get] a better understanding of what's happening inside these companies."

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Democratic elections lawyer Marc Elias fights court sanctions as he gears up for midterm elections

Jerry Dunleavy

Washington Examiner

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<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/courts/democratic-elections-lawyer-marc-elias-fights-court-sanctions-as-he-gears-up-for-midterm-elections>

Democratic lawyer and discredited dossier funder Marc Elias is trying to escape sanctions imposed by federal appeals judges last year for misleading the court.

The former lawyer for Perkins Coie, best known for funding British ex-spy Christopher Steele's discredited dossier while he worked as Hillary Clinton's top campaign lawyer in 2016, was punished by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit in March last year for his behavior in a battle against a Texas law banning straight-ticket voting.

Elias has attempted to fashion himself as a guardian of democracy despite his lead role in undermining the 2016 presidential election using the baseless Trump-Russia narrative. But the 5th Circuit's sanctions pose a serious blemish for him as he fights to get Democrats elected in 2022.

Paul Clement, the lawyer representing Elias, filed a late December request asking the full appeals court to take up the matter and to reverse the sanctions against the Democratic lawyer. Clement argued that appeals courts "generally reserve sanctions for egregious misconduct" and said Elias had committed only "good-faith mistakes."

The 5th Circuit judges found Elias and others on his team filed a motion that was denied, then refiled a nearly identical motion without notifying the court the first effort had been denied. Judge Edith Clement, nominated by former President George W. Bush in 2001, and Judge Jennifer Elrod, nominated by Bush in 2007, both ordered Elias and his associates to be sanctioned last year, while Judge Catharina Haynes, another 2007 Bush nominee, did not.

“This inexplicable failure to disclose the earlier denial of their motion violated their duty of candor to the court,” the judges ruled last year, adding that the redundant motion “multiplied the proceedings unreasonably and vexatiously.”

The Democratic lawyers, including Elias, were ordered to pay attorneys' fees and double costs, and the judges recommended Elias and his colleagues review the section of the Model Rules of Professional Conduct on “Candor Toward the Tribunal” and encouraged them to “complete one hour of Continuing Legal Education in the area of Ethics and Professionalism, specifically candor with the court.”

The appeals judges upheld their decision in June, ruling that the sanctions were “justified” and “appropriate” because Elias “violated local rules.” The judges also said that Elias and the other lawyers “recklessly disregarded their duty to the court by failing to demonstrate candor to the court.” The court ordered Elias and the others to pay up \$8,700 in opposing attorneys’ fees in December.

The underlying case involved a 2017 Texas law that ended straight-party ticket voting effective Sept. 1, 2020, two months before the November 2020 election. A federal judge cited the pandemic to put the practice back in place in September 2020, but the appeals court overruled that and upheld the law that month. Texas Democrats have long claimed the law hurts black and Hispanic voters.

Elias, the former head of the Perkins Coie political law group who launched his own Elias Law Group last year, hired the opposition research firm Fusion GPS, which in turn hired Steele in 2016. Elias testified that he was aware of Fusion's plans to have Steele brief reporters about his anti-Trump research during the 2016 contest, met with Steele during the 2016 contest, and periodically briefed the campaign about the findings from Fusion and Steele.

DOJ Inspector General Michael Horowitz’s December 2019 report criticized the Justice Department and the FBI for at least 17 “significant errors and omissions” related to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act warrants against former Trump campaign adviser Carter Page and for the bureau's reliance on Steele’s dossier.

Elias, who was also the general counsel for now-Vice President Kamala Harris's 2020 bid, gained popularity during 2020’s election court battles. Michael Sussmann, another now-former Perkins Coie lawyer with whom Elias coordinated closely with on anti-Trump research in 2016, was indicted in special counsel John Durham’s criminal investigation.

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Jury selection underway in trial of alleged U.S. consulate employee assassin, accomplice

Julian Resendiz

Border Report

January 7, 2022

<https://www.brproud.com/border-report-tour/jury-selection-underway-in-trial-of-alleged-u-s-consulate-employee-assassin-accomplice/>

EL PASO, Texas (Border Report) – Jury selection began Friday morning in El Paso in the trial of the alleged shooter and an associate in the 2010 murder of a U.S. consulate employee in Juarez.

The trial itself for Jose Guadalupe Diaz, a.k.a. “Zorro” (Fox), and alleged Barrio Azteca gang member Martin Perez Marrufo is set to start Monday morning in U.S. District Judge Kathlene Cardone’s court. The two men face federal charges of violent crimes in aid of racketeering, conspiracy to kidnap, kill, main or injure persons in a foreign country, firearms violations, and others.

Diaz is accused of fatally shooting consulate employee Leslie Ann Enriquez Catton, her husband Arthur Redelfs and Alberto Salcido Cenicerros – the husband of another consulate employee.

A third man, Arturo Gallegos Castellon, described by the U.S. Justice Department as a lieutenant in the Barrio Azteca hierarchy, was sentenced in 2014 to life in prison for ordering the killings.

Gallegos “led the teams of assassins who carried out the U.S. Consulate shootings in March 2010 and ruthlessly murdered nearly 1,600 others as part of a cartel conflict over a drug trafficking route from Mexico into the United States,” Acting Assistant U.S. Attorney General David O’Neil said at the time.

Barrio Azteca gang members were “foot soldiers” for the Juarez cartel, which fractured but has been making a comeback as La Linea, a transnational criminal organization in recent years. La Linea controls drug trafficking, migrant smuggling and drug sales in much of Chihuahua. Its operatives in the neighboring state of Sonora (across the border from Arizona) are facing charges in Mexico in connection with the Nov. 3, 2019 murder of three women and six children who were American citizens.

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Mexico charges 7 in 'Fast and Furious' weapons trafficking

Associated Press

January 9, 2022

<https://www.beaumontenterprise.com/news/article/Mexico-charges-7-in-Fast-and-Furious-weapons-16761995.php>

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexican prosecutors said Sunday they have charged seven people, including former top officials, in the “Fast and Furious” weapons trafficking scandal.

The December 2010 murder of Border Patrol agent Brian Terry exposed the bungled “Fast and Furious” investigation, in which agents from the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives allowed criminals to buy guns with the intention of tracking the weapons.

But the agency lost most of the guns, including two that were found at the scene of Terry’s death in southern Arizona. The U.S. government has heavily pursued prosecution of the men involved in the killing.

Mexico says Mexican drug gangs and former officials also participated in or failed to stop the weapons trafficking.

Mexico’s Attorney General’s Office said Sunday it has lodged weapons trafficking charges against seven people in the more-than-decade-old case, including the country’s former top police official, Genaro Garcia Luna, and former drug lord Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman.

Garcia Luna was arrested in Texas in 2019 and currently faces trial in the U.S. for allegedly protecting a drug gang. Mexico has asked for his extradition to face charges of illegal enrichment.

García Luna served as security chief in President Felipe Calderón's 2006-2012 administration and was the leader of the government's fight against organized crime.

Also charged was former Federal Police commander Luis Cardenas Palomino, who was considered the right-hand man of García Luna. Mexico already arrested Cardenas Palomino on charges of torture, and U.S. prosecutors have separately accused him of accepting millions in bribes from the Sinaloa cartel.

Mexico also charged Guzman in the weapons trafficking case, but he is already serving a life sentence in Colorado.

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Human smuggling continues to be on the rise in South Texas

Vanessa Croix

KENS-TV

January 7, 2022

<https://www.kens5.com/article/news/special-reports/at-the-border/human-smuggling-continues-to-be-on-the-rise-in-south-texas/273-e19f270e-b057-434f-b6ce-128062a00852>

LA SALLE COUNTY, Texas — Human smuggling along the southwest border is reaching record high numbers.

Governor Greg Abbott's Operation Lone Star has deployed a force of state troopers along the border highways from Del Rio to the Rio Grande Valley in a mission to crackdown on human smuggling.

One of those crackdowns happened New Years Eve off I-35 in La Salle County.

DPS body cam video shows the moment a man is pulled over and tells the officers there's no one riding in the utility trailer he's pulling behind the truck he's driving.

But, minutes later, troopers make a shocking discovery, 21 migrants hiding in a tight crawl-like space in the trailer.

"It's not very much room, it's like if you're crawling underneath the bed, closed in the dark where there's no ventilation for them," said DPS Sgt. Juan Maldonado.

Maldonado said troopers are seeing an uptick in human smuggling in South Texas. He said the stop in La Salle County is not out of the ordinary.

"They usually get smuggled to a large city which would be going towards you to San Antonio, Houston, Dallas, the big metro cities," said Maldonado.

He said troopers are also seeing a rise in the criminal element associated with the smuggling.

DPS said the driver carrying those 21 migrants on New Years Eve, is a Mexican Mafia Gang member. Officials did not identify the man, but said he was arrested on smuggling charges in addition to being in possession of a stolen firearm. DPS said the truck he was driving was also stolen.

“The migrants who make this journey north are not ignorant of the dangers. They know how dangerous it is,” said Theresa Cardinal Brown with the Bipartisan Policy Center, a think tank in Washington D.C.

She said their mission is to find solutions to the country’s most challenging issues, in this case, the surge in illegal immigration.

“For many of these people, they truly believe that if they stay where they are, they will be killed. Their children will be killed, their family will be killed, they will die,” said Cardinal-Brown. “They have no reason to stay where they are. That’s the kind of desperation that drives them north.”

Cardinal-Brown said the real problems are with the current immigration policies.

She said most migrants aren’t able to get work visas and are rarely granted asylum.

“We have made it so difficult for people to try to come legally that this is the last chance remaining to them,” said Cardinal-Brown. “They’re going to keep coming and they will keep trying, and they will keep trying to find ways to come in until they succeed, because that’s the desperation they have.”

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Mexico cracks down on migrants from Venezuela, will require travel visas

Fernie Ortiz

Border Report

January 7, 2022

<https://www.borderreport.com/hot-topics/immigration/mexico-cracks-down-on-migrants-from-venezuela-will-require-travel-visas/>

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico said Thursday it will begin requiring travel visas for Venezuelans starting Jan. 21, after a surge in the number of migrants trying to reach the U.S. border.

In publishing the new rules, the Interior Department said the decision was based on a tenfold increase in the number of Venezuelan citizens arriving in Mexico in recent years seeking to travel “in an irregular manner to a third country,” a clear reference to the United States.

Last year, U.S. President Joe Biden’s administration offered temporary legal residency to several hundred thousand Venezuelans who have fled their country’s economic and political crisis.

On Dec. 11, Mexico suspended a 17-year-old program that had allowed Brazilian citizens to enter without a visa. The move came after Mexico detected an uptick in Brazilian migrants traveling to Mexico with the intention of reaching the United States.

Migrants, mainly from Central America, Haiti and Cuba, often cross Mexico in hopes of reaching the U.S. border. Mexico has largely been aiding the U.S. government in trying to reduce the flow.

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Moderna gives Mexico 2.7 million shots as deaths top 300,000

Associated Press

January 8, 2022

<https://www.fox44news.com/news/moderna-gives-mexico-2-7-million-shots-as-deaths-top-300000/>

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The U.S. company Moderna donated 2.7 million doses of coronavirus vaccine to Mexico Saturday as the country's official death toll topped 300,000.

Mexico passed 300,000 test-confirmed coronavirus deaths this week, but so little testing is done in the country that a government review of death certificates puts to real toll at almost 460,000.

Mexican officials welcomed the arrival of the shipment at the airport in Toluca, just west of Mexico City, and said the vaccines will be used to inoculate teachers.

Teachers in Mexico were second after only health care workers to be vaccinated in the spring.

In April and May, over 2.7 million teachers got initial shots. But most of them got the single-dose Chinese Cansino vaccine, whose effectiveness appears to decline over time.

Mexico has now obtained over 200 million doses of vaccines, and has been trying to reopen in-person learning at all levels.

Education Secretary Delfina Gómez said, "We are grateful to receive this donation, which will undoubtedly help more boys, girls and youths to come to classrooms with greater safety and confidence."

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I'm supporting a billion dollar electrical power line to the RGV

Greg Abbott

Rio Grande Guardian

January 9, 2022

<https://riograndeguardian.com/abbott-im-supporting-a-billion-dollar-electrical-power-line-to-the-rgv/>

Howdy, RGV. The only thing better than being in the Rio Grande Valley is being in the Rio Grande Valley with my wonderful wife, Cecilia. Thank you for being a fabulous First Lady for our great state. She has been such a loving mother and wife. She has been a role model by being a terrific teacher and principal. But I am proud as you are about the fact that my wife made Texas history when she became the first Hispanic First Lady in the history of our great state. Thank you, Cecilia Abbott.

Well it is great to join you at this Hispanic Leadership Summit. I am proud of all the Hispanic leaders who are a part of his summit today, some of whom are from here in the RGV. Others of whom are from across the entire state of Texas. But all of whom are doing a fabulous job of spreading the

message that in the heart of Hispanics, they really are Republicans. And together they will keep Texas red.

Now I am back in the Rio Grande Valley so much because I so much care about this region. In fact, I have been to the Rio Grande Valley more than any other governor in the history of Texas. But I do more than just visit the Rio Grande Valley. I deliver for the people of the Rio Grande Valley.

Some examples. Before I was governor the Rio Grande Valley had no level one trauma center. What that meant is people who suffered traumatic injuries, they might have to go all the way to San Antonio or Corpus Christi or some other place in order to be treated. That was unacceptable. And so I promised that South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley would get a level one trauma center and now the Rio Grande Valley has one right here in Hidalgo County.

I promised more higher education opportunities and now the Rio Grande Valley has the Texas A&M Higher Education Center right here in McAllen, Texas.

I promised more roads and we have provided more than \$2 billion in road funding for the RGV since I have been your governor.

To ensure that you all are going to have the power that you need to meet the demands of a growing population as well as a growing economy, I am supporting a billion dollar electrical power line to the RGV.

I also promised more jobs. And get this. Just last month more people in Hidalgo County had a job than ever before in Texas history.

The fact of the matter is that the Rio Grande Valley is truly brimming with promise. It is the promise of opportunity, of prosperity, and hope. The opportunity for better jobs. The opportunity for a better education. The opportunity for a better quality of life.

It is the prosperity that isn't reserved for just a few. It goes to every single person across the entire state of Texas in every single region. And hope. The hope that every generation will have a brighter future.

It is promise that is not found just in the Rio Grande Valley but in every community across our state. Together, all of us, we have put Texas on a remarkable path toward a brighter future. A Texas where working families can do far more than just get by. They can flourish under the opportunities of the 9th largest economy in the entire world. A Texas where students don't simply graduate with a diploma but they graduate with the preparation and the inspiration to take on college or take on a career. A Texas where every parent can rest easy knowing that their families are safe in their communities. And a Texas where we protect our constitutional rights and your individual liberties.

That is the Texas that we have worked so hard to create. But, we must fight to keep it that way. Because some want a completely different Texas. Where we have cut taxes they would raise them. Where we have created jobs, they would destroy them. Where we have supported our law enforcement officers, they would defund them. Where we have protected your constitutional rights, they threaten to take them away. And were we promote Texas exceptionalism they engage in fear mongering.

We cannot let big government liberals redesign our state with a progressive agenda that is destroying some parts of America. We need a proven winner who will fight to secure the future of Texas.

That is why, today, I am in the Rio Grande Valley. To officially announce my re-election to run as your governor of the great state of Texas.

Editor's Note: The above commentary focuses on the Rio Grande Valley portion of Gov. Greg Abbott's remarks at his re-election campaign kickoff held Saturday in McAllen, Texas. To watch the whole show, click here.

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Analysis: A Texas election in the shade of government's third branch

Ross Ramsey

Texas Tribune

January 10, 2022

<https://www.texastribune.org/2022/01/10/texas-courts-abortion-voting-redistricting/>

Laws are laws until judges or legislators toss them out. For political purposes, a law that doesn't survive court challenges can still count as a win — as long as it remains in place through an election.

Some of the biggest political issues in Texas are pending in court.

The U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments on Friday about the constitutionality of federal vaccine mandates, a tussle that has the federal government on one side and Texas and other states on the other.

The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans is now the forum for lawsuits over the state's new ban on abortions after detection of a fetal pulse, usually about six weeks into a pregnancy. That's one of the nation's most restrictive laws and its fate will ultimately depend on a ruling from the Supreme Court, which is reconsidering its 49-year-old ruling in *Roe v. Wade*.

The election season in Texas is well underway, even with two major legislative issues — new political maps and newly restrictive voting and election laws — working their way through the courts. The courts have delayed elections in the past when redistricting maps were not to their liking, but they don't have a lot of time left: Early voting in the Texas primaries starts on Feb. 14. And the state's new law on voting and election practices, also tangled up in court, will remain in place until and unless the courts say otherwise.

In each of those cases, the supporters of the new laws, or of the federal orders on vaccines, will get their way unless the courts decide otherwise. Opponents of those laws, looking for federal lenience, will all have to wait.

It all might balance out in the long run, but vaccines, abortions and voting in an election that's weeks away are short-run concerns for many. The winning side might change when those cases are complete, but in the meantime, the assumption is that the governments that changed the rules knew what they were doing.

When it comes to elections, that's a relatively new development. Texas has been cited over and over by the courts for "intentional discrimination" in redistricting. A lawsuit filed in October alleges that the new maps provide fresh examples of that.

But Texas is no longer required, as it was until 2013, to get changes in its maps and its voting laws approved by federal courts or the U.S. Department of Justice before putting them into effect.

States make laws all the time, but voting laws are a peculiar case. The federal Voting Rights Act was written to stop states with histories of discriminating — states like this one — from revising and refining their bad behavior to stay ahead of equal rights legislation. They were required to get permission before their changes could take effect.

But after that 2013 ruling from the Supreme Court, instead of waiting for "preclearance," states can proceed with their new laws until the courts stop them. A voting or election law that turns out to be illegal after the lawsuits are judged remains in effect until that judging is done.

In the meantime, the elections go on under the new law, which is presumed to be constitutional — and nondiscriminatory.

Abortion laws and vaccine or mask mandates can be time-sensitive, too. For now, the new restrictions on abortion in Texas remain in effect while the court challenges to it proceed. Anyone seeking an abortion — or helping someone seek an abortion — is subject to the restrictions in the new law. Even if the courts eventually overturn the Texas law, someone seeking an abortion right now has to follow it.

The same goes for the federal vaccine mandates. Unless the courts put a temporary hold on those orders, they'll remain in effect for now.

It's clear what laws are in effect on voting, redistricting, abortion and vaccines here in the first month of 2022 — what Texans are allowed to do in the current election, whether they're able to obtain abortions and whether they're required to follow government vaccine mandates.

But it might be temporary.

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The strange silence around Texas election audit

Editorial Board

Dallas Morning News

January 9, 2022

<https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/editorials/2022/01/09/the-strange-silence-around-texas-election-audit/>

When Texas launched a "full forensic audit" of the 2020 general election, Gov. Greg Abbott and the office of the secretary of state wanted everybody to know about it.

The secretary of state's office announced the audit Sept. 23, on a Thursday, hours after former President Donald Trump demanded an audit in Texas, a state he easily won. Abbott soon went on Fox News to defend the decision to pursue an audit, telling host Chris Wallace: "We have a responsibility to ensure the integrity and confidence in the elections in the state of Texas."

There was then, as there is now, no credible question about the integrity of the state's elections, but onward we went. Now, the first phase of the audit is done and very few issues were found in the four counties targeted for the review: Dallas, Collin, Tarrant and Harris. The largest discrepancy was located in Republican-leaning Collin County, where a difference of 17 votes between manual and electronic counts was found. And for that, Collin County officials had a clear explanation.

You'd think Abbott and Secretary of State John B. Scott would want to shout this good news story from the rooftops. After all, the multimillion dollar audit has shown so far that our state's voters can go to the polls with confidence that we are holding free and fair elections in Texas.

What we got instead was a news drop about the audit results on New Year's Eve, when few Texans were paying attention. In journalism, we know from experience that officials save bad news for the night before a holiday.

Wasn't the goal to make Texans confident in their election results?

Maybe the lack of noise over the audit results has more to do with the fact that they will make it more difficult to justify additional "election integrity" stunts like this one.

Voter fraud does happen and should be investigated and prosecuted in accordance with the law, but the problem is limited and does not justify the level of interest and investment that it has received from GOP officials. In 2021, Republican state lawmakers redirected \$4 million from the state prison budget to the office of the secretary of state to help pay for election audits.

This is what that office found in a statewide review that was part of the first phase of the 2020 election audit: 509 instances where individuals may have cast ballots in Texas and another state and 67 possible cases of votes cast on behalf of dead voters. That was among 11.3 million votes cast.

The secretary of state's office also identified more than 11,000 potential non-citizen voters, but recent reporting raises serious questions about the validity of the data used to identify many of those people. And this is not the first time that a sweep of voter rolls has erroneously turned up large numbers of supposedly "non-citizen" voters.

Meanwhile, the Texas attorney general's election integrity unit saw its budget and staff increase in 2021. Yet it closed only three cases last year, compared with 17 the year before, according to the Houston Chronicle.

The state audit will continue this year, with officials saying it will look at whether election procedures in 2020 were properly followed.

Texas leaders insist on pouring money and resources into finding voter fraud, and the results are paltry. What will it take for them to abandon this inquisition and tell Texas voters that we can have confidence in our elections and in our democracy?

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From: Sam Taylor
Sent: Tuesday, January 18, 2022 8:59 AM
Subject: SOS Morning News Clips 1/18/22

Sensitivity: Personal



Texas Secretary of State Morning News Clips January 18, 2022

[Texas Secretary of State, Travis County at impasse on dealing with mail-in ballot application rejections](#), KXAN-TV, January 18, 2022

[Texas Secretary of State and Travis County Clerk's Office exchange words on mail-in ballot mix-up](#), KVUE-TV, January 14, 2022

[Texas Secretary of State 'surprised' by mail-in ballot application rejections](#), KTBC-TV, January 14, 2022

[Texas Secretary of State calls on Travis Co. to review rejected mail-in ballot application](#), KEYE-TV, January 14, 2022

[New Texas voting law snags US citizens, mail ballot requests](#), Associated Press, January 14, 2022

[Texas wants review of Travis County absentee ballot requests rejected under state's new voting law](#), Austin American-Statesman, January 15, 2022

[Texas Secretary of State Calls for More Transparency in Elections](#), The Dallas Express, January 15, 2022

[Texas election officials blame new voting law for rise in rejected mail-in ballot applications](#), KERA News, January 14, 2022

[Texas launches digital ballot-by-mail tracking system](#), KXAN-TV, January 16, 2022

[One county in Texas turns down 7 times as many vote-by-mail applications after new suppression laws: report](#), Raw Story, January 17, 2022

[Texas says supply chain issues have limited the number of voter registration forms it can give out](#), *KUT-FM*, January 18, 2022

['It's a red flag': Counties see increase in rejected mail-in ballot applications under new Texas voting rules](#), *KHOU-TV*, January 14, 2022

[New voting law leading to high rejection of mail-in ballot applications in Texas](#), *CNN*, January 14, 2022

[Montgomery County approves early-voting sites for March primaries](#), *Community Impact*, January 14, 2022

[New voter registration certificates are in the mail for El Paso County registered voters](#), *KVIA-TV*, January 14, 2022

[New Texas elections law, decried as vote suppression, leads to record number of rejected mail ballot applications](#), *Houston Chronicle*, January 15, 2022

[Pence says federal election bills 'offend the Founders' intention that states conduct elections.'](#) *CNN*, January 14, 2022

[In Quest for Energy Independence, Mexico Is Buying a Texas Oil Refinery](#), *New York Times*, January 18, 2022

[Texas border cities registered 'huge' spike in retail sales after bridges reopened](#), *Border Report*, January 17, 2022

['No way we could afford to foot the bill to do what is needed': South Texas county gets state dollars to recoup border crisis expenses](#), *KENS-TV*, January 14, 2022

[Hidalgo County Set To Dispute 2020 Census Count](#), *KURV-AM*, January 17, 2022

[Shell to hand over Deer Park refinery to Pemex next week – sources](#), *Reuters*, January 13, 2022

[Over 100 Mexican immigration agents linked to bribery and corruption](#), *Associated Press*, January 14, 2022

[U.S. Energy Secretary to Visit Mexico to Discuss Power Market Concerns](#), *Latin Post*, January 17, 2022

[Millions in funding slated for Texas bridges, repairs](#), *KSAT-TV*, January 14, 2022

[Mexico labor minister defends Pemex union boss vote despite influence concerns](#), *Reuters*, January 14, 2022

[Column: Mexico's Electricity Reform Would Lead to More, Not Less, Reliance on NatGas Imports](#), *Natural Gas Intelligence*, January 14, 2022

[Texas Dems work around election integrity law as they mail out "hundreds of thousands" of mail-in ballots](#), *Hot Air*, January 15, 2022

[Opinion: Pence: Jan. 6 was a tragedy. Busting the filibuster would be, too](#), *Washington Post*, January 14, 2022

[Anchía: When you trash the border, you are trashing Texas](#), *Rio Grande Guardian*, January 14, 2022

[As Abbott Celebrates MLK Day, Voter Suppression Agenda Kicks Into Full Gear](#), *Texas Signal*, January 17, 2022

[Garcia: New Texas election law already has made a mess of mail voting](#), *San Antonio Express-News*, January 15, 2022

[Who's afraid of the big, bad ballot drop box?](#), *Austin American-Statesman*, January 15, 2022

Texas Secretary of State, Travis County at impasse on dealing with mail-in ballot application rejections

Billy Gates

KXAN-TV

January 18, 2022

<https://www.kxan.com/news/local/travis-county/texas-secretary-of-state-travis-county-at-impasse-on-dealing-with-mail-in-ballot-application-rejections/>

AUSTIN (KXAN) — With mail-in ballot applications rejected at 50% in Travis County, the Texas Secretary of State wants county elections officials to “immediately review and re-examine” them.

John Scott said Jan. 14 that he was “surprised to learn” Travis County elections officials had rejected about half of all mail-in ballot applications. County officials made the announcement Jan. 13, saying the state hasn’t provided enough help so they can tell people how to fix their applications.

“Although we expect more comprehensive guidance from the Secretary of State’s Office in the future, at this time, our office does not have enough information regarding the new online cure process to instruct voters how to cure their application with the SOS,” a county press release said. “Additionally, we have not received instructions from the state outlining what our office can do to assist voters in submitting a completed application.”

County officials said there hasn’t been a final rejection of any applications, only that they need “additional guidance” from the Secretary of State’s office. The county plans to have a press conference at 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday to discuss what outgoing county clerk Dana DeBeauvoir said is a “complicated issue.”

The newly-passed law, dubbed by Texas Republicans as a “voter integrity” law, requires mail-in ballot applicants to provide a valid driver’s license number or the last four digits of their social security

number to match their voter registration record. If those numbers don't match, the application is, by law, automatically rejected.

Scott said no one at Travis County's office asked for help and wants them to reach out so the applications can be approved before the March 1 primary election.

"Travis County made the decision to reject these mail ballot applications before contacting our office," he said. "We call on Travis County to immediately review and re-examine the mail ballot applications in question to determine whether they were processed in accordance with state law, with the goal of reinstating and minimizing any disruption to eligible voters who have properly submitted their application for ballot by mail."

The Texas Tribune reports other counties are having similar issues with mail-in ballot applications rejections. Harris County has rejected about 16% of its total applications while Bexar County has rejected more than 200 applications because the entire identification section wasn't filled out. Another 150 applications were rejected because driver's license numbers didn't match.

The Travis County Clerk's office is in the middle of a big change. With longtime clerk DeBeauvoir retiring Jan. 28, Rebecca Guerrero is slated to take over as an interim clerk for 2022. Guerrero has worked in the clerk's office for the past 22 years, with the last six years as the Director of Recording.

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Texas Secretary of State and Travis County Clerk's Office exchange words on mail-in ballot mix-up

Tanvi Varma

KVUE-TV

January 14, 2022

<https://www.kvue.com/article/news/local/texas-secretary-of-state-travis-county-twitter-mail-in-ballots/269-0b7a8234-dbf6-44cb-8b64-fbf4ea4e167d>

AUSTIN, Texas — The Travis County Clerk's Office on Thursday said it's had to reject almost half of its recent mail-in ballot applications as a result of Senate Bill 1, a voting bill signed into law last September.

The office has also said they haven't received proper instruction on how to help voters to fix their applications. The clerk's office said it would be hosting a press conference next week.

In response, Texas Secretary of State John Scott issued the following statement Friday:

"We were surprised to learn for the first time of the apparent wholesale rejection of mail ballot applications by Travis County. Our office's role to each county, including Travis County, is to be available to provide advice and assistance on implementation of Texas election law upon request. Nevertheless, Travis County made the decision to reject these mail ballot applications before contacting our office. We call on Travis County to immediately review and re-examine the mail ballot applications in question to determine whether they were processed in accordance with state law, with the goal of reinstating and minimizing any disruption to eligible voters who have properly submitted

their application for ballot by mail. We anxiously await the results of their re-processing of these mail ballot applications."

On Thursday, the two entities took to Twitter to address their concerns.

"Always, you can pick up the phone and call our office instead of calling a press conference. Much more time efficient," said the Texas Secretary of State on Twitter.

This comment was in response to Travis County commenting on a Twitter post about voting in the March primary election. Travis County wrote that they needed more assistance regarding voter portals.

Senate Bill 1 requires applicants to submit their driver's license number or the last four digits of social security, and for that information to then match the applicant's voter registration record.

Travis County Clerk Dana DeBeauvoir is planning to hold a press conference on Jan. 18 to discuss the issue.

Senate Bill 1 not only adds new requirements to mail-in voting, but it bans drive-thru voting, 24-hour voting and adds a criminal penalty to election officials who send mail-in ballot applications to people who haven't requested them.

According to the Texas Secretary of State's office, to qualify for vote by mail, you must be 65 years or older, sick or disabled, out of the county, expected to give birth within three weeks before or after election day, or in jail.

According to a press release Friday, a new Ballot by Mail tracking tool created by House Bill 1382 is now available online through the Texas Secretary of State's website.

"I'm excited that the statewide Ballot by Mail tracking tool is now available online through the Secretary of State's website," Rep. John Bucy III (D-Austin) said. "We passed H.B. 1382 to increase accessibility, efficiency, and transparency for Texas voters. This is the type of common sense modernization needed in Texas elections."

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Texas Secretary of State 'surprised' by mail-in ballot application rejections

KTBC-TV

January 14, 2022

<https://www.fox7austin.com/news/texas-secretary-of-state-surprised-by-mail-in-ballot-application-rejections>

AUSTIN, Texas - Texas Secretary of State John Scott has issued a statement saying he was 'surprised' by the Travis County Clerk's Office's announcement that it had rejected an unusually large percentage of applications for a ballot by mail for the March 1 Primary Election.

Fifty percent of applications for mail-in ballots in Travis County have been rejected as of Jan. 13, says the county clerk's office. Many other counties are experiencing the same high rejection rate, says the office. Williamson County reported that its rejection rate is 40% because of similar issues.

In a press release, John Scott accused Travis County of making the decision to reject these mail ballot applications before contacting his office.

"We call on Travis County to immediately review and re-examine the mail ballot applications in question to determine whether they were processed in accordance with state law, with the goal of reinstating and minimizing any disruption to eligible voters who have properly submitted their application for ballot by mail," the press release said. "We anxiously await the results of their re-processing of these mail ballot applications."

The press release goes on to urge all county election officials to contact the Texas Secretary of State's office to "seek advice and assistance on the correct method of processing mail ballot applications."

Eligible voters who want to track their mail-in ballot applications to their respective county can use the recently launched Ballot by Mail Tracker, available on the Texas Secretary of State's 'My Voter Portal.'

Through the Ballot by Mail Tracker, voters are able to see whether their application for a ballot by mail was accepted or rejected, and can correct any mismatched identification information by following the prompts in the tracker, according to the press release.

- Under Texas law, you are only eligible to vote by mail if you are:
- 65 years or older
- Sick or disabled
- Out of the county on election day and during the period for early voting by personal appearance
- Expected to give birth within three weeks before or after Election Day
- Confined in jail, but otherwise eligible

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Texas Secretary of State calls on Travis Co. to review rejected mail-in ballot application

Adela Uchida

KEYE-TV

January 14, 2022

<https://cbsaustin.com/news/local/texas-secretary-of-state-calls-on-travis-co-to-review-rejected-mail-in-ballot-application-election-vote-county-primary-clerk>

The Texas Secretary of State is telling the Travis County clerk's office to go back, and review mail-in ballot applications the clerk's office rejected. The Travis county clerk has rejected half of those applications ahead of the March primary election.

The problem with the new mail-in ballot application is on the right-hand side of the very first section – where it asks for your driver’s license or the last four digits of your social security number. Many applicants appear to not have included it.

It’s part of a new voting law that passed the legislature in 2021. House Speaker Dade Phelan is a supporter. “I don’t think it’s asking too much to have an identifier on there, I know what my social security number is, I know what my driver’s license number is.”

But voting rights advocates say the new law was a solution without a problem. “It’s the problem of legislating conspiracy theories and not in reality, and when they legislate like this on a whim, real voters get hurt,” said MOVE Texas communications director Charlie Bonner.

He says some applicants also sent in an older version of the form, that did not ask for ID numbers. “There are a lot of issues and there’s really been no guidance from the Secretary of State’s office to these local elections officials or to voters.”

The Secretary of State did issue a statement today saying, “Travis County made the decision to reject these mail ballot applications before contacting our office. We call on Travis county to immediately review and re-examine the mail ballot applications in question to determine whether they were processed in accordance with state law, with the goal of reinstating and minimizing any disruption to eligible voters who have properly submitted their application for ballot by mail.”

“The Secretary of State’s Office and a lot of our elected officials like to pin a problem on Travis county, and ignore the fact that ballots are being rejected in Harris county and in Bexar county and in Dallas. This problem is happening all over the state,” Bonner said.

The Travis County Clerk, meantime, says they are waiting for guidance from the secretary of state and that the rejection of the ballot applications isn’t final.

Supporters of the new law like Speaker Phelan say it’s on clerk’s offices statewide to get the word out. “If anything, it’s a public education PSA for the counties to remind their voters exactly what the new law is.”

Travis County says they’ll have more to say next week, in a press conference.

Meantime, you can track your mail-in ballot application through the tracker run by the secretary of state by [clicking here](#).

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New Texas voting law snags US citizens, mail ballot requests

Acacia Coronado, Paul Weber and Nicholas Riccardi

Associated Press

January 14, 2022

https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/new-texas-voting-law-snags-us-citizens-mail-ballot-requests/2022/01/14/239a1ccc-7596-11ec-a26d-1c21c16b1c93_story.html

AUSTIN, Texas — A sweeping new Texas voting law that Republicans muscled through the Legislature last year over dramatic protests is drawing fire again, even before some of the most contentious restrictions and changes kick in ahead of the state’s first-in-the nation primary.

Thousands of Texans — including some U.S. citizens — have received letters saying they have been flagged as potential noncitizens who could be kicked off voting rolls. And this week, local elections officials said hundreds of mail-in ballot applications are being rejected for not including required new information.

“It’s just a bad situation on a number of levels,” said James Slattery, an attorney with the Texas Civil Rights Project, one of several voting rights groups that has sued the state over the new law.

The Texas law was approved last year by Republicans, who joined their party colleagues in at least 18 states, including Florida, Georgia and Arizona, in enacting new voting restrictions since the 2020 election, according to the Brennan Center for Justice. The national GOP campaign to tighten voting laws has been partly driven by former President Donald Trump’s false claims that he won the election, not President Joe Biden.

Democrats have strenuously objected — including by walking out and to gridlock the Legislature, warning it could disenfranchise untold numbers of voters, especially Black, Latino and Asian people. Many of its provisions, such as expanded powers for partisan poll watchers, don’t take effect until the election. But Democrats and civil rights groups say what has happened so far is alarming.

First, Texas sent letters to more than 11,000 voters warning them their registrations will be canceled unless they prove to their local elections office they are citizens. More than 2,000 registrations ended after the voters did not come in, according to the Texas Secretary of State’s office. But some who received the warning letters were citizens.

Monty Tew, a 52-year-old who was born in Texas, said he couldn’t understand why he got the letter asking him to prove his citizenship. He said he paid \$30 to request a copy of his birth certificate, which he then sent the county a picture of as proof of citizenship and was soon notified the issue was resolved.

“I feel fortunate for that not to have been that big of a deal, it wasn’t that burdensome,” said Tew, of Round Rock, a city outside Austin. “But I can imagine how that can be a much bigger flogging for someone else perhaps, if they didn’t have their hands on technology or if paying someone \$30 to get something that was a waste of your time, money and effort could be a hassle.”

Then this week, election administrators in some of Texas’ largest counties, which are run by Democrats, began raising early alarms about hundreds of mail-in ballot applications they’ve had to reject for not complying with strict new provisions.

Tucked into the 76-page law is a new requirement that voter include either their driver’s license number or the last four digits of their Social Security number on mail-in ballot applications, or the number of a state-issued identification.

Counties then match those numbers to their records before mailing an actual ballot. Texas already had some of the nation's most restrictive mail-in ballot rules, and was among only a handful of states that did not expand mail balloting in 2020 during the pandemic.

As of Friday, Harris County officials said they had rejected more than 200 of 1,200 applications from voters in the Houston area. In Austin, county election officials put the rate of rejections at roughly 50%.

"It's definitely a red flag," said Isabel Longoria, the Harris County elections administrator. "At this point, to be so low in the number of applications and have a 20 percent rejection rate for the primaries? It's really got me worried."

The Secretary of State's office said in a statement Friday that counties should check with it on how to properly reject mail ballots. It had previously said the letters warning voters they may lose their right to vote were sent as part of the implementation of the new voting law. That measure includes provisions setting out a procedure to comply with a settlement of a 2019 lawsuit settlement over the last time Texas had tried to weed out noncitizen voters and ended up threatening to revoke the registration of large numbers of U.S. citizens as well.

"Voters who do not provide proof of citizenship to their county voter registrar within 30 days of receiving the notice of examination will have their registration cancelled, with the opportunity to be reinstated if the voter later provides proof of citizenship, including at the polling place," said Sam Taylor, a spokesman for the office.

Of the 2,327 voters whose registration have been canceled through the procedure, 278 have been confirmed as noncitizens, Taylor said.

But civil rights groups say the state is not taking the correct steps to ensure U.S. citizens don't get caught in the process. The state is supposed to only flag people who identified as noncitizens on their driver's licenses after registering to vote. But it's also catching some like Harish Vyalla, 35, of Austin, who said he has voted in the county at least twice since becoming a US citizen in 2013.

"I had no concerns because I know I am a citizen with proper documentation, but I was surprised because nobody had asked me in the past," said Vyalla, adding it took about a month to preserve his right to vote. "The government should already have all these proofs and documents in hand."

Nina Perales, an attorney with the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, helped write the settlement of the 2019 case. She said state state officials are clearly not following it and are setting themselves up for another lawsuit.

Perales said Texas voters should brace for a potential rocky voting experience as the law's provisions fully kick in during the March 1 primary.

"Texans would be well-served to know their rights when they go to the polls, because I think there'll be confusion and doubt for a lot of voters," Perales said.

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Texas wants review of Travis County absentee ballot requests rejected under state's new voting law

Madlin Mekelburg and Luz Moreno-Lozano

Austin American-Statesman

January 15, 2022

<https://www.statesman.com/story/news/politics/state/2022/01/15/texas-wants-review-tossed-travis-county-absentee-ballot-requests/6525950001/>

Texas Secretary of State John Scott called Friday on elections officials in Travis County to “review and re-examine” hundreds of applications for mail-in ballots that were rejected for violating the state’s new election law that creates stricter rules for absentee voting.

The law created new identification requirements for Texans looking to cast their ballot through the mail, and elections officials in Travis, Williamson, Hays and Bastrop counties said they have collectively rejected hundreds of applications that fail to meet the new standards.

People seeking to vote by mail must now include certain identifying information on their application for a ballot: their driver’s license number, a state ID number or, in some cases, the last four digits of their Social Security number. County officials then match this number against the individual’s voter registration number. If the number provided in the application doesn’t match the number on file, the application must be rejected.

“This is truly voter suppression,” Travis County Clerk Dana DeBeauvoir said. “It’s a very complicated process — and here’s the thing: Voters are left with the problem of trying to figure out what (ID) number they put on their voter registration that we have on file.”

In Travis County, about 350 applications — half of those received by the county clerk’s office so far — have been rejected for failing to meet the new requirements.

Scott said his agency was “surprised to learn for the first time of the apparent wholesale rejection of mail ballot applications by Travis County” and encouraged officials in Austin to contact his office for assistance implementing the new election law.

“We call on Travis County to immediately review and re-examine the mail ballot applications in question to determine whether they were processed in accordance with state law, with the goal of reinstating and minimizing any disruption to eligible voters who have properly submitted their application for ballot by mail,” he said in a statement.

But Travis County was one of several counties across the state being forced to reject a higher-than-usual share of applications for mail-in ballots for failing to include any ID number or including a number that does not match the information officials have on file.

The new matching requirement has led to confusion and frustration for voters and election administrators. Voters are not required to provide both a driver’s license and Social Security number when they register to vote, so the state does not have both ID numbers on file for every voter in the state. If an individual registers to vote using one form of ID and then applies for a mail-in ballot using the other number, their application would be rejected.

In Harris County, elections officials said they have received 1,276 applications for mail-in ballots as of Thursday, and 208 have been rejected for failing to comply with the new law.

Similarly in San Antonio, Bexar County elections officials told the Texas Tribune that they have rejected 200 applications that did not include any information in the ID section and 125 applications where voters used a driver's license number, but that wasn't the number in their voter record.

As of Friday, Williamson County had received 400 applications for mail-in ballots and reported about 40% had to be rejected. Of those, 64 didn't meet the new voter ID requirements and 96 didn't include a party preference, another requirement for applications for primary election ballots.

Williamson County Elections Administrator Chris Davis said his office expects that number to increase over the next several weeks as political parties and candidates begin to send out applications for absentee ballots.

Hays County election officials also reported seeing several of their mail-in ballot applications rejected for not having the proper identification numbers on file.

Jennifer Doinoff, Hays County elections administrator and voter registrar, said her office is encouraging people to check their ID registration on votetexas.gov or put both identifiers on their application to increase their chances of getting approved.

"Any time you have a change in the process it's going to be an issue," Doinoff said. "And it's already something that is confusing, but we are just going with it. We are doing everything we can to help voters."

But it's still early. Counties began accepting applications for absentee ballots on Jan. 1, and Texans have until Feb. 18 to request a paper ballot. Elections officials in the Austin area said they expected to see the number of rejected ballot requests remain high.

In Texas, only certain voters can receive a ballot to vote by mail: those 65 or older, those who are disabled, those who will be out of the county on the day of an election or those in jail but otherwise eligible to vote.

The Republican and Democratic primaries on March 1 will be the first statewide election since the state's sweeping voting law was adopted. Texas Republicans who championed the measure and said it would reduce voter fraud in the state, despite no evidence that widespread voter fraud is occurring.

Civil rights groups and voting advocacy organizations said the law will create barriers to voting for all Texans and could disproportionately affect voters of color.

During the last legislative session, Texas House Democrats left the state for Washington, D.C., to deny Republicans a quorum and block the bill, but it was ultimately passed upon their return.

The law makes broad changes, including banning drive-thru and overnight voting, and it expands power afforded to partisan poll watchers. It also creates a slew of new crimes tied to the election process, including prohibiting public officials from soliciting or distributing an application to vote by mail to individuals who didn't request the document.

“It’s doubly confusing now,” DeBeauvoir said. “If I try to tell a voter that the best way to get around this is just to put both their Texas driver’s license number and last four digits of their Social (Security number) on an application, then I’ve committed a felony. They have found every way to hamstring election administrators.”

Caldwell County Elections Administrator Kimber Daniel said certain voters are feeling the effect of that change more than others.

“What we’re seeing right now is — most of our voters who do ballots by mail are elderly — that not being able to send a reminder notice to them has been difficult,” she said. “They’re used to getting something, a reminder that if you’re going to vote by mail this year you need to call and request an application.”

The process for correcting mistakes on ballots and applications also looks different under the new law.

The Texas secretary of state is now tasked with creating a ballot by mail tracker where residents can track the status of their application. The Ballot by Mail Tracker, can show whether an application was accepted or rejected, and can a person can correct any mismatched identification information by following the prompts in the tracker.

But local elections officials have said the portal requires more information fields than ever before, and the interface can be hard to navigate, especially for the largest population of absentee voters: those older than 65.

DeBeauvoir’s office got into a heated exchange with the secretary of state’s office on Twitter over the issue Thursday, after her office issued a statement saying it was awaiting “more comprehensive guidance” from the state regarding the new system. She scheduled a news conference for Tuesday to discuss the issue.

After the secretary of state’s office shared a link to the voter portal on Twitter, it tagged the Travis County clerk's account, which replied: “Still waiting on information from your office on how to upload the information into the portal. Can someone assist?”

“Always, you can pick up the phone and call our office instead of calling a press conference. Much more time efficient,” the state agency's account said in reply.

DeBeauvoir said Friday she had not spoken with anyone at the secretary of state’s office.

Davis in Williamson County said his office was preparing to send an email to the secretary of state’s office about the issues that voters have been facing with the portal and curing process, and hope it can provide some guidance on how to help residents.

“Voters are being asked to include more info on their applications than ever before,” Davis said. “Some are or may get the ID information wrong, and we are seeing rejection rates that are problematic, and at the same time there is a tracker that is hard to access and use. And that is making it hard for people to vote.”

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Texas Secretary of State Calls for More Transparency in Elections

Jose Nino

The Dallas Express

January 15, 2022

<https://dallasexpress.com/texas-secretary-of-state-calls-for-more-transparency-in-elections/>

During a speech before the Texas Association of Elections Administrators (TAEA) on January 4, 2022, Texas Secretary of State John Scott called for more transparency to address the “crisis of confidence” that voters have during election time especially with accusations of voter fraud.

Election integrity has been a major topic of discussion in many states nationwide.

Per TAEA President Remi Garza, Scott’s appearance at the event was the first time a secretary of state was in attendance.

Erin Anderson of Texas Scorecard observed that “Election-related matters are mostly handled by specialized staff within the office’s elections division.”

Garza noted that Secretary Scott’s visit “highlights the partnership he has already demonstrated since taking office and his focus on elections,” adding he sees Scott as “a great ally for these coming years.”

Gov. Greg Abbott appointed Scott to his position last October.

“Thank you for what you do to make elections work,” Scott said to the administrators.

“As county election officials, you serve the most critical function in our democracy: You protect the integrity of the ballot box,” Scott stated. “You make sure that Texas elections are accurate, fair, and secure.”

“Elections administrators here in Texas and across the country are dealing with a crisis of confidence among voters and have been for the past several election cycles,” he added. “Not only are voters animated about the issues and our candidates on the ballot, they’re animated about the integrity of the ballot box.”

The Brennan Center for Justice stated, “we must be careful not to undermine free and fair access to the ballot in the name of preventing phantom voter fraud.”

The article continues by saying that “most allegations of fraud turn out to be baseless.”

Scott believes the current audit of the 2020 election will serve as “an information mechanism to pass knowledge on to the voters” about how elections are conducted.

“Is there fraud in elections?” he inquired. “Probably as long as there’s been elections, somebody’s been trying to game elections.”

Scott also called for further transparency.

“Heider Garcia said it best at our election law conference: ‘Give us a chance to show you what we do.’ That’s what we need to be telling people, our voters, our fellow citizens,” he stated.

Heider Garcia is the Tarrant County Elections Administrator.

“It’s the thing that should give people confidence,” he added. “Make it transparent.”

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Texas election officials blame new voting law for rise in rejected mail-in ballot applications

Julian Aguilar

KERA News

January 14, 2022

<https://www.keranews.org/politics/2022-01-14/texas-election-officials-blame-new-voting-law-for-rise-in-rejected-mail-in-ballot-applications>

All over the state, county officials report they’re rejecting hundreds of applications for mail-in ballots, an issue several attribute to recent election law changes championed by state Republicans. With COVID-19 cases on the rise and the March primary fast approaching, county officials across the state are rejecting a high number of applications submitted by voters who wish to vote by mail instead of going to the polls.

The issue centers on new requirements passed by state lawmakers last year during the 87th Texas Legislature and the special sessions that followed. Senate bill 1, by state Sen. Bryan Hughes, R-Mineola, ushered in sweeping changes to election procedures, including what information must be included on an application for a mail-in ballot.

The law requires that applications include a potential voter’s driver’s license numbers or Social Security information. That information must match the data on the person’s previously-submitted voting record. Critics of the provision say most people don’t remember which number they used when originally registering.

In Bexar County, 42 of the 80 ballot applications received Thursday were rejected, Bexar County Elections administrator Jacque Callanen told Texas Public Radio. And roughly half of Travis County’s mail-in ballot applications for the March primary election have been rejected, KUT reported Thursday.

Many who spoke out against SB 1 before it passed said the legislation was designed to disenfranchise voters. Now, they say the high number of rejected ballots proves that’s exactly what is happening.

“It’s making the process not only more difficult to follow along but people are scared to put perhaps their voter information, their driver’s license, their Social Security number, to have it mailed around,” Harris County Elections Administrator Isabel Longoria told Houston Public Media.

Of the 1,276 mail-in ballot applications received to date by Harris County, Longoria said 208 have been rejected, about 16%. But in 2018, only 4,979 applications were rejected out of 78,745, about 6%.

“Senate bill 1, as predicted by election officials, is making it harder for voters to apply to vote by mail,” she said.

State watchdog groups are also weighing in, and are urging voters to be more proactive this election cycle.

“As things stand now, about half of those voters are being blocked from having their voices heard,” Stephanie Gomez, the associate director at Common Cause Texas, said in a statement. “If this isn’t fixed, this single provision of SB 1 could block up to a half-million Texans from voting by mail this year.”

“In the meantime, we urge all Texans to be your own advocates for your freedom to vote,” added Gomez. “While the politicians in charge are determined to make it as hard as possible to vote, Common Cause Texas is ramping up our Texas-sized election protection to ensure our communities can make their voice heard at the ballot box.”

Hughes’ district office didn’t respond to a request for comment on the criticisms levied against his legislation. But the Texas Secretary of State’s office, which oversees state elections, released a statement Friday urging county administrators “to seek advice and assistance on the correct method of processing mail ballot applications.”

The office also singled out Travis County, which Texas Secretary of State John Scott said “made the decision to reject these mail ballot applications before contacting our office.”

“We call on Travis County to immediately review and re-examine the mail ballot applications in question to determine whether they were processed in accordance with state law, with the goal of reinstating and minimizing any disruption to eligible voters who have properly submitted their application for ballot by mail,” Scott said. “We anxiously await the results of their re-processing of these mail ballot applications.”

The statement follows a brief back-and-forth on Twitter Thursday where Scott’s office and Travis County officials traded jabs over how the offices communicate.

While that bickering unfolds in Austin, election officials hundreds of miles away told KERA they hope there is enough time to educate potential voters of the changes to mail-in ballot procedures before upcoming registration deadlines.

“Anytime you do anything like this and ask for more information without a lot of notice or information being given out to the public you’re going to have issued like this,” said Lisa Wise, the El Paso County Elections Administrator.

Wise said her office has only received 103 applications for mail-in ballots, but 23 of those were rejected — including 11, or roughly 10 %, that didn’t meet the state’s new identification requirements.

The others didn't indicate party affiliations as required or lacked other information. Wise said her office has also received more applications that haven't yet been processed.

"We're just trying to make sure we can turn around the notifications as soon as possible to let voters know" about the changes, she said.

Another hurdle in processing the applications is that some voters are sending in old applications instead of the newer versions now required under SB1.

In Tyler, Smith County Elections Administrator Michelle Allcon said her office has only rejected a small number of ballot applications, but those were all due to residents not using the new form.

"The rejections that we've had are due to them using forms that expired in the November 2021 election," she said.

In the Rio Grande Valley's Hidalgo County, 64 out of the 77 mail-in applications have been rejected so far. Hidalgo County Elections Analyst Sal Hernandez said the office does not have exact figures, but that a large number of the rejections were due to outdated forms.

"People are not fully aware of it even though it's on the website," he said. "We have sent them new applications."

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Texas launches digital ballot-by-mail tracking system

Kelsey Thompson

KXAN-TV

January 16, 2022

<https://www.kxan.com/news/texas/texas-launches-digital-ballot-by-mail-tracking-system/>

AUSTIN (KXAN) — Voters utilizing ballot-by-mail offerings can now track the status of their ballot online with the launch of a new digital tool. The digital initiative was created through House Bill 1382 during the 87th Texas Legislature.

The digital tool lives on the Texas Secretary of State's website, under the "My Voter Portal" tab. Officials required the launch of the program come in time for the March primary elections.

"I'm excited that the statewide Ballot by Mail tracking tool is now available online through the Secretary of State's website," Rep. John Bucy III (D-Austin) said in the release. "We passed H.B. 1382 to increase accessibility, efficiency, and transparency for Texas voters. This is the type of common sense modernization needed in Texas elections."

Those using the tool will fill out their personal information into the online form, including their name, date of birth, driver's license number or Department of Public Safety I.D., address and the last four digits of their social security number. From there, the tracker will trace and report the current status of a person's ballot-by-mail application or ballot as it makes its way through the system.

To check your latest voter registration status, click on the “Am I Registered?” tab under the “My Voter Portal.”

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One county in Texas turns down 7 times as many vote-by-mail applications after new suppression laws: report

Sarah K. Burris

Raw Story

January 17, 2022

<https://www.rawstory.com/texas-voter-suppression-help-tips/>

The 2022 primary elections in Texas will come on March 1, but the voter suppression bills are already having an impact on those who hoped to participate.

The Harris County Judge, who manages elections in the largest county in the state, tweeted that she has been forced to refuse seven times as many vote by mail applications as last year.

Linda Hidalgo explained that because of the new laws, people must register to vote with their driver's license number and if you use your social security number with your mail-in ballot, it gets rejected:

[“In Harris County percentage-wise we’re rejecting 7 times more mail ballot apps than before, because of new TX voter suppression laws that create a maze of technicalities. Example: if you register to vote with your DL number but request a mail ballot with your SSN, you’re rejected”](#)

Another person noted that the new ballot application was also "written to cause confusion and uncertainty." He said that it requires people to know their VUID or precinct number. The VUID is a Voter Unique Identifier. He explained it can be found by going to the Secretary of State's website input an ID or license number with date of birth. It would then spit out the VUID. The same can be said with the precinct number.

Vote.com also has a precinct location number for folks.

Many responded that one of the biggest problems is that not everyone is tech-savvy and not everyone has access to computers. For that, the Texas Secretary of State is accepting phone calls at (512) 463-5650 or email at elections@sos.texas.gov.

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Texas says supply chain issues have limited the number of voter registration forms it can give out

Ashley Lopez

KUT-FM

January 18, 2022

<https://www.kut.org/politics/2022-01-18/texas-says-supply-chain-issues-have-limited-the-number-of-voter-registration-forms-it-can-give-out>

The Texas Secretary of State's office is having more trouble than usual getting enough voter registration cards to groups who help Texans register to vote.

Sam Taylor, assistant secretary of state for communications, said supply chain issues have made it harder and more expensive to get paper, which means the Secretary of State's office will be giving out fewer voter registration forms to groups ahead of elections this year.

"We are limited in what we can supply this year, because of the paper shortage and the cost constraints due to the price of paper and the supply of paper," he said.

Grace Chimene, the president of the League of Women Voters of Texas, said it is not unusual for the Secretary of State to not have enough forms to fill all the requests it gets from groups like hers ahead of elections. This particular shortage, however, is affecting an important part of her group's work: registering thousands of newly naturalized citizens.

Chimene said in previous years, her group, which has chapters across the state, has been able to get enough forms to pass out at naturalization ceremonies. Often, she said, the group partners with the state to give out several thousand forms at each ceremony.

"The League in Houston registers about 30,000 new citizens every year through these ceremonies in the past," Chimene said.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a mix of in-person and remote ceremonies. Chimene said her group has either been handing out voter registration materials at in-person events or they've been sending out packets they put together ahead of time to those new citizens.

Either way, the League and their volunteers often ask for thousands of voter registration forms ahead of these ceremonies.

"It's a really important job that we do and we value it, and I think the new citizens value it also," Chimene said.

Taylor said the Secretary of State's office has been forced to limit each group to 1,000 to 2,000 registration forms per request. He said this shortage is coming at a time when many groups are seeking out new voter registration forms because of a change in Texas' voter registration laws created under Senate Bill 1, a controversial voting law that went into effect last month.

"The voter registration application changed this year for one reason: It's because the legislature decided to increase the penalty for illegal voter registration from a class B misdemeanor to a class A misdemeanor," he said. "And that has to be reflected on the new voter registration application."

Taylor said counties and groups across the state have had to order new applications that comply with the new law. He said officials will have to reject applications that are submitted on "old stock" that doesn't reflect the new rules.

Chimene said all these constraints present serious issues for her group as they try to get voter registration materials together ahead of these large naturalization ceremonies.

“We are treating all organizations that request these the same,” Taylor said. “We are trying to fulfill these requests as fast we can. But the fact is we simply don’t have the supply to honor every single request for free applications.”

According to Chimene, this is one of the pitfalls of Texas being among the few states in the country that does not have online voter registration. Supply chain issues are not as big of a problem when you can just direct someone to a website.

She’s also worried about the message this sends to newly naturalized citizens, which she said have been under particular scrutiny by the Secretary of State’s office recently. Chimene said the League is worried that newly naturalized, eligible voters are being targeted by the state’s latest focus on potential non-citizen voters.

“We are concerned about it, and we are looking into it,” Chimene said. “It just sort all goes together: not providing the service they are supposed be providing to the citizens of Texas.”

Chimene said the Secretary of State’s office has told the League to seek out donations instead of relying on the state for voter registration forms. She said she “didn’t appreciate” this considering the fact her group is a non-partisan nonprofit. However, Chimene said, her group will try and do what it can.

“We will ask our supporters, we will ask our friends and our neighbors,” she said. “And find out if we could have somebody donate to get this done.”

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'It's a red flag': Counties see increase in rejected mail-in ballot applications under new Texas voting rules

Marcelina Benito

KHOU-TV

January 14, 2022

<https://www.khou.com/article/news/politics/texas-counties-increase-rejected-mail-in-ballot-applications/285-8746be6e-0d32-4f18-8802-08c3394fa6be>

HARRIS COUNTY, Texas — The March 1 primary in Texas is only six weeks away. It will be the first major election since SB 1, Texas' controversial new voting law went into effect.

Election officials report hundreds of Texas voters are already having issues requesting mail in ballots.

"This is uncharted territory for us," said Isabel Longoria, Harris County election administrator.

Longoria and her team are prepping for that critical primary.

"The Secretary of State sends us daily updates on how to make SB 1 happen, and it feels like a rushed process for something that's so important," Longoria said.

Under the new law, voters wanting a mail-in ballot must include their drivers license number or social security number on their application. Many applications are failing to meet the new ID requirements.

"It's those kind of errors that are a direct result of SB 1, making it harder for voters to get through an already complex system," Longoria said.

So far this year in Harris County, 16% of the 1,276 applications have been rejected. In the 2018 Texas primary, only 2.5 percent of 4,800 applications were rejected.

"It's a red flag that we're watching," Longoria said.

In Travis County, the problem is even worse with nearly 50% of mail-in ballot applications rejected there so far.

"The confusion is going to have what I will call an equal effect on Democrat and Republican voters," said KHOU political analyst Bob Stein.

Stein predicts these types of problems will only increase.

"It may not have much impact in the primaries, but in November there will be a lot of concern," Stein said.

To make sure your mail-in ballot request isn't rejected, Longoria's best advice is to include your phone number and/or email in the application so they can call you in case there's something that needs to be corrected.

And if you have any questions about the process, you can always call Harris County Elections at 713-755-6965. The deadline to request a mail-in ballot for the primary is Feb. 18.

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New voting law leading to high rejection of mail-in ballot applications in Texas

Kelly Mena

CNN

January 14, 2022

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/14/politics/texas-mail-in-ballot-application-rejections/index.html>

(CNN) Hundreds of mail-in ballot applications are being rejected in some of Texas's largest counties because of the new voting law passed by the Republican-led state legislature last year, according to multiple election officials.

Election officials in Harris County, Travis County and Bexar County say they are rejecting a high volume of mail-in ballot applications for the March 1 primary. The counties include Houston, Austin and San Antonio, respectively.

Under the new voting law, voters must include either their driver's license number or the last four digits of their Social Security number on their applications. Those numbers are then matched against voters' records. For a voter to be approved for a mail-in ballot, the numbers have to be the same.

However, not every voter remembers which number they gave when they initially registered to vote, leading to the application rejections.

Harris County has rejected 208 of 1,276 applications, the county's communications director Leah Shah, told CNN.

Shah called the rejection rate "a red flag." She also noted other aspects of the restrictive voting law -- which includes a provision that bans election officials from sending unsolicited mail-in voting applications that would include information on how to properly fill out the applications -- meant voters are left with little help.

"We have our hands tied as far as what we can and can't say or teach the public regarding [mail-in ballot applications]," said Shah.

Meanwhile, Travis County's election clerk said they've rejected about half of the roughly 700 applications they've received, according to the Texas Tribune. CNN reached out to the Travis County clerk for a comment.

Republican Secretary of State John Scott called the rejection rate in Travis County "surprising" before calling on the county to reexamine the applications.

"We call on Travis County to immediately review and re-examine the mail ballot applications in question to determine whether they were processed in accordance with state law, with the goal of reinstating and minimizing any disruption to eligible voters who have properly submitted their application for ballot by mail. We anxiously await the results of their re-processing of these mail ballot applications," said Scott in a statement on Friday.

Scott went on to urge county officials to reach out to his office for assistance "on the correct method of processing mail ballot applications."

In Bexar County, officials have rejected 200 applications on which the ID section was not filled out and another 125 were rejected because the voter provided their driver's license number which wasn't on file, according to the Tribune.

In other counties, officials are rejecting mail-in ballots at an alarming rate as well.

Cidney Compton, the absentee coordinator in Denton County, told CNN that voters there are using outdated applications that don't include an ID section. Compton said the county has received less than 200 applications and has denied about 50.

The process for voters across the state to fix their applications involves election officials sending them a rejection letter with an explanation of the missing information along with a new application. Voters can then either send in the new application or correct the information through a new online portal, according to guidance from the secretary of state's office and election officials.

This is the first election cycle in which the new voting law is in effect after being enacted last September. The bill was part of a national push by Republicans seizing on Trump's false lies of the 2020 election to clamp down access to the ballot box.

Texas already has restrictions for who is eligible for mail-in ballots. Under the law, those who are over age 65, out of the county on Election Day or have a disability or illness that prevents them from voting in person are eligible.

Voting rights groups are now calling on voters to be proactive about educating themselves on the new voting law.

"In the meantime, we urge all Texans to be your own advocates for your freedom to vote," Common Cause Texas Associate Director Stephanie Gómez said in a statement Friday. "Make a plan to vote and think about contingency plans so that you can still vote even if you hit one of the barriers that were created by SB 1."

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Montgomery County approves early-voting sites for March primaries

Jishnu Nair

Community Impact

January 14, 2022

<https://communityimpact.com/houston/conroe-montgomery/election/2022/01/14/montgomery-county-approves-early-voting-sites-for-march-primaries/>

Montgomery County commissioners approved early-voting sites and times for March 1 primaries at a Jan. 11 Commissioners Court session.

The filing deadline for candidates running in the county was Dec. 13. A list of candidates for office can be found here.

Early voting will take place on the following dates and times:

- Feb. 14-18, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.
- Feb. 19, 7 a.m.-7 p.m.
- Feb. 20, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.
- Feb. 22-25, 7 a.m.-7 p.m.

The following locations were approved for early voting:

- Central Library, 104 I-45 N., Conroe
- North Montgomery County Community Center, 600 Gerald St., Willis,
- Lone Star Community Center, 2500 Lone Star Parkway, Montgomery
- Montgomery County Community Development Center, 31355 Friendship Drive, Magnolia
- Magnolia Event Center, 11659 FM 1488, Magnolia
- South County Community Center, 2235 Lake Robbins Drive, The Woodlands
- Spring Creek Greenway Nature Center, 1300 Riley Fuzzel Road, Spring
- George and Cynthia Woods Mitchell Library, 8125 Ashlane Way, The Woodlands
- East Montgomery County Fair Association Building, 21675A McCleskey Road, New Caney
- Security Community Center 18760 Hwy. 105 E., Cleveland
- East Montgomery County Community Development Center, 16401 First St., Ste. 100, Splendora

- Election Central (limited ballots, special forms of early voting, and ballot by mail only), 9159 Airport Road, Conroe

For more information on elections and registering to vote, see the Montgomery County Elections website or the Texas secretary of state website. The deadline to register to vote for the March 1 primary is Jan. 31.

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New voter registration certificates are in the mail for El Paso County registered voters

Yvonne Suarez

KVIA-TV

January 14, 2022

<https://kvia.com/news/2022/01/14/new-voter-registration-certificates-are-in-the-mail-for-el-paso-county-registered-voters/>

EL PASO, Texas -- Registered voters can expect to see their new Voter Registration Certificates in their mailboxes soon. The El Paso County Elections Department says the cards are blue and are valid from January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2023. Those registered voters who do not receive their new certificate should call the El Paso County Elections office at (915) 546-2154.

The Voter Registration Certificate is not required when voting in person and will not replace an acceptable form of photo identification for voting. Acceptable forms of photo I.D. include Texas Driver's License, Texas Personal Identification Card, United States Military Identification Card, or a United States Passport book or card. For more information on acceptable forms of photo I.D., visit elpasocountyvotes.com:

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New Texas elections law, decried as vote suppression, leads to record number of rejected mail ballot applications

Taylor Goldenstein

Houston Chronicle

January 15, 2022

<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/politics/texas/article/New-Texas-elections-law-decried-as-vote-16777151.php>

County officials in urban areas across the state say they've been forced to reject an unprecedented number of mail ballot applications because they do not adhere to new requirements stipulated by the election bill passed last year by the Legislature's Republican majority.

The new law, which Democrats decried as an attempt to suppress the votes of minority groups, requires mail voters to give their driver's license number or state ID number. In the absence of those, they can provide the last four digits of their Social Security number or indicate they do not have the required IDs.

The problem some counties are running into — one that critics of the bill had warned lawmakers about last year — is that the number provided by the voter must match with what the county has on

file, typically the one used to register to vote. And an online portal run by the state, per the new law, to allow voters to check on their applications, has had a bumpy rollout in the Secretary of State's Office.

"We have never had to reject applications for ballot by mail in this number," said Jacque Callanen, Bexar County elections administrator.

"(Voters) expect the next thing they're going to get from us is the actual ballot to vote on and mail back. Now all the sudden they're receiving a letter from us that says, 'Ehh, we need you to fill out this other information before we can process your ballot' ... That's frustrating for them; it's frustrating for us."

As of the latest tally on Wednesday, the county had rejected 325 applications. Callanen said she plans to hire two temporary workers to deal with this issue alone.

In Harris County, officials say they've so far had to reject about 208 applications out of more than 1,000 applications received so far for the same reasons.

In both counties, most of the rejected applications were lacking any ID information from the voter.

There is time to fix the problems ahead of the primaries: The state's deadline for mail ballot applications is Feb. 18. Election Day is March 1.

So far, Harris County is seeing fewer applications than usual for this time of year, but that could be related to political campaigns and parties had to wait for redistricting before mailing out applications, county spokeswoman Leah Shah said. Under the new voting law, counties are not allowed to mail out ballot applications, as many had in the past, unless a voter requests one.

For comparison's sake, during the same time period ahead of the last midterm election in 2018, the county received nearly 5,000 applications and rejected about 100.

"We are seeing a 700-percent increase in the percentage of rejected mail-in ballot applications, which certainly raises a red flag for our office," elections administrator Isabel Longoria said. "What we're seeing here is a direct byproduct of SB1, which simply makes voting more difficult."

The problem was even more pronounced in Travis County, where officials said as of Thursday they'd rejected about half of the about 700 applications they'd received, most because of the new ID requirement.

"A lot of the administrators in the state saw potential for this to be a challenge for voters to successfully submit applications," said Remi Garza, president of the Texas Association of Elections Administrators. "We did our best to communicate that to the policymakers — had they heeded our advice and perhaps phased this process in or allowed for applications to be processed and not immediately rejected, I think it would have been easier for voters to access the ballot-by-mail process."

Sen. Bryan Hughes, R-Mineola, who authored Senate Bill 1, the new voting bill, has said that the purpose of the legislation was to make it easier to vote and harder to cheat. Hughes did not respond to a request for comment Friday.

Rep. Jessica González, D-Dallas, vice-chair of the Texas House Elections Committee, said this was exactly the effect Democrats had repeatedly tried to warn Republicans this bill would have.

“The March Primary is quickly approaching, and I worry for senior and rural Democratic and Republican voters that may not have access to their ballot due to these new requirements,” González said. “As elected officials, our goal should be to expand voter access, not make voting more complicated and difficult.”

It’s the kind of matter that González and eight of her Democratic colleagues said they’d like to raise with Secretary of State John B. Scott, whom Gov. Greg Abbott appointed in October. In a letter they sent Friday, the Democrats said they’d also like to discuss the office’s audit of the 2020 election; the first phase’s results released last month yielded no proof of widespread fraud.

Abbott’s last two appointees, Ruth Hughs and David Whitley, failed to receive confirmation by the Texas Senate Nominations Committee. Whitley resigned after losing confidence from legislators with a botched voter purge in which thousands of legal voters were targeted.

In a hearing last year, the state’s director of elections under Hughs during invited testimony pronounced Texas’ 2020 election as “smooth and secure.” Some lawmakers say that testimony led the Republican-led Senate to oust her by declining to hold a vote to confirm her appointment.

Secretary of State blames county

Texas has some of the most restrictive voting laws in the country, and among those are its limitations on who can vote absentee. Even during the pandemic as some Republican states moved to temporarily expand vote-by-mail access, Texas was one of seven in the country where an excuse other than risk of infection was still needed.

To qualify, the Texas Election Code requires voters to be 65 or older, disabled, in jail or out of their home county during the voting period.

The Secretary of State’s office in a statement on Friday said the office was “surprised to learn for the first time of the apparent wholesale rejection of mail ballot applications by Travis County” and called on the county to re-examine the rejected applications.

“We urge all county election officials to contact the Texas Secretary of State’s office to seek advice and assistance on the correct method of processing mail ballot applications,” said spokesman Sam Taylor.

On Twitter, the office showed less patience with county officials: “Always, you can pick up the phone and call our office instead of calling a press conference. Much more time efficient,” responding to Travis County, which is set to hold one on Tuesday.

It was not clear what the office expected the counties to do differently, however, and the office did not respond to repeated requests for clarification.

“I don’t know what other options the Secretary of State’s office thinks are available,” Garza said. “I don’t want to challenge what the Secretary of State’s office thinks should be happening, but I think if they were sitting in our chairs, I think our hands are tied.”

The new election law also included a process for voters to correct such issues with their mail ballot applications, one that voters are supposed to be able to stay on top of via an online ballot tracker. Yet some election officials say they haven’t been told how to upload information to the web application.

A spokesman told KUT on Friday that guidance was forthcoming within days on how to use the online ballot tracker.

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Pence says federal election bills ‘offend the Founders’ intention that states conduct elections’

Brian Rokus and Shawna Mizelle

CNN

January 14, 2022

<https://kvia.com/your-voice-your-vote/politics/cnn-us-politics/2022/01/14/pence-says-federal-election-bills-offend-the-founders-intention-that-states-conduct-elections/>

Former Vice President Mike Pence contrasted Democrats’ push for election legislation with his own actions at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, in an op-ed published in The Washington Post on Friday.

Pence, in the piece headlined “Jan. 6 was a power grab. So is busting the filibuster to nationalize elections,” writes, “On Jan. 6, an angry mob ransacked the Capitol, largely to try to get Congress and me, as the president of the Senate, to use federal authority to overturn results of the presidential election that had been certified by all 50 states” and credits law enforcement with securing the Capitol.

He goes on to accuse President Joe Biden and Senate Democrats of using the memory of the riot to “attempt another federal power grab over our state elections.”

“Their plan to end the filibuster to allow Democrats to pass a bill nationalizing our elections would offend the Founders’ intention that states conduct elections just as much as what some of our most ardent supporters would have had me do one year ago,” Pence writes.

His rebuke comes as the Senate is poised to take up voting legislation on Tuesday. Biden has aggressively pushed for the Senate to change its filibuster rules in order to clear the way for the legislation to pass with fewer votes but has faced opposition to the rules change from moderate Democratic Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona.

Pence says in his opinion piece that during the January 6 election certification, he upheld the principle that elections are determined at the state level — not by Congress.

On that day, he had rejected then-President Donald Trump's entreaties to subvert the constitutional process that would certify Biden's election victory, earning Trump's wrath. After the mob breached the Capitol, Pence was rushed out of the Senate chamber as rioters calling for his death stormed the halls.

"The notion that Congress would break the filibuster rule to pass a law equaling a wholesale takeover of elections by the federal government is inconsistent with our nation's history and an affront to our Constitution's structure," Pence writes in the op-ed, before going on to criticize proposals in the election legislation.

In the piece, the former vice president praised states that passed restrictive voting laws last year, such as Texas and Georgia, writing that they "led the way with common-sense reforms" in an attempt "to restore confidence in the integrity of our elections."

Pence called on senators to "do as you did before: Uphold the right of states to conduct and certify elections. Reject this latest attempt to give Washington the power to decide how the United States' elections are run. And keep the oath you made before God and the American people to support and defend the Constitution."

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In Quest for Energy Independence, Mexico Is Buying a Texas Oil Refinery

Clifford Krauss

New York Times

January 18, 2022

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/18/business/economy/mexico-oil-refinery-texas.html>

DEER PARK, Texas — Two giant murals, on storage tanks at an oil refinery here, depict the rebels led by Sam Houston who secured Texas' independence from Mexico in the 1830s. This week those murals will become the property of the Mexican national oil company, which is acquiring full control of the refinery.

The refinery purchase is part of President Andres Manuel López Obrador's own bid for an independence of sorts. In an effort to achieve energy self-sufficiency, the president of Mexico is investing heavily in the state-owned oil company, placing a renewed emphasis on petroleum production and retreating from renewable energy even as some oil giants like BP and Royal Dutch Shell are investing more in that sector.

Mr. López Obrador aims to eliminate most Mexican oil exports over the next two years so the country can process more of it domestically. He wants to replace the gasoline and diesel supplies the country currently buys from other refineries in the United States with fuel produced domestically or by the refinery in Deer Park, which would be made from crude oil it imports from Mexico. The shift would be an ambitious leap for Petroleos Mexicanos, the company commonly known as Pemex. The company's oil production, comparable to Chevron's in recent years, has been falling for more than a decade, and it shoulders more than \$100 billion in debt, the largest of any oil company in the world.

The decision to pay \$596 million for a controlling interest in the Deer Park refinery, which sits on the Houston ship channel and would be the only major Pemex operation outside Mexico, is central to

fulfilling Mr. López Obrador's plans to rehabilitate the long-ailing oil sector and establishing eight productive refineries for Mexican use. Mexico also agreed to pay off \$1.2 billion in debts that Pemex and Shell jointly owe as co-owners of the refinery, which is profitable.

"It's something historic," Mr. López Obrador said last month. In a separate news conference last year, he said, "The most important thing is that in 2023 we will be self-sufficient in gasoline and diesel and there will be no increase in fuel prices."

While Mr. Lopez Obrador's policies diverge from the rising global concern over climate change, they reflect a lasting temptation for leaders and lawmakers worldwide: replacing imported energy sources with domestically produced fuels. Further, the generally well-paying jobs the oil and other fossil fuel industries provide are politically popular across Latin America, Africa as well as industrialized countries like the United States.

In the 1930s, the Mexican government took over Royal Dutch Shell's operations south of the border as it nationalized the entire oil industry then dominated by foreigners. Now Mr. López Obrador is poised to go one step further, taking complete control of a big Shell oil refinery.

The takeover is all the more pointed because it is happening in an industrial suburb that calls itself "the birthplace of Texas," where rebels marched to the San Jacinto battlefield to defeat the Mexican Army — the event commemorated on the refinery murals. The battlefield is a five-mile drive from the refinery.

It is hard to overestimate the connection between oil and politics in Mexico, where the day petroleum was nationalized, March 18, is a national holiday. Oil provides the Mexican government with a third of its revenues, and Pemex is one of the nation's biggest employers, with about 120,000 workers.

Mr. López Obrador hails from the oil-producing state of Tabasco, and the powerful Pemex labor union is a crucial part of his political base. He ran on a platform of rebuilding the company, and has raised its production budget, cut taxes it pays and reversed efforts by his predecessor to restructure its monopoly over oil production in the country.

When he took office three years ago, Mr. López Obrador began undoing changes made in 2013 to the country's Constitution intended to open the oil and gas industry to private and foreign investment. He is also pushing to reverse electricity reforms that his predecessor, Enrique Peña Nieto, put in place to increase the use of privately funded wind and solar farms and move away from state-run power plants fueled by oil and coal.

Energy experts say Mexico is backtracking on a commitment it made a decade ago under President Felipe Calderón, to generate more than a third of its power from clean energy sources by 2024. Mexico now produces just over a quarter of its power from renewables.

"They are going to heavier fuels rather than to lighter fuels," said David Goldwyn, a top State Department energy official in the Obama administration. "Virtually every foreign company — Ford, Walmart, G.E., everybody who operates there — has their own net-zero target now. If they can't get access to clean energy, Mexico becomes a liability."

Mr. López Obrador's government has said it will combat climate change by investing in hydroelectric power and reforestation.

Many of the Mexican president's initiatives are being contested by opposition lawmakers and the business community. But Mr. López Obrador can do a lot on his own. He plans to spend \$8 billion on a project to build an oil refinery in Tabasco state, and more than \$3 billion more to modernize six refineries.

The purchase of the Deer Park refinery is crucial to his plans because the Tabasco complex will not be completed until 2023 or 2024 and will not produce enough gasoline, diesel and other fuels to meet all of Mexico's needs.

Long a partner of Pemex, Shell, which operates the Deer Park refinery, is selling its stake in part to satisfy investors concerned about climate change who want the oil giant to invest more in renewable energy and hydrogen.

Under Mexican ownership the refinery will continue its practice of using Mexican crude oil, but it will probably sell more of the gasoline and other fuels it produces to Mexico.

In the future, some energy experts said, Pemex could also use the Deer Park refinery to process oil from other countries that also produce the kinds of heavy crude that Mexico does.

"I think it's a good deal and makes sense for Pemex," said Tom Kloza, global head of energy analysis at Oil Price Information Service, who noted that Deer Park could perhaps process Venezuelan oil if the United States lifted sanctions against that country.

The Mexican policy changes would have only a modest and temporary impact on American refineries, which can replace Mexican oil with crude from Colombia, Brazil, Saudi Arabia and Canada. Refiners could lose as much as a half-million barrels of transportation fuel sales a day to Mexico, but energy experts say refiners would be able to find other markets.

Guy Hackwell, the general manager of the Deer Park complex, said, "Best practices will remain in place." He said the "vast majority of the work force will report to the same job the day after the deal closes."

As for the murals, a Pemex spokeswoman, Jimena Alvarado, said, "We would never remove a historical mural."

Residents in Deer Park, in the heart of the Gulf of Mexico petrochemical complex, say they feel assured that locals will run the plant and Shell will continue to own an adjoining chemical plant. "The phone numbers will remain the same for who we contact in the event of an emergency and we will still have the same people and relationships, so I feel good about that," Deer Park's city manager, Jay Stokes, said.

But some energy experts said Mr. López Obrador's approach to energy, including the refinery purchase, would waste precious government resources that could be better used to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and local air pollution. There are also doubts that Mexico can build enough refining capacity to fulfill the president's objectives.

Jorge Piñon, a former president of Amoco Oil de Mexico, said Mexico most likely would not be able to immediately profit from slashing exports of crude and processing its own fuels since the refinery business typically has low profit margins, especially in Latin America.

He said the Mexican refineries could not match American refineries in handling Mexico's high-sulfur heavy crude. Mexican fuels made from heavy oil caused severe air pollution problems in many cities before the country began importing cleaner-burning American gasoline and diesel over the last 20 years.

By exporting less oil, Mexico would also almost certainly use more of it for domestic power generation, potentially pushing out solar and wind generation and producing more air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

"His nationalistic decisions will have a negative impact on climate change," Mr. Piñon said. "He is marching back to the 1930s."

Mr. López Obrador is unapologetic. "Oil is the best business in the world," he said at a news conference last May.

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Texas border cities registered 'huge' spike in retail sales after bridges reopened

Sandra Sanchez

Border Report

January 18, 2022

<https://fox4kc.com/border-report/texas-border-cities-register-huge-spike-in-retail-sales-after-bridges-reopened/>

McALLEN, Texas (Border Report) — The South Texas town of McAllen along with other Texas cities along the Mexico border experienced a jump in retail sales in November after travel restrictions were lifted, according to new sales tax data released by the state's comptroller.

Texas Comptroller Glenn Hager reported that McAllen had a 34.8% increase in city sales and use taxes in November from the previous year. This increase coincided with the Biden administration easing border restrictions to allow Mexican nationals vaccinated against COVID-19 to come into the United States to shop.

McAllen will receive \$7.7 million back from the state for sales in November — that's a \$2 million increase from the \$5.7 million the city received for the same period the year before.

And that's welcome news to McAllen City Manager Roel "Roy" Rodriguez, who told Border Report the city has been hurting after border restrictions remained in place for nearly 20 months — extending back to the Trump presidency, as a way to stop the spread of COVID-19.

"Absolutely it has something to do with the borders reopening. It certainly has some to do with the bridge reopening with sales up almost 35%," Rodriguez said.

“To receive \$2 million more than the same month last year. It’s huge. It’s huge!” he said.

Overall, cities across Texas experienced a 25% increase in sales in November, from the previous year, Heger’s office announced Wednesday.

Sales tax distributions from the state to border cities for November sales:

- Brownsville, on the Gulf Coast across from Matamoros, Mexico, had a 32% increase in sales in November and is getting \$4.8 million from the state, up from \$3.6 million a year ago.
- The West Texas town of El Paso had a 28% increase in sales as Mexican nationals from Juarez, Mexico, returned to shop. El Paso is getting nearly a \$2 million bump in sales tax from the state, totaling \$10.4 million, up from \$8.1 million received in January 2020.
- Laredo, across from Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, had a 27% increase, earning the South Texas border city \$4.5 million from the state.
- Eagle Pass experienced a 30% jump in sales in November.
- Del Rio had 22% more sales in November.
- Roma had a 14% increase in sales.
- Rio Grande City had a 11% spike.

[Search all Texas cities from the comptroller’s chart](#)

Rodriguez said he hopes sales will continue on an upswing in McAllen because the city coffers suffered during prolonged land border restrictions.

“It was pent-up demand,” Rodriguez said about the swarm of shoppers who crossed from Reynosa, Mexico, to McAllen when the border reopened fully.

“They opened the bridge and they came over,” he said. “Let’s see if that continues to last. I think it will.”

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‘No way we could afford to foot the bill to do what is needed’: South Texas county gets state dollars to recoup border crisis expenses

Anastasiya Bolton

KENS-TV

January 14, 2022

<https://www.kens5.com/article/news/special-reports/at-the-border/south-texas-counties-confront-immigration-issues/273-34207fa7-6219-464c-bd21-65fca2bfbb3f>

SARITA, Texas — If you’ve driven to South Padre Island, you’ve been to Kenedy County. You just may not have noticed it.

There is no place to stop—no gas station, no restaurant. Just the highway, ranches and 350 residents.

“When it's raining and it's green and the country's just busting at the seams, I tell you, we live in heaven,” says Kenedy County Judge Chuck Burns. “If it's drought conditions and hadn't rained for a while (and) everything's brown, I'll tell you we live in hell.”

Burns knows this area better than most. He's a fifth-generation Kenedy County resident and a ranch owner.

“We run steers and we also have a hunting operation,” Burns told KENS 5. “We're the third-least-populated county in Texas in the fourth-least-populated county in the United States.”

Burns has a vested interest in what goes on in Kenedy County. So, he became a judge last summer, filling a vacant spot. This year he's running to hold the seat officially. When he took the job, he expected it would entail the typical county judge duties. There is one, however, that caught him by surprise.

“We have an expense of recovering dead bodies that is very unforgiving terrain here,” Burns said. “Some of these people don't make it through. We're encountering a greater number of bodies, for a lack of a better way to put it.”

Burns told KENS 5 he didn't expect he and the county would be in the body-recovery business.

“That was not on my radar, to tell you the truth,” Burns said

The judge is talking about bodies of suspected migrants making their way north from the U.S.-Mexico border.

“There's no reason for them to stop here,” Burns said. “They're coming through to the rest of Texas in the United States.”

“I've lived here my whole life and understand the plight of the people coming through here and just how dangerous it is,” he added. “But as far as the extent of the numbers we were seeing and as fast as it was rising, when I took the office, I wasn't expecting that to be on my radar as something I've really got to address to pay for, actually.”

Burns told KENS 5 that with body-recovery operations come additional expenses, including paying for an autopsy, for example.

“The numbers can skyrocket very quickly,” he said. “There is no way we could afford to foot the bill to do what is needed in this area. So, it was very imperative for me to reach for help and not neglect my responsibilities.”

Kenedy County is one of 53 in Texas that have signed border traffic-related disaster declarations and submitted those to the governor's office.

“Kenedy County has suffered widespread severe damage, injury, loss of life and property due to the imminent threat resulting from immigrants using Kenedy County as a corridor for the transport of weapons, drugs and human trafficking,” the local disaster declaration reads, in part.

According to the governor's office, the 53 counties include Bee, Brewster, Brooks, Chambers, Colorado, Crane, Crockett, Culberson, DeWitt, Dimmit, Duval, Edwards, Frio, Galveston, Goliad, Gonzalez, Hudspeth, Jackson, Jeff Davis, Jim Hogg, Jim Wells, Kenedy, Kimble, Kinney, Kleberg, La Salle, Lavaca, Live Oak, Mason, Maverick, McCulloch, McMullen, Medina, Menard, Midland, Pecos, Presidio, Real, Refugio, San Patricio, Schleicher, Sutton, Terrell, Throckmorton, Uvalde, Val Verde, Victoria, Webb, Wharton, Wilbarger, Wilson, Zapata and Zavala.

Burns also provided the state with estimates of how much money his county would need to recupe the various costs associated with migration.

According to the documentation he provided KENS 5, last summer the county filled out what is called a Border Cost Estimate Form, which detailed to the state the county's expenses, including the need for specialty all-terrain vehicles, overtime for telecommunication officers "due to the surge from the border crisis," and body recovery, including removal, autopsy and funeral expenses.

Burns asked the state for money from Gov. Greg Abbott's Operation Lone Star grant program, funded by the legislature.

"We have a responsibility to address the problem," he said. "We can't just stick our head in the sand."

Judge Burns told KENS 5 that within the last few weeks the state granted Kenedy County more than \$700,000.

"It's a great start, and we're going to work with that," he said.

If the county needs more, Burns said he'll ask for more.

"We're still kind of a gateway into the rest of Texas as well as United States, we feel it important that we do our part," he said.

Burns said the way this grant worked: the county has to get reimbursed from the state for border-related expenses.

The county is now going through the gruesome task of counting the bodies of suspected migrants it has handled to get paid back for that.

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Hidalgo County Set To Dispute 2020 Census Count

KURV-AM

January 17, 2022

<https://www.kurv.com/hidalgo-county-set-to-dispute-2020-census-count/>

Saying the border region was again seriously undercounted, border congress members have requested a meeting with the new director of the U.S. Census Bureau.

Four of the five border representatives have written to Robert Santos claiming the 2020 Census likely missed large parts of Hispanic populations in rural areas along the U.S.-Mexico border, not unlike the 2010 Census.

Hidalgo County was “materially undercounted” during the 2020 Census, county officials are sending a letter to the state’s Census director in an effort to get the population count adjusted higher.

The letter asks for an investigation into the process of collecting the population data which took place as the coronavirus was sweeping through the region. County and Valley leaders maintain the pandemic prevented thousands of residents from being counted. As a result, officials say, the county is losing out on millions of crucial federal dollars.

The 2020 Census put Hidalgo County’s population at 870,781. County officials contend the population is closer to, or perhaps more than, 1 million.

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Shell to hand over Deer Park refinery to Pemex next week – sources

Ana Isabel Martinez

Reuters

January 13, 2022

<https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/shell-hand-over-deer-park-refinery-pemex-next-week-sources-2022-01-13/>

MEXICO CITY, Jan 13 (Reuters) - Mexican state oil company Petroleos Mexicanos will take control of the Deer Park refinery in Houston, Texas on Jan. 20, three sources with knowledge of the matter said on Thursday.

Royal Dutch Shell (RDSa.L) had agreed in May to sell its majority stake in the Deer Park refinery, which can process up to 340,000 barrels per day (bpd), to Pemex (PEMX.UL), its long-time partner in the plant, for about \$596 million.

"Next Thursday, the payment and transfer of the asset will happen," said a Pemex source, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "The refinery will then be operated directly by Pemex". [read more](#)

Pemex has reached an agreement with personnel already working in the refinery, the source added.

The operators would be the same to guarantee stability, but they would no longer be working for Shell, the source said.

A Pemex delegation, including Chief Executive Officer Octavio Romero, will travel to Texas to finalize the deal on Thursday, a second source added.

Pemex did not immediately respond to a request for comment and a Shell spokesman did not immediately confirm the delivery date.

A third source close to the talks said there are still final transition activities pending, but added that he expected the deal to complete in the next few days.

Mexican Energy Minister Rocio Nahle did not confirm the Jan. 20 date in an interview with local television network Milenio, saying the timing of the process was being managed between Shell and Pemex.

"It is very risky to give a date ... but this process is already underway," Nahle said. "Hopefully soon."

Conversations had accelerated in recent days in order to complete the entire purchase operation before Feb. 1, the third source said.

Neither Shell nor Pemex have detailed what volumes of refined product Mexico will receive from the Texas plant nor how much crude it will be able to supply from now on.

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Over 100 Mexican immigration agents linked to bribery and corruption

Associated Press

January 14, 2022

<https://www.borderreport.com/hot-topics/immigration/over-100-mexican-immigration-agents-linked-to-bribery-and-corruption/>

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico's immigration agency said Thursday that 105 of its agents have been reported to the internal affairs office for allegedly corrupt behavior.

The National Immigration Institute did not describe the purported wrongdoing, but said it was combatting extortion, as when border agents demand bribes to allow people to enter the country.

A sample of that corruption temptations was on display Jan. 6, when a group of Venezuelan migrants landed at the Mexico City airport.

The National Immigration Institute said that when the migrants lined up at immigration checkpoints, an agent reported that each one had a \$100 bill tucked into their passport.

The Venezuelans said they had put the bills in the passports by mistake. They did not have the proper papers to enter Mexico, and were sent back to their country.

Mexico said earlier this month it will begin requiring travel visas for Venezuelans starting Jan. 21, after a surge in the number of migrants trying to reach the U.S. border.

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U.S. Energy Secretary to Visit Mexico to Discuss Power Market Concerns

Jess Smith

Latin Post

January 17, 2022

<https://www.latinpost.com/articles/153643/20220117/u-s-energy-secretary-visit-mexico-discuss-power-market-concerns.htm>

With the government's planned revamp of the Mexican electricity market foreseeably on the agenda, United States Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm will travel to Mexico this week to meet with senior government officials, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said on Monday.

"She'll meet with the Mexican energy minister and the foreign minister, and we'll also welcome her here at the palace," the president said at a usual morning press briefing.

AMLO Eyes Strengthening of State Controlled Power Sectors

The U.S. has voiced concern over a Lopez Obrador-led effort aimed at strengthening state control of the power sector at the expense of private companies.

During the visit, which will include meetings with Granholm and the Mexican foreign and energy ministers, Lopez Obrador stated that no topic will be off the table. He specifically mentioned prospective discussions on his proposed power industry changes.

Private investors have expressed concerns about the idea, and the U.S. ambassador has stated that Washington has "serious concerns" about it.

Previous Mexican governments, according to Lopez Obrador, rigged the energy industry in favor of private capital at the expense of customers and state-run energy businesses.

"I will be pleased to inform her on the reforms if necessary, or if she wishes to know my opinion," the leftist nationalist leader stated.

The Mexican president also expressed gratitude to Granholm for the U.S.' approval of Mexican state oil company (Petrleos Mexicanos) Pemex's acquisition of Royal Dutch Shell's Deer Park refinery in Texas.

Mexico's 'Open Discussion' on Electric Power Reform

On Monday, the debate over Mexico's contentious constitutional reform of the electric energy sector has restarted, with a panel of governors and state leaders launching an open discussion on electric power reform.

The governors' meeting marked the start of President AMLO's second attempt to approve the bill after he failed to gain the necessary approval from the opposition during the previous parliament session.

Because the proposal includes constitutional changes, Morena, the majority party, will need the backing of two-thirds of members present in both chambers of Congress to enact the reform.

The ruling coalition would need the support of 333 legislators if the lower chamber was full. AMLO's Morena party, together with minor party allies, currently has only 279 seats.

"Despite the numbers, there is no doubt that reform can occur," said Valeria Vázquez, partner and Deloitte's energy and resources business leader. Vázquez, on the other hand, believes the reform will be "extremely difficult to negotiate" in its current shape.

Among other things, the present proposal cancels all current private power generation and sales contracts, which would presumably be renegotiable at a later date.

While the forums ensure that debate will take place this session, Legislators from the three biggest opposition parties - the PAN, PRI, and PRD - have warned that any vote will be postponed until after the June 5 governorship elections.

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Millions in funding slated for Texas bridges, repairs

Samuel King

KSAT-TV

January 14, 2022

<https://www.ksat.com/news/local/2022/01/15/millions-in-funding-slated-for-texas-bridges-repairs/>

SAN ANTONIO – Texas will receive a half billion dollars to help pay for bridge improvements and repairs, with money coming from the federal infrastructure law. The money is aimed at fixing the bridges most in need of repair.

“It will also modernize bridges to withstand the effects of climate change and to make them safer for all users, including cyclists and pedestrians,” Deputy Federal Highway Administrator Stephanie Pollack said in a statement. “Every state has bridges in poor condition and in need of repair, including bridges with weight restrictions that may force lengthy detours for travelers, school buses, first responders or trucks carrying freight,” she added.

The funding is considered the largest federal investment in bridges since the establishment of the Interstate Highway System in the 1950s. Bexar County has close to a thousand bridges considered in fair condition, according to a database from the Federal Highway Administration. Another seven are considered in poor condition.

At least two of the bridges on the list are slated for repairs in the coming years: I-35 over Eisenhower Road and Walters Street over the Union Pacific railroad tracks on the East Side.

The Texas Department of Transportation defines bridges in poor condition are “those exhibiting signs of advanced structural deterioration” but not necessarily unsafe.

Texas has more than 800 bridges considered in poor condition and another 26,100 in fair condition.

Have questions about transportation or traffic? Let us know, and your answer may be our next story. Find past answers on our traffic page.

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Mexico labor minister defends Pemex union boss vote despite influence concerns

Reuters

January 14, 2022

<https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/mexico-labor-minister-defends-pemex-union-boss-vote-despite-influence-concerns-2022-01-14/>

MEXICO CITY, Jan 14 (Reuters) - Mexican Labor Minister Luisa Maria Alcalde on Friday defended an impending vote to elect a new leader of the trade union of state oil company Petroleos Mexicanos (Pemex) over concerns that the influence of a controversial old union boss could linger on.

Politicians, including in the ruling party, have criticized the candidacy of Ricardo Aldana, Pemex treasurer under the longtime union boss Carlos Romero Deschamps, who stood down in 2019 after the president said he was under investigation.

Union officials said at an event broadcast on social media late last year that Aldana would have strong backing in the election, urging Pemex workers to vote for him.

Asked if the administration could be sure Romero Deschamps' would not retain influence at the union, Alcalde said the Jan. 31 vote would be "free, democratic and fair."

"We can't say 'yes' to this one, 'no' to that one, 'this one has certain ties, he has this back story,' it's the workers who will decide," she told a regular news conference.

Officials in 2019 said Romero Deschamps, who has denied wrongdoing, was being investigated on suspicion of conducting operations with funds of illicit origin.

Both Aldana and Romero Deschamps are veteran politicians in the long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador consigned to a historic defeat when he was elected in 2018.

Cecilia Sanchez, a senator with Lopez Obrador's National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) who is also seeking to lead the union, rebuked the labor ministry on Twitter after the news conference and said the old bosses were being left in charge.

Aldana did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

For decades, Pemex has been dogged with accusations that it is a breeding ground for corruption.

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Column: Mexico's Electricity Reform Would Lead to More, Not Less, Reliance on NatGas Imports

Eduardo Prud'homme

Natural Gas Intelligence

January 14, 2022

<https://www.naturalgasintel.com/column-mexicos-electricity-reform-would-lead-to-more-not-less-reliance-on-natgas-imports/>

The year 2022 is littered with risk for economic activity in Mexico. The persistence of an inflationary environment, the expectation of meager growth, slowing investment, the continuation of capital flight, tensions between the government and the private sector, and a treasury increasingly committed to the financial rescue of Petróleos Mexicanos (Pemex) are all depressing to contemplate. However,

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's popularity is sky-high. This perception of political infallibility is going to fuel his ambition to get his energy reform passed.

Despite not having enough votes in Congress, the first quarter will see the government trying to convince the population that constitutional reform in the electric power sector is needed. They will argue that strengthening the Comisión Federal de Electricidad (CFE) is necessary to achieve fair prices for electricity, and that the limitation of private companies to generate only 46% of electricity will allow the state to guarantee that there is no lack of power in homes.

The Mexican state is already bending over backwards to save state energy firms. According to the annual financing plan prepared by Mexico's Ministry of Finance, CFE's financing needs last year were estimated at approximately \$3 billion for the payment of debt and this year the figure is \$1 billion. In 2022, Pemex will need more than \$10 billion of public financing to stay in operation. From the statist perspective of López Obrador's administration, the complex financial situation of CFE and Pemex is a symptom of the damage that opening up energy to the private sector brought to Mexico. They are merely righting the ship.

The flaw in this diagnosis is that government officials confuse the pair of state-owned companies with the energy industry at large. The current thrust of energy policy is to restore the economic power of Pemex and CFE so that they serve as the engine of development and become an expression of the strength of the government.

CFE's big complaint about the economic dispatch rules is related to the fixed costs that it has to absorb when it shuts down its plants when they are displaced by private generators. The argument goes that CFE is defenseless against the entry of private companies into the sector.

Research shows that things could get worse. According to the World Energy Council (WEC), Mexico's energy performance between 2011 and 2021 improved in important areas. In the field of energy security, there is now greater diversity in generation technologies. In terms of equity, there is better access to electricity, and electricity prices allow for greater affordability. In the sustainability dimension, the contrast with 2011 shows that today carbon emissions associated with electricity generation are lower.

The outstanding negative has to do with Mexico's dependence on imports.

Dependency on imports has actually grown during this administration, while they dropped during the previous one. This shows that the policies aimed at achieving one of the great objectives of the current government – so-called energy sovereignty – have actually worsened Mexico's dependence on imports.

There has also been a setback in environmental performance. The opening of the energy sector in 2013 resulted in greater diversity in the generation matrix, and allowed for a greater use of natural gas in the production of electricity, which means better prices for electricity. The promotion of renewable energy projects with clean energy certificates and special transmission fees helped reduce carbon emissions. But this administration has seen the Energy Ministry end the policy of clean energy certificates. They were seen not as a financing mechanism for wind or solar projects, but rather as a way for private capital to take advantage of CFE's transmission network while stealing market share

in the generation segment. Things will only get worse if the government is successful in achieving changes to the legal framework.

A simulation exercise of generation plants in Mexico sponsored by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) quantifies the potential impacts on the electrical system that López Obrador's reform would cause. Production costs in a reform scenario versus business as usual would grow by between 31.7% and 52.5%. This would mean the government would have to inevitably subsidize CFE's operation if it wanted to keep basic electricity supply rates low.

With market rules that give priority to CFE plants, the use of fuels would change dramatically. Mexico's commitments to the Paris Agreement would be called into question with increases in CO2 emissions, according to the report. The reason for these increases is in the resulting intensive use of fuel oil. If the reform went ahead, the burning of fuel oil by CFE would grow between 823.7% and 1,119.5% compared to the levels typically observed today. However, this is not necessarily at the cost of less natural gas use.

CFE plants that use gas have lower thermal efficiency, which means that each kWh of electricity generated requires more gas. With more CFE plants operating, natural gas consumption could grow between 5.5% and 28.9% under a reform scenario. With these numbers and given zero growth in domestic production, the dependence on natural gas imports would be accentuated. If the most extreme scenario projected by the NREL team materializes, the incremental volumes would mean close to an additional 1 Bcf/d of natural gas would be needed in Mexico's generation segment.

The results of the NREL simulation and the review of the historical behavior of the WEC indicators deserve to be analyzed in a North American regional perspective. Energy policy in Mexico does not necessarily go against the commercial interests of the United States. The prospect of an increase in gas exports for U.S. producers even with a reversal of the open market scheme changes the perception of risk in doing business with Mexico. Emissions reduction commitments would be hit, however, a situation that could generate discomfort within the three countries that make up the United States-Mexico-Canada-Agreement. The strain on Mexican public finances caused by the potential reform could also lead to economic difficulties that would benefit no one.

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Texas Dems work around election integrity law as they mail out "hundreds of thousands" of mail-in ballots

Karen Townsend

Hot Air

January 15, 2022

<https://hotair.com/karen-townsend/2022/01/15/texas-dems-work-around-election-integrity-law-as-they-mail-out-hundreds-of-thousands-of-mail-in-ballots-n441724>

The Texas Legislature passed SB1 which ushers in election integrity reforms in 2021 and Governor Abbott signed it into law. Texas Democrats now complain that voter suppression is happening in the form of the number of rejections of mail-in ballot applications.

Texas lawmakers would not have had to pass election integrity reforms if the rookie Harris County Clerk, a young and aggressive Democrat, had not decided to use the coronavirus pandemic as an

excuse to create new ways of voting in the 2020 elections. It began when he announced that mail-in ballot applications would be mailed to every registered voter in Harris County – more than 2.4 million – which is against Texas election law. He was quickly stopped by court order. Other actions were taken by his office which had never been done before and was outside of election law, such as twenty-four-hour voting and drive-thru voting, as well as an increase of drop boxes for ballots that were frequently left unattended. Lawmakers in Austin passed legislation that makes election law uniform across the state and prevents local officials from going rogue in pursuit of their political agenda.

That is how we got here. Now that primary elections are coming up in March for the 2022 midterm elections, complaints are being reported of an unprecedented number of mail-in ballot applications being rejected. New voter identification requirements are being blamed. Some of the state's largest counties are rejecting applications due to a failure to meet new requirements, most frequently a mismatch between the requirements and the data the state has on file to verify voters.

Under Texas' new voting law, absentee voters must include their driver's license number or state ID number or, if they don't have one, the last four digits of their Social Security number on their applications. If they don't have those IDs, voters can indicate they have not been issued that identification. Counties must match those numbers against the information in an individual's voter file to approve them for a mail-in ballot.

In Harris County, 208 applications — roughly 16% of the 1,276 applications received so far — have been rejected based on the new rules. That includes 137 applications on which voters had not filled out the new ID requirements and 71 applications that included an ID number that wasn't in the voter's record.

In Travis County, officials said they've rejected about half of the roughly 700 applications they've received so far, with the "vast majority" of rejections based on the new voting law.

In Bexar County, officials have rejected 200 applications on which the ID section was not filled out. Another 125 were rejected because the voter had provided their driver's license number on the application, but that number was not in their voter record.

Texas has a specific list of requirements for who is eligible for mail-in voting. These include anyone over the age of 65, as well as voters who are disabled, voters who will be out of their county of residence during the voting period, or have an illness that prevents voting in person. Texas has never had universal mail-in voting, a top priority for state Democrats at this point. Local officials are not allowed to send out mail-in ballot applications unsolicited. However, county parties and individual groups do send out applications to those over the age of 65 as a part of their get-out-the-vote efforts.

The Texas Democratic Party announced this week that it will "work around" new voting laws and send out hundreds of thousands of vote-by-mail applications to Texans age 65 and older. The move is being touted as sidestepping changes in the law. Apparently, Democrats are fond of workarounds. Remember it was likely a retweet by Biden's Chief of Staff Ron Klain that boasted about using OSHA for vaccine mandates as a workaround that contributed to the Supreme Court striking that down this week.

A driver's license number or a social security number can be used to fulfill voter id requirements for mail-in voting. However, the state doesn't have both numbers on file for all voters, resulting in some rejections now.

Last summer, the Texas secretary of state's office indicated that 2,045,419 registered voters lacked one of the two numbers in their voter file despite the office's efforts to backfill that information in the state's voter rolls. Another 266,661 voters didn't have either number on file.

Those numbers have since dropped. As of Dec. 20, 702,257 voters had only one number on file, while 106,911 didn't have either, according to updated figures provided by the Texas secretary of state's office.

Meanwhile, 493,823 registered voters didn't have a driver's license on file, which is the first number voters are asked to provide on both applications to register to vote and applications to vote by mail.

Some county election officials are pointing to outdated applications being used as a reason for rejection. These may be coming from campaigns and political parties who don't have the updated applications requiring driver license numbers as identification. There is a way to correct applications provided in the new voting law. County officials provide voters with a rejection notice and information on how to correct it. This process includes a new online ballot tracker. Some officials are getting nervous because the deadline for applications is coming up on February 18. It takes time for local offices to process applications. Some offices are hiring additional people to handle the process.

Requiring voter id is not voter suppression. Democrats use it as an excuse to cry foul while Republicans see it as a common sense way of assuring election integrity. The press is only too happy to run stories using Democrat talking points so expect more of this during the midterm election cycle. The truth is that states like Texas have increased early voting periods. During early voting a voter can cast a ballot at any voting location in their county at their convenience, not only in their precinct as is required on election day. Perhaps Delaware should consider more opportunities for voters, too.

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Jan. 6 was a tragedy. Busting the filibuster would be, too

Mike Pence

Washington Post

January 14, 2022

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/01/14/mike-pence-filibuster-nationalize-elections/>

Now that the anniversary of Jan. 6 has come and gone, some of us who lived through that tragic day in 2021 are getting a clearer picture of what was and is at stake. On Jan. 6, an angry mob ransacked the Capitol, largely to try to get Congress and me, as the president of the Senate, to use federal authority to overturn results of the presidential election that had been certified by all 50 states.

Lives were lost and many were injured, but thanks to the selfless and courageous work of law enforcement, the Capitol was secured, and Congress was able to reconvene the very same day and complete its work under the Constitution and laws of the United States.

In the year since that fateful day, states across the country have enacted measures to try to restore confidence in the integrity of our elections while ensuring access to voting for every American. Georgia, Arizona and Texas have led the way with common-sense reforms, such as requiring verifiable identification on absentee ballots and using cameras to record ballot processing.

Despite this steady progress of state-based reforms, now come President Biden and Senate Democrats with plans to use the memory of Jan. 6 to attempt another federal power grab over our state elections and drive a wedge further into our divided nation.

Their plan to end the filibuster to allow Democrats to pass a bill nationalizing our elections would offend the Founders' intention that states conduct elections just as much as what some of our most ardent supporters would have had me do one year ago.

Under the Constitution, elections are largely determined at the state level, not by Congress — a principle I upheld on Jan. 6 without compromise. The only role of Congress with respect to the electoral college is to “open, present and record” votes submitted and certified by the states. No more, no less. The notion that Congress would break the filibuster rule to pass a law equaling a wholesale takeover of elections by the federal government is inconsistent with our nation's history and an affront to our Constitution's structure.

Democrats in Congress don't like the way many states have governed over the past year. In fact, Senate Majority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) recently compared Republican state officials to “violent insurrectionists” who stormed the Capitol because they had the audacity to pass legislation designed to eliminate voter fraud.

Biden and the Democrats' plan advancing in Congress would massively increase opportunities for election fraud, further erode confidence in our elections and deliver an irreversible victory for the radical left.

The plan would mandate the most questionable and abuse-prone election rules nationwide, while banning common-sense measures to detect, deter and prosecute election fraud.

For example, states would be forced to adopt universal mail-in ballots, to provide same-day voter registration, online voter registration, easier voter registration through motor vehicle department offices and a minimum 15 days of early voting. Duplicate voter registration records would abound, states' voter-ID requirements would be dramatically weakened, and anyone, including undocumented people, who simply signed a sworn written statement claiming to be eligible to vote would be permitted to do so. The opportunities for voter fraud would explode.

States would also be required to count every mail-in vote that arrives up to seven days after Election Day. Ballot harvesting — wherein which paid political operatives collect absentee ballots from places such as nursing homes — would be legal nationwide, exposing our most vulnerable voters to coercion and increasing the risk that their ballots would be tampered with.

Our Founders were deeply suspicious of consolidated power in the nation's capital. They also were rightly concerned with foreign interference if presidential elections were governed by or decided in the capital. Those were among the reasons the constitutional convention settled on state-based elections and limited the role of the federal government in the election of the nation's leaders.

Jan. 6 was a dark day in the history of our nation that was overcome by the courage of our Capitol Hill police and the willingness of the elected representatives of the American people in both parties to keep their oaths and uphold a constitutional framework that has been the bulwark of the freest and most prosperous nation in history.

With this anniversary passed, I call on my former colleagues in the Senate to do as you did before: Uphold the right of states to conduct and certify elections. Reject this latest attempt to give Washington the power to decide how the United States' elections are run. And keep the oath you made before God and the American people to support and defend the Constitution.

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Anchía: When you trash the border, you are trashing Texas

Steve Taylor

Rio Grande Guardian

January 14, 2022

https://riograndeguardian.com/anchia-when-you-trash-the-border-you-are-trashing-texas/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=anchia-when-you-trash-the-border-you-are-trashing-texas

EDINBURG, Texas – State Rep. Rafael Anchía says he is offended when politicians from Austin come to the Rio Grande Valley for the sole purpose of taking photo ops on DPS gun boats.

The Dallas lawmaker gave the keynote address at the Hidalgo Tejano Democrats 1st Annual Gala held at the Memorial Event Center in Mission. The group honored ten local VIPs at the event.

“As a Texan I want to say proudly and loudly that I am border proud. I am proud of the border that we have with Mexico. I am proud of the fact that we sit in the middle of a North American continent and that we are an exporting powerhouse, thanks to the work that happens here in the Rio Grande Valley,” Anchía said, to great applause.

“While being border proud, it offends me on a regular basis when you have politicians from Austin who come down here for the sole purpose of taking photo ops on DPS gun boats. That, to me, is offensive.”

There was more applause.

“They don’t want to come down here and talk about our award-winning public schools, not to talk about UTRGV, not to talk about our great hospitals, but to talk about fear, criminality, violence, and essentially to trash the RGV. That should be offensive to you as it is to me.”

Anchía, a former chairman of the international relations committee in the Texas House, singled out Gov. Greg Abbott for criticism.

“We need leaders who celebrate the border instead of comparing the RGV, as the governor did a couple of years ago, to a Third World country. I don’t know if you remember that, it was in the 2014

campaign. We need leaders who will engage with the people, come down here not for a photo-op but to know the people, understand the people.”

Anchía said that when he was first elected he came to the Valley and met with the then mayor of McAllen, Richard Cortez. Cortez, now the Hidalgo County Judge, was in the audience. Cortez picked the “Tejano Pillar Award” from the Tejano Democrats.

“Mayor Cortez told me of his dreams and aspirations for this community. And he told me, and I didn’t understand it at the time. He said, soon, we are going to have a skyline here in McAllen. Understanding those hopes, dreams and aspirations, is what elected officials who ostensibly represent Texas should do,” Anchía said.

Anchía said that when you know the locals you do not do “stupid things” like putting out a tweet saying Zapata County is in the Rio Grande Valley. That drew laughs from the audience.

“I remember the heat he (Abbott) got for that and it was well deserved. When you know the people, when you know people’s hopes, dreams and aspirations, you don’t say silly things.”

Anchía won loud applause when he said: “I want to make a point that when you trash the border, you are trashing Texas. And if you are Texas proud, you must be border proud.”

In addition to Cortez, another recipient of a Tejano Democrats award was state Rep. Armando ‘Mando’ Martinez of Weslaco.

Praising Martinez’s leadership, Anchía said of Martinez: “It is not everybody in Austin that is willing to stand up for their community. It is not everybody in Austin who is willing to speak truth to power. And it is not everybody in Austin that can be counted on when times get tough.”

Education

Anchía told how both of his parents came to the United States as immigrants. He said his mother came from Mexico in the mid-1950s at a time when her country was dominated by one party rule. Anchía said the PRI “won” the presidency for 70-plus consecutive years. Anchía said his mother taught bilingual education thanks to the education she received at a community college. He said but for that community college education the family would have had real financial hardship.

Anchía said his father came from the Basque region of Spain, a country which, at the time, was ruled by the Franco military dictatorship. He said neither of his parents came to the U.S. just for economic reasons. He said they came because of “higher ideals.”

Anchía said he has benefited from the “infrastructure of opportunity.” He said his father often says that the United States is the only country in the world where one can, in one generation, go from being a sheep herder or a goat herder to a lawyer or politician.

He added that it should not matter what country an immigrant comes from or what zip code a citizen is born in. “As proud Texans we must fight to keep that infrastructure of opportunity in place.”

Voting rights and faith

Anchía also spoke about voting rights and faith. He said the three things Texans need, in order to get from where they are to where they want to be, are faith, education and the right to vote. He said they were part of a three legged stool.

“When you don’t have one of those things, when your right to vote is adversely impacted or diminished, when you don’t have that infrastructure opportunity that you need to get ahead, and when you don’t have that faith, you are out of balance. And our state currently is out of balance, unfortunately, under the current leadership.”

State Sen. Eddie Lucio was another recipient of a Tejano Democrats award. In his remarks, Lucio referenced his faith. Anchía later praised Lucio for his faith and spoke about a recent study of the New Testament. “They cut out every passage in the New Testament that talks about helping the poor. And it rendered the New Testament incomprehensible because every fourth verse in the New Testament directs us and commands us to help the poor, to help the less fortunate,” Anchía said.

Anchía said he had met with a prominent Valley businessman for lunch earlier in the day. He said the businessman asked if Gov. Abbott could be defeated in this year’s gubernatorial election. Anchía said, not only can he be beaten, he has to be beaten.

Anchía said the trend lines are moving in the Democrats’ direction. He said Romney defeated Obama in Texas by 16 percent. He said Trump beat Clinton in Texas by nine points and that Trump beat Biden in Texas by five points.

“More than Ohio, Indiana, Missouri, we are the new battleground state and the trend line is moving in our direction,” Anchía said.

Anchía said that in the 2020 presidential election, one million more Democrats voted in Texas than in 2016. He said 3.5 million new voters have been registered since 2018.

The worst kept political secret in Austin is that Gov. Abbott wants to run for president of the United States, Anchía said. He said this ambition has led to Abbott making mistakes as governor. He cited the state’s response to the coronavirus pandemic and the failure of the electric grid during last year’s big freeze.

Anchía said Texans do not want big government or small government. “They want component government, they want government that works, government that is responsive, government that is effective,” he said.

Anchía noted that if Texas was a country it would have the ninth largest economy in the world.

“We are playing small ball. We are talking about trans kids playing sports, we are the ninth largest economy in the world. Larger than Mexico, Russia or South Korea. We are a powerhouse, but we are not acting that way.”

Anchía said if Democrats can break through and win one statewide campaign in Texas the border bashing would stop.

“People who come down here, hop in that gun boat and trash the Valley. The minute we punch one of these bullies in the nose, metaphorically, electorally, the attacks on our community will stop. Just one, just one breakthrough. Could be attorney general, could be lieutenant governor, could be governor, should be all of them. The minute that happens, this stops.”

Cortez remarks

Later, when Judge Cortez made his remarks from the podium, he referenced Anchía’s speech.

“What can we say about our guest speaker, I mean, wow, that is what we are about,” Cortez said.

Cortez said he was “very proud” of the work the county administration had done in recent times. He praised the partnerships the county had forged with local cities and schools. “We have been through some tough times. We have proven together, over and over, that when we do get together, great things happen.”

Cortez said local residents will see a better quality of life when new investment is brought into the area.

“We cannot be a good government if we do not provide excellent services. Forty percent in poverty, that is unacceptable. We have to reduce poverty. We have to build partnerships. I am not here to put people down. I am here to raise people up,” he said.

Tejano Democrats awards

The ten awards given out by the Hidalgo Tejano Democrats were:

Tejano Lifetime Achievement Award: State Sen. Eddie Lucio, Jr.

Tejano Man of the Year Award: Hidalgo County DA Ricardo Rodriguez

Tejano Woman of the Year Award: 13th Court of Appeals Justice Leticia Hinojosa

Tejano Humanitarian Award: Juanita Valdez-Cox of La Unión del Pueblo

Tejano Star Award: Hidalgo County Clerk Arturo Guajardo

Tejano Pillar Award: Hidalgo County Judge Richard Cortez

Hidalgo Gavel Award: State District Judge Bobby Flores

Tejano Gavel Award: Hidalgo County JP Jaime Jerry Muñoz

Tejano Service Award: State Rep. Eddie Lucio, III

Tejano Eagle Award: State Rep. Armando Martinez

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As Abbott Celebrates MLK Day, Voter Suppression Agenda Kicks Into Full Gear

Fernando Ramirez

Texas Signal

January 17, 2022

<https://texassignal.com/as-abbott-celebrates-mlk-day-voter-suppression-agenda-kicks-into-full-gear/>

On Monday, Gov. Greg Abbott celebrated Martin Luther King Jr. Day by sharing a famous quote from the late civil rights leader and minister: “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

The quote, now engraved in Washington D.C.’s MLK Memorial, comes from a sermon King delivered in 1959. By then, King was more than familiar with challenging times and the risks of advocating for civil rights in Jim Crow America.

Three years earlier his home in Montgomery, Alabama had been bombed with dynamite while his wife and newborn daughter were still inside. His family miraculously uninjured, King returned home to an upset crowd of supporters who he told to go home and not worry because, “we are not hurt and remember that if anything happens to me, there will be others to take my place.”

If Abbott genuinely wanted to honor King’s legacy, he would gather the legislature and scrap Senate Bill 1, a sweeping Trump-brained law that makes it more difficult to access the ballot box.

Just about every civil rights organization in Texas is suing the law, which went into effect in December. Already, the restrictive voting law has begun impacting Texas mail ballot applications, just one of the ways SB 1 has begun to disenfranchise voters.

On Thursday, the Travis County Clerk’s Office announced it had rejected about 50 percent of mail ballot applications. The office attributed the increased rate of rejections to Senate Bill 1, which requires mail ballot applicants to include either a Driver’s License number or last four digits of their Social Security number.

In Bexar County, election officials are rejecting mail-in ballot applications at a similar rate under the strict new law, according to the San Antonio Report. About half of the mail ballots were rejected on the first day officials began accepting them.

In Harris County, mail ballot applications were rejected roughly 16 percent of the time under the new rules, according to the Texas Tribune.

(Texans can check the status of their mail ballot application at the Texas Secretary of State’s website.)

The Department of Justice has filed two federal lawsuits against the law for violating the Voting Rights Act. The Justice Department is arguing that the new law adds barriers to voting and disenfranchises Texans with disabilities, the elderly and those with limited English proficiency.

At least 18 other states joined Texas in passing voting restrictions after the 2020 presidential election, led by Georgia, where the MLK-founded Southern Christian Leadership Conference has joined a legal fight against the state’s own restrictive voting law.

In Congress, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has said Democrats will vote on two voting rights bills sometime this week. Their future is uncertain with two key senators still opposing a carve out to allow for a simple majority vote on the bills.

The push for federal voting rights legislation comes days after President Biden delivered a speech on the issue in Atlanta, Georgia where the Republican-led legislature has also made it more difficult to vote.

“Jim Crow 2.0 is about two insidious things: voter suppression and election subversion,” Biden said at the time. “It’s no longer about who gets to vote; it’s about making it harder to vote. It’s about who gets to count the vote and whether your vote counts at all.”

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New Texas election law already has made a mess of mail voting

Gilbert Garcia

San Antonio Express-News

January 15, 2022

https://www.expressnews.com/news/news_columnists/gilbert_garcia/article/Garcia-New-Texas-election-law-already-has-made-a-16777548.php

If you tried to create the most idiotic law your mind could conjure, it would be hard to match the stupidity of the mail ballot application provision of this state’s new election law.

According to Senate Bill 1, a Republican-driven set of voting restrictions signed into law four months ago by Gov. Greg Abbott, it is now a felony for an election official in Texas to send an unsolicited mail ballot application to a voter.

Keep in mind that county elections office websites across the state provide a link to the mail ballot application form.

The Texas secretary of state’s office also provides the application form on its website.

Political candidates and political parties in Texas are perfectly free to boost their cause by sending out unsolicited mail ballot applications to voters. They do it on the regular.

Think about it: Your state and county election officials are allowed to make mail ballot applications available on their webpages, enabling you to print out the form, fill it out and send it in. But they can’t mail a physical copy of the form to you unless you ask for it.

If you have five people in your household who want to vote by mail, you can print out five copies from the Bexar County Elections Department website and have each of those five people fill out the application.

But the department can’t send you those five applications, even if you call to request them, unless each of those five people separately informs the department they want a copy of the form.

Why is it acceptable for Greg Abbott to send me an unsolicited mail ballot application, but a criminal act for an election official to do it?

Even if you buy into the notion that mail voting is rife with fraud, it's important to consider that we're not talking about mail ballots. We're just talking about applications for mail ballots.

People have to fill out those applications and get them approved by county election officials in order to receive a mail ballot. How are you preventing fraud by hindering access to application forms?

If you're looking for logic in this provision of SB1, you won't find it by thinking in terms of justice or election integrity. You'll find it only by dialing up the logic of the mendacious political hack.

By making it harder for people to apply for mail ballots, Texas Republicans are surely causing headaches for some of their own voters.

After all, GOP voters tend to skew older than the rest of the electorate, and one of the state's five accepted excuses for voting by mail is being at least 65 years old.

GOP lawmakers, however, took the macro rather than the micro view on mail voting with SB1. They concluded that Democrats vote by mail in bigger numbers and that anything that could be used to tamp down those numbers would be beneficial to the Republican cause.

They were also reacting to a 2020 election cycle in which some county officials responded to the COVID-19 pandemic — and the health risks associated with big crowds lining up to vote in person — by encouraging mail voting.

Harris County attempted to send out unsolicited mail ballot applications to all of its registered voters, while Bexar County — prompted by the efforts of County Commissioner Justin Rodriguez — mailed applications to voters 65 and older.

This past week, we got an early taste of the damage that SB1 will do to the Texas election system.

Jacque Callanen, the elections administrator for Bexar County, addressed county commissioners Tuesday and described the new state election provisions as “ridiculous.”

Callanen said the Elections Department phone system receives 50 to 100 calls a night requesting mail ballot applications.

“Right now, the law only permits us to send one,” she said. “So we'll have someone say, ‘Would you send my husband and myself one?’”

“Well, if it's the female voice, we can only send it to her. We have to contact her and say, ‘We have to hear it from him before we can release it.’”

Callanen said the department received 80 mail ballot applications Monday but had to reject 42 of them because of SB1's identification requirements.

The law stipulates that applicants for mail ballots must include a driver's license/state ID number or the last four digits of their Social Security number.

If the number they use for the application doesn't match the number they provided on their voter registration form, the application will be rejected.

The Travis County Clerk's Office said that as of Thursday, it had rejected "about 50 percent" of mail ballot applications for the state's March 1 primary elections.

If you believe that voting should be as smooth, fair and accessible as possible, this madness is thoroughly depressing.

If you believe the election process should come with numerous roadblocks and impediments to suppress turnout, create confusion and disenfranchise people, you got what you wanted.

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Who's afraid of the big, bad ballot drop box?

John Young

Austin American-Statesman

January 15, 2022

<https://www.statesman.com/story/opinion/columns/2022/01/15/young-whos-afraid-big-bad-ballot-drop-box/9160085002/>

Joe Biden needs a traveling prop. Every time he speaks, it should be at his side. It should be the symbol of the next election and his campaign for re-election.

Biden's partner at each podium should be a ballot box – a mail-in ballot drop box, to be exact – a vessel of convenience for voters, a symbol of leaders who value them.

The prop would serve two purposes – to encourage Americans to vote, and to show them that these simple receptacles aren't dangerous at all.

This is necessary, because Republican leaders are frightened to death by them.

In case you haven't noticed, Republican leaders want fewer people voting. If that's news to you, let's have Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky explain it.

"They're mailing out a solicitation to vote by mail," he said in advance of the 2020 Georgia Senate run-offs – where, sure enough, high turnout yanked Senate control from his party.

"I'm very, very concerned that if you solicit votes from typically non-voters, that you will affect and change the outcome."

What Paul's saying is, we can't have people at the polls who aren't "the regulars." Heaven forbid that we would open this process up to all manner of rabble . . . er, people. The invite should be reserved for Rand Paul's friends.

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Biden's speech on the year anniversary of the Jan. 6 terrorist attack hit on so many important points. Principally it hit on the self-evident fact that his predecessor, lacking any other title, is drum major to a big parade of lies.

More importantly, Biden hit on the biggest issue corresponding to the Big Lie to which Republican leaders pledge allegiance – the undermining of the democratic process.

“Right now, in state after state, new laws are being written – not to protect the vote, but to deny it; not only to suppress the vote, but to subvert it; not to strengthen or protect our democracy, but because the former president lost.

“Instead of looking at the election results from 2020 and saying they need new ideas or better ideas to win more voters, the former president and his supporters have decided the only way for them to win is to suppress your vote and subvert our elections.”

Parroting the lies of a party leader who could face criminal charges for his bid to overthrow a free and fair election, GOP leaders have taken several tacks to tamp down voter participation. One of the most odious has been to curb the use of ballot drop boxes, and of course voting by mail.

I use both every election. My state of Colorado has universal mail voting along with measures like motor-voter and same-day registration.

I didn't need a pandemic to convince me that the best way to vote would be to fill out my mail-in ballot and walk it to a conveniently located ballot drop box. No lines, no waiting, no stamp, no dependence on the postal service. If I needed any other reason, COVID-19 sealed the deal.

The ballot drop box is the symbol of a system that values my vote.

The thing is, it's just a box – metal, with the county's name on it and election information. It's secure. Can't get your paws in it. Can't “steal” the election. A box.

But look at what Republicans are doing. When they can, they are limiting the availability – and the convenience – of this method.

The Republican president of the Georgia Senate has authored a bill to prohibit ballot drop boxes. A similar bill has been introduced in Wisconsin.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis calls them “a big problem.” Um, how so? Is it that “more voters” thing that scares Sen. Paul?

As the 2020 election approached, Texas looked to see heavy use of ballot drop boxes, permitted by the appointed Texas secretary of state. Harris County had 12 of them. Travis County had four.

Then, before the elections, Gov. Greg Abbott ordered that no county have more than one. That's one in Loving County, population 64, and one in Harris County, population 4.7 million. The Texas Supreme Court upheld his order with three days left of early voting. And the appointed, never-confirmed secretary of state left office in May.

All of which is why Joe Biden should campaign alongside a ballot drop box.

It is the symbol of the threat to democracy that Biden's predecessor embodies, him and the Big Lie. It is the remedy to leaders deathly afraid rabble might show up on Election Day.

Longtime newspaperman John Young lives in Colorado.

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From: Sam Taylor
Sent: Wednesday, November 10, 2021 8:21 AM
Subject: SOS Morning News Clips 11/10/21

Sensitivity: Personal



Texas Secretary of State Morning News Clips November 10, 2021

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[County residents get hands-on time with voting machines](#), *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, November 9, 2021

[Administrator: Smith County saw an average turnout in the November election](#), *Tyler Morning Telegraph*, November 8, 2021

[Temple ISD bond fails after provisional votes counted](#), *KCEN-TV*, November 9, 2021

[Group condemns DOJ's 'frivolous' suit against Texas over election integrity reforms](#), *Southeast Texas Record*, November 9, 2021

[Grayson County Commissioners approve new map after redistricting](#), *KXII-TV*, November 9, 2021

[Montgomery County OKs change to commissioner precincts](#), *Houston Chronicle*, November 9, 2021

[U.S. Rep. Gohmert considers run for Texas attorney general](#), *Spectrum News*, November 9, 2021

[Wisconsin elections chief says audit report needs correcting](#), *Associated Press*, November 9, 2021

[Rick Scott promises NRSC will fight for 'election integrity,' revisits 2018 recount gripes](#), *Florida Politics*, November 9, 2021

[Texas set to get around \\$30 billion from new infrastructure bill](#), *KAMC-TV*, November 9, 2021

[Biden, Trudeau, AMLO to Meet as North American Borders Reopen](#), *Bloomberg*, November 9, 2021

[Mexico Natural Gas Buyers Said Nervous About Winter Supply, Price Shocks](#), *Natural Gas Intelligence*, November 9, 2021

[Analysis: Corporate Mexico feels heat from global supply chain crunch](#), *Reuters*, November 9, 2021

[Your vote matters](#), *The Paisano*, November 9, 2021

[Analysis: Texas Republican lawmakers pleased most of their own voters, most of the time](#), *Texas Tribune*, November 10, 2021

Outgoing elections leader announces 2022 challenge to county clerk

Kathy Cruz

Hood County News

November 9, 2021

https://www.hcnews.com/news/outgoing-elections-leader-announces-2022-challenge-to-county-clerk/article_be5e80f2-41b3-11ec-8ca8-f795e9e3c700.html

Michele Carew announced during Tuesday's regular meeting of the Commissioners Court – her last as Hood County's elections administrator – that she will run for county clerk in 2022.

Carew will seek to unseat Katie Lang, a member of the Hood County Elections Commission who tried to fire her despite Carew having received kudos from the Secretary of State's office for her handling of the 2020 presidential election.

Lang told the HCN last week that she intends to seek a third term.

The filing period for the March 1 primaries opens Saturday and runs through 6 p.m. Monday, Dec. 13.

Last month, attempts by Lang, Precinct 4 Commissioner Dave Eagle, Republican Party Chair David Fischer, and a faction of the local Republican Party to oust Carew from her nonpartisan position was the focus of a lengthy Texas Tribune article.

Publication of the article was followed by Carew's appearance on CNN's "Don Lemon Tonight," and the situation was the subject of an opening monologue on the Rachel Maddow Show on MSNBC.

Other media outlets picked up the story, and Carew, who has voted in Republican primaries for more than a decade, wrote an editorial about her experience in Hood County that was published by The Washington Post.

Carew was on the Commissioners Court agenda to provide the county judge and commissioners a report on the Nov. 2 election and to update them on the elections administration department.

When it came time to speak about her department, Carew read a prepared statement.

“Today I stand here angry,” she began. “I’m angry that the politically motivated harassment that I’ve received in this position has pushed me to the point where I am choosing to leave a job I was so excited to be in.”

Carew went on to say that the happiness she felt over being close to family and working in the profession she loves “was sullied significantly by political partisanship that has never been part of this position in the time I’ve spent in the election world, until now.”

The president of the Texas Association of Elections Administrators, Carew has 14 years’ experience and was previously head of elections for Aransas County.

Elections administrator positions were created by the Legislature to allow elections to be supervised by nonpartisan, appointed officials.

Carew was appointed by the five-member Hood County Elections Commission to replace Crickett Miller, who resigned just weeks before the November 2020 presidential election. Miller, too, was criticized by Lang and Eagle.

In her statement to the Commissioners Court, Carew said that she is angry that what happened to her “is spreading across the country.”

She said that it is a “troubling issue as it seeks to control how elections are run, just to benefit a radical politically partisan group that is ultimately damaging to the democracy that made America great long before any of us were even born.”

Carew said that she has grown to love Hood County and will continue to be involved and serve the community.

“I therefore intend to run for the position of county clerk in 2022,” she stated. “I look forward to doing the will of the people, for the betterment of all, not just a select few.”

On Tuesday afternoon after the Commissioners Court meeting, Lang responded to the HCN’s request for comment about Carew’s claims of harassment and her announcement that she will run for county clerk.

“From what I have seen, the only thing Ms. Carew was subjected to was accountability,” Lang wrote in an email. “While she has been undermining the electoral process by ignoring Texas Statutes and soliciting money from liberal mega donors, I have been fighting to protect election integrity, the Top Republican Party priority.”

She continued, “Ms. Carew has the right to run for office just like she has the right to vote. I’m sure Hood County voters will easily see who best represents their Christian conservative principles along with the experience, and qualifications of a County Clerk.”

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County residents get hands-on time with voting machines

Lynn Walker

Wichita Falls Times Record News

November 9, 2021

<https://www.timesrecordnews.com/story/news/2021/11/09/county-residents-get-hands-time-voting-machines/6350331001/>

Dozens of Wichita County residents turned out Monday evening to look at new voting machines the county is considering purchasing.

Wichita is one of eight Texas counties required by the state to buy all new voting equipment. The requirement mandated by the Texas Legislature followed concerns about voter fraud in the 2020 election. The current equipment does not produce paper ballots, which the legislature now requires.

Representatives from ES&S demonstrated how the company’s machines work and talked about the security measures in the system. Visitors then had a chance to get hands-on time with the machines.

ES&S is one of just two companies authorized by the state to sell equipment to counties. The change will cost Wichita County about \$1 million, which county officials hope will be reimbursed by the state.

The second company, Harte, was scheduled to make its public presentation Tuesday evening in the Ray Clymer Exhibit Hall at the MPEC.

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Administrator: Smith County saw an average turnout in the November election

Maleri McHam

Tyler Morning Telegraph

November 8, 2021

https://tylerpaper.com/news/local/administrator-smith-county-saw-an-average-turnout-in-the-november-election/article_fafd873e-40c7-11ec-b0fa-5b7fae33037c.html

Although last week’s turnout was pretty standard for a constitutional amendments election, Smith County Elections Administrator Michelle Allcon said she was pleased with the amount of voters who cast a ballot on Election Day.

Out of 148,949 registered voters, 10,831 (7.27%) cast their ballot. Unofficial results show voters passed the eight constitutional amendments and a countywide road and bridge bond for \$45 million.

Allcon said more voters cast ballots on Election Day than all of those cast during early voting. Out of the 20 voting locations open, five of them saw 700 or more voters.

“I did not have high hopes for Election Day and it went a lot better than I thought it would, turnout wise,” she said, adding a higher overall turnout would’ve been ideal.

Compared to previous years, the turnout for this election was a bit higher than the 6,077 (4.7%) people who voted in 2017, but not as high as the 17,710 (11.4%) people who voted in 2019, Allcon said. While she was hoping for the numbers to be closer to those in the 2019 election, Allcon said she is glad they were a bit higher than in 2017.

“It was still a little disappointing but it was expected,” she said. “People just don’t vote during the constitutional amendments for the most part.”

Constitutional amendment elections are important, but they are not talked about as much by people, Allcon said. Elections were pushed through social media and other outlets, but at the end of the day, not having candidates on the ballot produces a lot less election conversation, Allcon added.

Results from the November elections can be found by visiting <https://www.smith-county.com/government/departments/elections/current-election-information/current-election-results>

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Temple ISD bond fails after provisional votes counted

KCEN-TV

November 9, 2021

<https://www.kcentv.com/article/news/education/bell-county-will-recount-votes/500-f8b4304e-f74d-4b7c-b724-eedcd95c1e50>

BELL COUNTY, Texas — A bond to improve facilities at every Temple Independent School District failed Tuesday after another count of the ballots, according to the Bell County Elections Board.

The count included an additional 18 provisional votes. The bond initially failed by just three votes on election day 1,964 to 1,967.

The official count was 1,965 votes for the bond and 1,967 against the bond, according to officials and the margin of three moved to margin of two.

Only one of those provisional ballots included a vote regarding the TISD bond, according the officials.

The \$178.3 million Proposition A raises the tax rate by 12 cents per \$100 of property value, the district said. It goes toward facility upgrades at every campus.

According to Deputy Chief of Bell County Elections, Jeannette Compean, the count will be the final numbers, but they don't become official until the canvassing on Nov.15.

Once the board counts the vote with the additional ballots, Compean said the district can ask for a recount.

Dr. Bobby Ott, Temple ISD superintendent, reacted to the results by saying:

“I would just like to say that I am very proud of our professionalism, positivity and honesty throughout this process,” said Ott, “No matter what side of the vote, our entire community has highlighted these things throughout the bond process. The needs were determined by our citizens and our engagement with the community has been nonstop. Based on the number of emails and calls I’ve received It appears that many people regret not voting. The democratic process of voting was not founded on the basis of apathy. It was started with the idea that every voice matters - and this includes your voice for your local schools and your own children and grandchildren. The results of this election revealed that truth. As TISD’s superintendent, I want to be clear that I am committed to running this process as many times as necessary to ensure the needs of our students, staff and community are met when it comes to facilities and being provisioned for growth. We will re-engage the community, modify the package based on input and run it back.”

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Group condemns DOJ’s ‘frivolous’ suit against Texas over election integrity reforms

Southeast Texas Record

November 9, 2021

<https://setexasrecord.com/stories/612133151-group-condemns-doj-s-frivolous-suit-against-texas-over-election-integrity-reforms>

AUSTIN – By attacking states with frivolous lawsuit, the Biden Administration has weaponized the Department of Justice into an arm of the Democrat political party, according to the Foundation for Government Accountability.

Last week, the DOJ filed suit against Texas over the state’s allegedly “restrictive” voting procedures imposed by Senate Bill 1, which was signed into law back in September.

The complaint contends the bill violates the Voting Rights Act by restricting assistance in the polling booth for voters who have a disability or are unable to read or write.

The complaint further argues the bill violates the Civil Rights Act by requiring rejection of mail ballots and mail ballot request forms because of paperwork errors or omissions.

The FGA has announced that it has already prepared an amicus brief in support of Texas, arguing that the bill strikes a lawful and proper balance between making it easy to vote, but hard to cheat.

“This lawsuit is extremely troubling, but not unexpected, given the great lengths the current administration has gone to weaponize the DOJ into an arm of their political party,” stated Chase Martin, legal affairs director for FGA. “FGA will continue to stand beside Texas as it takes on this barrage of baseless legal attacks from the left.”

Filed in the Western District of Texas, case No. 5:21-cv-01085

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Grayson County Commissioners approve new map after redistricting

Lauren Rangel

KXII-TV

November 9, 2021

<https://www.kxii.com/2021/11/10/grayson-county-commissioners-approve-new-map-after-redistricting/>

SHERMAN, Texas (KXII) - Grayson County Commissioners are redistricting and drawing the lines for a new map.

Re-drawing the maps happens every 10 years after the census data is released.

Tuesday, they approved five new voting districts in the county because of a growth in population and the annexation of cities.

And, they said precinct lines shifted to accommodate growth too.

Out of all four, precinct one grew the most over the last decade.

“When we talk about local government, it doesn’t get any more local than a voting district,” said Grayson County Judge Bill Magers. “What we did today was making sure that as our county has grown and changed that every single citizen in Grayson County has access to vote.”

They said the justice of the peace maps did not change, and there is no more than a five percent difference of population between each precinct.

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Montgomery County OKs change to commissioner precincts

Catherine Dominguez

Houston Chronicle

November 9, 2021

<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/neighborhood/woodlands/news/article/Montgomery-County-OKs-change-to-commissioner-16606392.php>

With no public comment and little discussion, the Montgomery County commissioners adopted a final plan that will even out commissioners precinct by moving Voting Box No. 2 from Precinct 4 to Precinct 1.

The redistricting is required by state law every ten years following a census count to ensure the population of commissioners’ precinct remain equal. During a special session last week, the court adopted several policies to get the process complete before the Nov. 12 deadline.

While the county grew by 36 percent since 2010, Montgomery County commissioner precinct grew mostly evenly. With Precinct 1 the smallest in population and Precinct 4 the largest, the court needed to make the minor adjustment of moving Voting Box No. 2.

Outside legal counsel representatives told commissioners last week the redistricting needed to be done quickly.

“It’s a ticking time bomb,” David Mendez with Bickerstaff Heath Delgado Acosta LLP said, adding if the county proceeds with imbalance precincts, county would be open a one person one vote lawsuit. “A person can bring action to stop the election until you fix the imbalance.”

Mendez noted filing for the 2022 election starts Nov. 3.

Mendez presented several key things the court needed to keep in mind when modifying the precincts during a Wednesday special session. Of those guidelines, Mendez said when redrawing precinct lines, you can’t “pack” or “crack” minority voters in a way that affects their voting power.

Required by law, the process comes up every 10 years following the release of updated census data. According to the United States Constitution and the Voting Rights Act, precincts can’t have more than a 10 percent population difference. If that happens, precinct boundaries would be redrawn to distribute the population more evenly.

The 2020 census shows the county’s new population to be 620,443. That is a 36.1 percent increase over 2010’s population of 455,746.

Precinct 4, headed by Commissioner James Metts, took the top spot with the most residents at 163,098. In contrast, Precinct 1 Commissioner Robert Walker found his precinct with the fewest residents at 144,667. As for Precinct 2 Commissioner Charlie Riley and Precinct 3 Commissioner James Noack they came in neck and neck with 156,549 and 156,138 residents respectively.

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U.S. Rep. Gohmert considers run for Texas attorney general

Karina Kling

Spectrum News

November 9, 2021

<https://spectrumlocalnews.com/tx/south-texas-el-paso/news/2021/11/09/u-s--rep--louie-gohmert--considers-run-for-texas-attorney-general>

TEXAS — East Texas Republican Congressman Louie Gohmert says he’s exploring a run for Texas attorney general. The GOP primary field is already crowded and Gohmert says he’ll jump in if he can raise \$1 million over the next 10 days.

“We’re running out of time,” he told supporters according to a video of his announcement posted on Facebook by the Smith County Republican Party. “If I’ve got a million bucks or more, I am all in. I am going to be the hardest running candidate you’ve ever seen.”

Candidates must file to run by Dec. 13 for the primary on March 1.

Like other candidates in the race, Gohmert hinted he’d make incumbent Ken Paxton’s legal woes central to his campaign. Paxton is under investigation by the FBI over bribery and abuse of office allegations. Paxton also has been battling a securities fraud case since his first months in office in 2015. He has denied wrongdoing in both.

Gohmert suggested Republicans could lose the powerful statewide office to a Democrat if Paxton wins the nomination.

“We’ve got to have an attorney general that’s undistracted by moral and legal issues of his own and who can get elected a year from now,” Gohmert told the crowd of supporters.

Gohmert is known as one of the most far-right Republicans in the Texas congressional delegation. He’s repeated former President Donald Trump’s unsubstantiated claims that the election was stolen and suggested the Jan. 6 riot was a left-wing conspiracy.

Paxton already faces three high-profile primary opponents: Texas Land Commissioner George P. Bush, former Texas Supreme Court Justice Eva Guzman and state Rep. Matt Krause, R-Fort Worth.

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Wisconsin elections chief says audit report needs correcting

Associated Press

November 9, 2021

<https://www.wbay.com/2021/11/10/wisconsin-elections-chief-says-audit-report-needs-correcting/>

MADISON, Wis. - Wisconsin Elections Commission administrator Meagan Wolfe says there are a handful of errors that will need to be corrected in the Legislative Audit Bureau’s report on the 2020 presidential election in the state.

Wolfe told the Joint Legislative Audit Bureau Tuesday that many of the inaccuracies in the report could have been addressed before it was released in late October.

She says the bureau decided to publish the report without giving the agency or its staff a chance to respond.

Wolfe and the six-member bipartisan commission have come under attack from Republicans alleging a handful of cases of voter fraud in Racine County.

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Rick Scott promises NRSC will fight for ‘election integrity,’ revisits 2018 recount gripes

Jacob Ogles

Florida Politics

November 9, 2021

<https://floridapolitics.com/archives/471750-rick-scott-promises-nrsc-will-fight-for-election-integrity-revisits-2018-recount-gripes/>

U.S. Sen. Rick Scott promised the National Republican Senatorial Committee will help defend so-called “election integrity” laws in Florida and elsewhere. He also accuses Democratic election officials of trying to illegally count too many ballots in counties favoring his opponent in Florida’s 2018 Senate race.

He made the public commitment to Republican National Committee Chair Ronna McDaniel during an episode of her “Real America” podcast released Tuesday morning.

“The RNC and the NRSC are doing a lot. We’re defending lawsuits in Georgia, Florida, Iowa,” Scott said. “We’re going into Texas and probably North Carolina because we’re a team.”

Scott, this election cycle, chairs the NRSC, which will support Republican Senate campaigns in electoral battlegrounds nationwide. It’s a critical cycle for the GOP as it aims to retake the majority in a chamber evenly split 50-50, with Vice President Kamala Harris’ tie-breaking vote giving Democrats control.

The Florida Senator at the podcast’s outset gave McDaniel and the RNC credit for his own seat in Washington.

“You won my race in 2018,” Scott told McDaniel.

“I think you had a lot to do with that,” McDaniel responded in-kind.

Scott secured his seat in the Senate by defeating three-term Democratic incumbent U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson by a razor-thin 10,033 votes out of more than 8 million cast. That was actually the third statewide race Scott won in a row by slim margins, having also won the Governor’s Mansion twice by 1.2 percentage points in 2010 and 1 percentage point in 2014. Notably, Scott reminded McDaniel the RNC did “nothing to help me win” his races for Governor.

“You have a unique perspective on an issue that is so pervasive in our party right now, which is election integrity,” McDaniel told Scott during the podcast. “You came up against some really bad supervisors in Broward and Palm Beach as a candidate.”

That’s accusations leveled against former Broward County Supervisor of Elections Brenda Snipes, whom Scott as Governor suspended after irregularities in his 2018 Senate race, and Palm Beach County Supervisor of Elections Susan Bucher, who Gov. Ron DeSantis suspended shortly after.

“We won by I think like 54,000 or 57,000 votes on Election Night,” Scott said. And then the Democrats sent down Marc Elias, who’s the lawyer who comes out to steal elections and he publicly said he was going to win the election. He didn’t care what the votes were.”

Elias represented Nelson during a state-mandated recount. He fought unsuccessfully for the state to count vote-by-mail ballots received after the election. He did successfully fight to allow voters to cure signatures on ballots received before polls closed.

“We had to fight for three weeks every day,” Scott said.

He accused elections supervisors of violating the law, resulting in a tighter election victory.

“They found 95,000 votes illegally after Election Night and they tried to count them all,” he said. “Those votes weren’t for me. Shocking.”

Both Broward and Palm Beach are heavily Democratic counties. While Scott sued Snipes over alleged misconduct, no nefarious acts were proven in court.

McDaniel said she was at the Broward Supervisor of Elections going through ballots herself by hand.

Scott said this all shows the importance of “getting the right laws and then electing the right people.” His comments come as Florida enacts a set of controversial election restrictions on vote-by-mail and early voting, and as DeSantis pushes for more changes before the 2022 midterms.

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Texas set to get around \$30 billion from new infrastructure bill

Grace Morris

KAMC-TV

November 9, 2021

<https://www.everythinglubbock.com/news/local-news/texas-set-to-get-around-30-billion-from-new-infrastructure-bill/>

LUBBOCK, Texas — The Biden Administration passed a new \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill with bipartisan support in both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

“We’ve long sort of thought here at The Chamber that an investment in our country’s infrastructure was long overdue,” said Vice President of Government Relations for the Lubbock Chamber of Commerce, Kyle Jacobson.

The bill aims to provide millions to improving roads, bridges, broadband internet, public transportation and more to folks across the country and in Texas.

Specifically, around \$30 billion from the bill will come to Texas, at least \$100 million of which will go towards expanding broadband internet.

That’s something the Lubbock Chamber of Commerce said is desperately needed in the South Plains.

“It’s largely rural areas west of I-35 that are still in need of broadband connectivity,” said Jacobson. “So we were happy to see that that was included. I think that will be good for our regional economy here in West Texas because broadband is so important not just for commerce but for education and telemedicine.”

However, not all are in favor of the bill that was passed. Congressman Jodey Arrington says he’s concerned the bill does not target the needs of Texans and will ultimately harm the Texas taxpayers.

“I think it’s horribly fiscally irresponsible,” said Arrington. “This is a negative return on investment for Texas taxpayers. It makes no sense. It is very irresponsible and there was no way I was going to support this bill.”

Arrington said he feels the bill is more about progressive policies rather than core infrastructure and will plunge the country further into debt.

“It is a bad return on investment for tax payers and it doesn’t fix the problems that Texas has with the current bureaucracy and red tape in terms of the permitting process to actually build the infrastructure,” said Arrington.

While not everyone agrees on the new deal, the current plan is that the bill will be paid for largely by using unspent emergency relief funds and unemployment insurance aid.

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Mexico Natural Gas Buyers Said Nervous About Winter Supply, Price Shocks

Andrew Baker

Natural Gas Intelligence

November 9, 2021

<https://www.naturalgasintel.com/mexico-natural-gas-buyers-said-nervous-about-winter-supply-price-shocks/>

Natural gas buyers in Mexico are nervous about supply and price shocks similar to Winter Storm Uri happening again this winter, experts said Monday at the U.S.-Mexico LDC Forum in San Antonio, TX.

Amid a historically tight global gas market, Mexico is more dependent than ever on pipeline imports from the United States, said NGI’s Christopher Lenton, senior editor for Mexico and Latin America, who keynoted day one of the conference.

The cold snap in February, which caused a 20% plunge in natural gas production in the south-central United States as power demand surged, showed the risks of Mexico’s dependence on U.S. gas supplies.

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Mexican gas buyers “always bring it up when I speak to them,” Lenton said. “They were slammed by it completely unprepared, and there are still consequences from that event.”

During the cold snap in February, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott issued an executive order restricting natural gas exports outside the state.

Pipeline natural gas deliveries from Texas to Mexico fell by more than 1 Bcf/d to slightly above 4 Bcf/d at the peak of the cold weather event, according to NGI calculations based on pipeline electronic bulletin boards.

Prices at the Waha and Houston Ship Channel hubs, both of which are closely linked to gas prices in Mexico, hit \$206/MMBtu and \$400/MMBtu, respectively, at the height of Uri. As a result, “we did see some market players unable, or unwilling, to pay their bills and it was a very difficult time,” Lenton said.

“The one thing I hear when I talk to Mexican buyers of natural gas is that they’re very, very nervous going into this winter,” he said. “A lot of that has to do with prices, but there’s also an element that has to do with the winter storm last year.”

In preparation, some gas buyers are looking at hedging instruments, while others are opting to purchase gas on a monthly basis, rather than in the spot market, Lenton said. Citing NGL’s most recent survey of Mexico’s natural gas market conducted in April, Lenton said there was a sizable year/year bump in the number of buyers purchasing gas in the month-ahead market.

He highlighted that Mexico is the world’s sixth largest importer of natural gas behind Italy and the eighth-largest natural gas market in the world, larger than Germany and the UK.

Adding to the challenge, Lenton said, is a lack of natural gas storage capacity in Mexico, as well as the lack of a robust secondary market to optimize unused pipeline transport capacity.

He noted that in the last public consultation of the gas market conducted by Sistrangas pipeline grid operator Centro Nacional de Control del Gas Natural (Cenagas), participants stressed the urgency of adding storage capacity.

Where Are Mexico’s Gas Supply Challenges?

Although Mexico’s gas market challenges vary by region, a common thread is concern about “gas availability, primarily related to the situation that we had back in February,” said Igasamex’s Carlos Arriola, director general, during a panel at the forum. The firm develops and operates natural gas systems in Mexico. Abbott’s executive order on gas exports “brought into the front how politically sensitive these types of issues can be, and how vulnerable to a great extent our current gas supply chain is due to lack of local production and to lack of storage.”

Luxem Energía’s Norberto Catalan, managing director of the energy trading firm, said part of the problem is that Cenagas “doesn’t allow us, as a market participant, to help them” through a secondary market for unused firm transport capacity.

Mexico’s previous government laid the groundwork for a secondary capacity market, and for the development of underground gas storage capacity.

Fellow panelist Rosanety Barrios, an independent energy analyst based in Mexico City, said the current administration has two main objectives in terms of energy policy: shoring up production of oil and gasoline by state oil company Petróleos Mexicanos (Pemex), and of electricity by state power firm Comisión Federal de Electricidad (CFE).

As a result, she said, the main objective of Cenagas has become ensuring gas supply for CFE.

Nonetheless, there is plenty to be optimistic about in Mexico’s gas market, said Arriola. He highlighted that a few years ago, gas buyers in Mexico could purchase natural gas only from Pemex. Today gas can be sourced from numerous marketers. U.S.-to-Mexico pipelines such as the Sur de Texas-Tuxpan offshore pipeline and the Wahalajara system also have improved optionality and energy security, he said.

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Biden, Trudeau, AMLO to Meet as North American Borders Reopen

Jennifer Epstein

Bloomberg

November 9, 2021

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-11-09/biden-trudeau-amlo-to-meet-as-north-american-borders-reopen?sref=ytoldrow>

The leaders of the United States, Canada and Mexico plan to meet in-person for the first time in Joe Biden's presidency as early as next week, according to two people familiar with the matter.

The meeting, as soon as next week, will bring together Biden, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador soon after the countries eased pandemic-related travel restrictions.

Immigration, energy and trade, as well as the broader recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, are likely to be among the topics the leaders discuss.

Lopez Obrador said in a Tuesday video address to migrants that he planned to visit the U.S. and to talk to Biden about immigration. He did not specify when that meeting would take place.

On Monday, the Biden administration reopened U.S. land borders with Canada and Mexico to nonessential travel, easing restrictions that had been in place since March 2020.

Biden has met virtually with both leaders and was at two summits in Europe with Trudeau earlier this month. Lopez Obrador hosted U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris in Mexico City in June.

The White House declined to comment and spokespeople for the two other leaders didn't immediately respond to requests for comment. Reuters earlier reported plans for the trilateral meeting.

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Analysis: Corporate Mexico feels heat from global supply chain crunch

Noe Torres

Reuters

November 9, 2021

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/corporate-mexico-feels-heat-global-supply-chain-crunch-2021-11-09/>

MEXICO CITY, Nov 9 (Reuters) - From the auto industry to producers of toilet paper and cement, Mexican companies have been hit hard by bottlenecks in international supply chains, depressing growth prospects for Latin America's second-largest economy.

Thousands of vehicles have sat on Mexican assembly lines awaiting missing semiconductors, but the impact of raw material shortages has been felt right across the corporate landscape.

Time and again in third quarter reports, companies flagged concerns over the disruptions that are increasingly bleeding into their bottom line in Mexico, an economy built around free trade that depends heavily on international supply chains.

Retailers and car companies expect the phenomenon to eat into traditional pre-Christmas sales, while rising input costs have fanned high inflation, pushing up interest rates even as growth expectations for Mexico have been scaled back.

"You can see the impact everywhere," said James Salazar, an analyst at bank CI Banco. "The problem is that if we keep seeing a recovery in demand, many companies will be in a jam."

Logistical bottlenecks have forced automakers, which contribute some 3.4% of Mexican gross domestic product (GDP), to carry out a slew of temporary work stoppages, curbing business.

Lower output crimped third quarter sales at conglomerate CYDSA (CYDSASAA.MX), a maker of coolants for the auto sector, by 2%. At Vitro (VITROA.MX), which produces windshields, windows and sunroofs, revenues in its auto business were down 14%.

Manufacturer Nema (NEMAKA.MX), which supplies components for companies such as Audi and Nissan, had to lower its 2021 sales target to \$3.82 billion from \$3.9 billion previously.

DELAYS

Lack of materials and delays have taken the shine off the recovery many companies had anticipated as the hit they absorbed in lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 scourge wore off.

Mexico's economy shrank 8.5% last year, its worst performance since the 1930s. Though it is expected to expand about 6% this year, analysts polled by the central bank in October shaved two tenths of a percentage point off their 2021 forecast.

The central bank recently estimated the semiconductor squeeze could knock one percentage point off GDP growth in 2021.

That pain radiates far beyond carmaking, also engulfing global cement giant Cemex, a bellwether for broader demand.

The Monterrey-based firm (CEMEXCPO.MX) said in the third quarter international logistics problems and higher costs hit its operating EBITDA - an indicator of profitability - even though sales grew in almost all of its markets. .

Cemex Chief Executive Fernando Gonzalez said that due to supply chain disruptions it had reduced 2021 capital expenditure guidance by \$100 million to \$1.2 billion.

Internet provider Axtel (AXTELCPO.MX) said shortages would knock some \$2.5 million off its revenues in the second half of 2021 because delays meant delivery times of four to six weeks had become five or six months, making some projects unfeasible.

Rival America Movil (AMXL.MX), the company controlled by billionaire Carlos Slim, is also feeling the pinch.

"I think in all the world, in all Latin America ... there is lack of handsets," said Daniel Hajj, America Movil's CEO.

CONSUMERS PAY

With Christmas only weeks away, companies' hopes of lifting sales risks falling foul of a lack of inventories.

Enrique Guijosa, finance chief of El Puerto de Liverpool (LIVEPOLC1.MX), one of Mexico's main department store chains, told analysts he expected shortages in sporting gear because of pandemic-induced shutdowns in countries like Vietnam and China.

Restrictions on goods' availability have translated into higher prices as companies pass on added costs to consumers. Inflation is now above 6%, double the central bank's target.

Gruma (GRUMAB.MX), a producer of Mexican staple food tortillas, said it had to put up its cornmeal prices, and flagged further potential increases next year.

Kimberly-Clark de Mexico (KIMBERA.MX), whose portfolio of brands includes Petalo toilet paper and Kleenex tissues, announced average price increases of 7% that would become fully effective at the end of the first quarter of 2022.

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Your vote matters

Gauri Raje

The Paisano

November 9, 2021

<https://paisano-online.com/27972/commentary/your-vote-matters/>

One of the perks of turning 18 is gaining the ability to legally cast your vote.

After the 2020 general elections, when, to my disappointment, I missed the eligibility cutoff by a week, my urge to vote grew. Soon enough, I was able to vote for the very first time as a legal adult. My very first time voting was in the Nov. 2 elections that took place in Texas. While the elections themselves were on a state level and dealt with propositions, the ability to walk into the voting center and cast my very first ballot was just as exciting. On my way back home, I was filled with a unique sense of satisfaction. Through my ballot, I had voiced my opinion. I had, in a way, done my part in contributing to the very essence of democracy – voting. Voting ensures we, as citizens, hold our elected officials accountable. It ensures that a democratic government is created by the people and for the people. Without voting, there is no democracy.

Yet, voting is often not a priority for many people, including young college students. In fact, college students and younger voters are often described as having one of the lowest participation rates in elections, especially state and local elections.

This lack of participation can be attributed to several reasons: including the fast pace of life, which makes voting seem like a hassle. Why would you stand in a long line for hours on end only to cast a vote that probably won't make a difference?

Don't forget that every single vote that is cast in an election adds up. Your vote matters. By voting, you are voicing your opinion. By voting, you are exercising a fundamental right you are entitled to by law.

And by voting I'm referring to all kinds of elections – be it local, state or national. In fact, state and local elections probably have the most direct impact on your day-to-day life.

Voting is a small yet consequential way in which our everyday lives are affected. It is far from trivial. The electoral process has real world consequences. Not exercising the right to vote is nothing short of complacency. Not to mention the strict voting laws many states have passed to restrict access to the ballot, which further highlights the importance of voting.

The current political climate is extremely polarized. A lot is at stake, especially for the younger generation, who will, so to speak, inherit the country and the planet. Voting at a time like this is all the more important if we want our generation to have a voice.

As college students who are just beginning to step into the real world, it is important to develop the habit of participating in elections early in life. In the age of digital media, it is very easy to get sucked into the trap of performative activism. We often find ourselves asking how we can really make a change and voting is the first step in doing so. It's the first step in getting involved.

If you are eligible to vote, get out there and cast your ballot. Furthermore, if you are passionate about certain issues, that is all the more reason for you to vote. And while you're at it, make sure you read up on the issues you will be voting on to ensure that your vote is well informed. It might seem like a burden, but, as a first time voter, I can assure you it is worth the effort.

Next time you come across news of an election, be it local, state, national or otherwise, go and vote. Your vote counts. Your vote matters.

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Analysis: Texas Republican lawmakers pleased most of their own voters, most of the time

Ross Ramsey

Texas Tribune

November 10, 2021

<https://www.texastribune.org/2021/11/10/texas-election-polling-issues/>

Texas voters weren't impressed by the work of the Texas Legislature this year. That might make for some interesting arguments leading up to next year's elections, but it could also fall flat, since

lawmakers drew so few truly competitive districts in the new political maps that will be used in those elections.

The latest University of Texas/Texas Tribune Poll found a mixed set of reactions from Texas voters:

- Voters approve of lawmakers' work on Second Amendment rights by a 46%-32% margin, but when it comes to the legislative response to gun violence, 35% approve and 41% disapprove.
- Approving voters were outnumbered by disapproving voters on immigration/border security, responses to COVID-19, abortion, transgender student athletes, public education, redistricting, property taxes and foster care.
- More voters than not approved the Legislature's work on election and voting laws and public safety.
- The biggest reaction to a list of issues was in the 60% of voters who disapprove of lawmakers' handling of reliability of the electric grid, after a nearly statewide loss of electricity during last February's polar vortex.

You might see all of that as fodder for next year's elections. For challengers chasing incumbents in the party primaries, that might be the case. But new redistricting maps drawn after the 2020 census are designed to protect incumbent lawmakers in general elections, along with preserving the Republican majority in the Texas Legislature.

Few legislative districts are competitive. Nearly all of the 181 contests in the November 2022 general election will be decided in favor of the political party — and most often, the incumbent — chosen by the mapmakers this year.

The issues are there. The contests are not.

Elections have consequences. It's a cliché because it's true.

One consequence of the 2020 election is that it reaffirmed solid Republican majorities in both the Texas House and Senate, and those legislators drew maps that reduce future threats to their majority. In the process, they also protected themselves from everything but challengers in the party primaries.

That's cheating, but it's the nature of redistricting — no matter who's in charge. The people in charge take care of the people in charge. Their maps are being challenged in courts — the first lawsuits were filed before lawmakers were even finished. But unless the courts decide the maps need significant revisions, the new maps will be used in next year's elections.

Voters will get their best shot at the issues in just a few months. The party primary elections are set for March 1. Candidates can officially file for office as early as Saturday, and the filing period will last a month.

The first threats to incumbents — and for most of them, the only real threats — will come from within their own parties and within the next four months.

For the state's attorney general, the issues are personal. At least three Republican elected officials — a former Texas Supreme Court justice, a land commissioner and a state representative — say they

will challenge Ken Paxton. He was indicted more than six years ago on securities fraud and still hasn't gone to court during years of procedural legal folderol. What's more, he's the subject of an investigation sparked by top aides who claim he used his state office to benefit a political donor.

For others, starting with the governor and the lieutenant governor, the work of the Legislature during 2021 will be the content of the 2022 election. Their primary voters like some of that work. In that most recent UT/TT Poll, strong majorities of Republican voters generally approve of the lawmakers' work on the Second Amendment (80%); elections and voting (75%); immigration and border security (73%); public safety (69%); and abortion (67%).

Among all voters, none of those issues won the approval of more than 46%. On two issues — immigration/border security and abortion — disapproval outpaced approval.

The state's incumbent lawmakers didn't get winning scores on other issues, like their COVID-19 responses and their work on public education, property taxes and the foster care system.

But the sharpest differences in voters' responses fall along party lines. They reveal the careful path taken by the Republican majority during a marathon year of legislating. They stuck with their own party's voters even when it meant going against most of the state's general election voters.

And since the political maps put most of the competition in next year's elections in the primaries and not in the general election, those partisans are the voters who'll grade their work.

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From: Sam Taylor
Sent: Friday, December 17, 2021 9:38 AM
Subject: SOS Morning News Clips 12/17/21



Texas Secretary of State Morning News Clips December 17, 2021

[Dallas County audit details released](#), *Coppell Gazette*, December 16, 2021

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[Ballot numbering under scrutiny in Ellis County](#), *Waxahachie Daily Light*, December 16, 2021

[Garcia: Get set for the weirdest county commissioner race we've ever seen](#), *San Antonio Express-News*, December 16, 2021

[Texas AG Paxton's \\$2.2M voter fraud unit closed three cases in 2021. GOP lawmakers still boosted its budget](#), *Houston Chronicle*, December 17, 2021

[Lawsuit alleges Harris County Democrat's map disqualifies some voters for six years](#), *The Center Square*, December 16, 2021

[Redistricting changes raises tension in Texas before elections](#), *KGNS-TV*, December 16, 2021

[Texas Democrats eye redistricting fights in state court as federal suits over gerrymandering mount](#), *Dallas Morning News*, December 16, 2021

[How Out Texas Rep. Celia Israel Put Voting Rights First in 2021](#), *The Advocate*, December 16, 2021

[Arlington approves redrawn council districts that some say dilute Black, Latino voting power](#), *KERA News*, December 16, 2021

[Court tells Texas AG, "Nah," On Election Prosecutions](#), *The Root*, December 16, 2021

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[Nevada county where Trump won to replace voting machines](#), *Associated Press*, December 16, 2021

[Yes, many noncitizens can now vote in New York City, but only in municipal elections](#), *KCEN-TV*, December 16, 2021

[Biden met virtually with U.S. senators to discuss voting rights bill](#), *Reuters*, December 16, 2021

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[Fox's worst week? Dominion ruling adds to drumbeat of bad news for the network](#), *CNN*, December 16, 2021

[Opening of Texas-Mexico border boosts holiday retail in San Antonio](#), *Texas Public Radio*, December 16, 2021

[EXCLUSIVE-Royal Dutch Shell confirms new delay in sale of Texas refinery to Mexico's Pemex](#), *Reuters*, December 16, 2021

[Texas has built 6 miles of wire border fencing along Rio Grande under Operation Lone Star](#), *Border Report*, December 16, 2021

Dallas County audit details released

Audrey Henvey

Coppell Gazette

December 16, 2021

https://starlocalmedia.com/coppellgazette/news/dallas-county-audit-details-released/article_37d2abc8-5e99-11ec-9aff-7b644dd8215e.html

The Texas Secretary of State's office has laid out details for phase two of its "full forensic audit" of the 2020 general election in Collin, Dallas, Harris and Tarrant counties.

On Friday, the office shared a letter from Texas Secretary of State John B. Scott addressed to elections administrators for each county.

"As indicated in our office's previous communications, the Texas Secretary of State's office is conducting the largest and most comprehensive forensic audit of the November 2020 General Election in your respective counties," the letter stated. "The purpose of this audit is to provide clarity and confidence for Texas voters that all applicable laws and procedures were followed during the 2020 Election, and to identify any irregularities or issues that need to be addressed going forward."

The letter asks the elections offices to begin locating requested documents in preparation for on-site examinations by the office's Forensic Audit Division, which will be coordinated in January.

The request comes after the office first announced in September that an election audit had already begun in the state's two largest Democrat and Republican counties. The office has since said that the audit is expected to cover about 35% of votes cast for the 2020 general election in Texas.

Scott's Friday letter came with a 10-page attachment outlining the records and procedures that the office is reviewing.

"The specific review process for each category will be based on the county's response to the initial survey questions provided," the office stated. "Once the scope is established on a county-by-county basis, we will provide detailed documentation regarding the specific review of each applicable category."

The outlined materials include voting system test records, lists of election workers, video surveillance records and questions about the county's election security measures.

According to an audit outline that was shared by the office in September, phase 2 involves the office conducting a comprehensive election records examination over several months "to ensure election administration procedures were properly followed during the 2020 General Election." That includes looking at county records including logic and accuracy testing records for voting machines, early voting and election day materials and training materials.

Irregularities or deviations from election administration procedures could trigger a full manual recount of ballots in a certain area, the office stated.

"I'm very confident that Collin County will come through this audit very well," Collin County elections administrator Bruce Sherbet said in September. "We had a very smooth and good election, and I think the biggest part for me is if this audit will help voters that don't have confidence in the process have confidence or more confidence that everything was handled appropriately, then that's very important."

Official election results posted on the Texas Secretary of State's website show that three of the four counties voted for President Joseph R. Biden Jr. in the 2020 general election. Collin County was the only one of the four that overall voted in favor of former President Donald J. Trump in the 2020 general election with 51.4% of the votes cast. Dallas County overall showed favor for Biden with 65.1% of votes cast.

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Texas' renewed voter citizenship review is still flagging citizens as "possible non-U.S. citizens"

Alexa Ura

Texas Tribune

December 17, 2021

<https://www.texastribune.org/2021/12/17/texas-voter-roll-review/>

Texas' last attempt to scour its voting rolls for noncitizens two years ago quickly devolved into a calamity.

The state flagged nearly 100,000 voters for citizenship checks and set them up for possible criminal investigation based on flawed data that didn't account for immigrants who gained citizenship. After it became clear it was jeopardizing legitimate voter registrations, it was pulled into three federal lawsuits challenging its process. Former Secretary of State David Whitley lost his job amid the fallout. And the court battle ultimately forced the state to abandon the effort and rethink its approach to ensure naturalized citizens weren't targeted.

This fall, the state began rolling out a new, scaled-down approach. But again, the county officials responsible for carrying it out are encountering what appear to be faults in the system.

Scores of citizens are still being marked for review — and possible removal from the rolls. Registrars in some of the state’s largest counties have found that a sizable number of voters labeled possible noncitizens actually filled out their voter registration cards at their naturalization ceremonies. In at least a few cases, the state flagged voters who were born in the U.S.

The secretary of state’s office says it is following the settlement agreement it entered in 2019 — an arrangement that limited its screening of voters to those who registered to vote and later indicated to the Texas Department of Public Safety that they are not citizens. Flagged voters can provide documentation of their citizenship in order to keep their registrations, officials have pointed out.

But the issues tied to the new effort are significant enough that they’ve renewed worries among the civil rights groups that forced the state to change its practices. They are questioning Texas’ compliance with the legal settlement that halted the last review. And for some attorneys, the persisting problems underscore their concerns that the state is needlessly putting the registrations of eligible voters at risk.

“We’re trying to get a grasp of the scale, but obviously there’s still a problem, which I think we always said would be the case,” said Joaquin Gonzalez, an attorney with the Texas Civil Rights Project, which was involved in the 2019 litigation. “It’s definitely something we were concerned would happen if they tried to restart this process.”

The review process tries to identify noncitizens using the Department of Public Safety’s massive driver’s license and ID database. It takes people who indicated they were not citizens when they obtained their IDs and then matches them to the voting rolls. But civil rights groups have been wary of that strategy because the database can contain inaccuracies and is prone to human error.

“It made sense to improve the process [in the settlement], but I think all parties were aware that there were still fundamental problems with the database and how they matched records,” Gonzalez said.

Texas’ voter citizenship review has persisted through the tenure of multiple secretaries of state and has been backed by state Republican leaders who have touted the broader review effort as a way to ensure the integrity of the voter rolls, though there is no evidence that large numbers of noncitizens are registered to vote.

The current iteration was formally initiated in early September before the appointment of the state’s new secretary of state, John Scott, who helped former President Donald Trump challenge the 2020 presidential election results in Pennsylvania.

That’s when the state sent counties 11,737 records of registered voters who were deemed “possible non-U.S. citizens.” It was a much smaller list than the one it produced in 2019, when it did not account for people who became naturalized citizens in between renewing driver’s licenses or ID cards they initially obtained as noncitizens.

But when Bexar County received its list of 641 flagged voters, county workers quickly determined that 109 of them — 17% of the total — had actually registered at naturalization ceremonies. The county is able to track the origin of those applications because of an internal labeling system it made up years ago when staff began attending the ceremonies, said Jacque Callanen, the county’s administrator.

Election officials in Travis County said they were similarly able to identify that applications for 60 voters on the county's list of 408 flagged voters — roughly 15% of the total — had been filled out at naturalization ceremonies.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Texas, another group that sued the state in 2019, is still assessing the extent to which the state's new attempt to review the rolls may be defective. But those figures alone should give everyone pause, ACLU staff attorney Thomas Buser-Clancy said after The Texas Tribune provided him those tallies.

"What we do know is that every time the secretary of state tries to do something like this it fails and that these efforts, which inevitably ensnare eligible voters, should not be happening," Buser-Clancy said.

In an advisory announcing the revised process, the secretary of state's office told counties that they should first attempt to "investigate" a voter's eligibility. If they are unable to verify citizenship, the county must then send out "notices of examination" that start a 30-day clock for the voter to submit proof of citizenship to retain their registration. Voters who don't respond with proof within 30 days are removed from the rolls — though they can be reinstated if they later prove their citizenship, including at a polling place.

Beyond the figures from Bexar and Travis counties, local election officials in other counties, including Cameron and Williamson, confirmed they've heard back from flagged voters who are naturalized citizens. After mailing 2,796 notices, officials in Harris County said 167 voters had provided them with documentation proving their citizenship. In Fort Bend, officials received proof of citizenship from at least 87 voters on their list of 515 "possible noncitizens." Last week, Texas Monthly reported on two cases of citizens in Cameron County who were flagged as possible noncitizens.

"This process, agreed upon by all parties and stakeholders, will ensure that only qualified U.S. citizens remain on the voter rolls in Texas' 254 counties," said Sam Taylor, the secretary of state's spokesperson. "We do not want any legitimate, qualified U.S. citizens to be canceled from the voter rolls, and this process protects U.S. citizens' right to remain registered and to vote."

In its advisory, the secretary of state suggested voter registrars could attempt to confirm a flagged voter's eligibility by consulting with other county governmental entities that may have verified their citizenship or by trying to identify voter registration applications that originated from naturalization ceremonies.

"To the extent that counties were able to confirm their citizenship status and they were kept on the rolls — that's exactly how the agreed-upon process is supposed to work," Taylor said of the naturalized citizens identified by officials in Bexar and Travis counties.

However, county officials have previously told the state they often have no way to independently verify someone's citizenship status to avoid sending out the 30-day notices. And most counties don't appear to track applications from naturalization ceremonies.

So far, 2,327 voter registrations have been canceled as part of the review — 88% of them because the voter did not respond to the notice within 30 days. Just 278 were canceled after voter registrars verified they were not citizens. In some cases, county officials said, this occurs because of clerical errors. Nearly 17 million Texans are registered to vote.

The rest remain pending, largely because the state is now under a federally mandated moratorium on registration cancellations within 90 days of a federal election — in this case, the upcoming March primaries. (Various counties did not send out notices until the last few weeks, meaning any cancellations for failing to respond cannot be carried out until after the primary election.)

Voters flagged through the review process “have every opportunity to confirm their U.S. citizenship status and remain on the rolls, including at the polls when they go to vote,” Taylor said.

But lawyers involved in the 2019 litigation said the state cannot rely on that as a failsafe if the review process is systematically including eligible voters.

“Whatever the flaw is, it’s systematic with respect to naturalized citizens,” said Nina Perales, the vice president of litigation for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, which also sued the state in 2019.

In the shadow of the state’s botched 2019 effort, some county elections officials told the Tribune they approached the renewed effort with hesitation. But unlike two years ago when many of them held off on acting on the state’s lists, county voter registrars are now under financial threat if they don’t cull through them.

The Texas Legislature this year empowered the secretary of state’s office to withhold funds from them if they fail to “timely perform” voter roll maintenance duties, including those related to voters flagged as possible noncitizens. Keith Ingram, the director of the office’s elections division, reminded locals of this in a Nov. 15 email in which he noted “that a number of counties” had taken no action on the registrations his office put into question.

Ingram’s email appears to have prompted several counties to send out notices of examination, while others are still seeking additional data or information that could allow them to confirm that voters are citizens without sending the notices.

Gretchen Nagy, the director of voter registration in Travis County, sees it as “due diligence” owed to the voters, recalling the phone conversations she had with anguished naturalized citizens who were caught up in the state’s 2019 review.

“It was really difficult when people on the other end were really upset and emotionally distraught, [asking] ‘Is there something wrong? Did I do something wrong?’” Nagy said. “We’re basically trying to think outside the box — any agency, any department that we can reach out to — to see if we can do a confirmation of citizenship before these individuals ever have to hear from us.”

Up the road, election officials in Williamson County last week were waiting on guidance from the state in regard to nearly a fifth of the voters on their list of 138 “possible noncitizens” who appeared to have registered through the Department of Public Safety, which only registers individuals once their citizenship has been verified.

The state erroneously included 25,000 of those types of records in its 2019 review — a mistake it began quietly walking back within days of announcing the review effort.

The secretary of state’s office confirmed its current review includes “a limited number” of those matches, though it did not respond to a request for an exact number. Taylor, the spokesperson, said the state determined that some voters who initially registered through DPS were flagged because they “marked ‘yes’ on the citizenship field but later marked ‘no’ on the same field at a subsequent visit

to DPS.” Those records could also include voters who were unable to provide citizenship documents to DPS.

“As a result, these records were flagged for citizenship review,” Taylor said.

The issues with the revised review appear to even be reaching voters who were born in the U.S.

Among them is Ivan Henson, a certified public accountant in Tarrant County, who was puzzled when he found in his mailbox a notice from the county dated Nov. 30 indicating his citizenship was in question. He was born in New Mexico.

“There is absolutely no reason I should be on this list,” Henson said.

Henson’s name appeared alongside more than 600 others on the list of possible noncitizens Tarrant County received from the state. County officials said they reviewed the list to see if they could find any clerical errors but ultimately sent out the notices following the state’s instructions.

Recalling news coverage of the state’s voter rolls debacle from two years ago, Henson made copies of his birth certificate and passport and quickly mailed them to the county, but he said he worries others who “don’t have time to mess with it” won’t be able to comply as easily.

“I am self-employed with my own copier and my own resources and my own time,” Henson said. “You know who this letter is going to disenfranchise.”

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Ballot numbering under scrutiny in Ellis County

Bill Spinks

Waxahachie Daily Light

December 16, 2021

<https://www.waxahachietx.com/story/news/politics/elections/2021/12/16/ballot-numbering-under-scrutiny-ellis-county/8935432002/>

Ellis County’s election system is secure, members of the Commissioners’ Court were told during Tuesday’s regular bi-weekly meeting as they peppered county elections administrator Jana Onyon with questions and heard public comments on election security across almost an hour and a half.

Onyon’s assertions, though, didn’t seem to assuage some members of the court as they seemed to lean toward reinstating sequentially numbered ballots for elections in the county.

Onyon told commissioners that ballots are numbered for security purposes so that they can be traced back to a polling location. The process dates back to legislation when hand ballots were still commonplace, but Onyon said the same process was kept even with technology advances.

A 2019 change to the balloting process allows for unused ballot stock to be reused in subsequent elections, which Onyon said resulted in significant cost savings — about \$13,000 for the November 2020 election. The reason this is possible is because ballots are not numbered until the votes are cast with the electronic system Ellis County began using in May 2019. The system generates a 2-digit alpha code and a random serial number.

Several public speakers urged a return to sequentially numbered ballots and called into question the Texas Secretary of State’s advisory allowing for non-pre-numbered ballots. Most cited what they said was lack of

confidence that votes were being securely counted, and said the money being saved wasn't worth the concern over security.

Onyon replied afterward that all guidance regarding the update originated from state legislation, and that all ballots that are placed in the tabulator are counted after they are filled out, regardless of numbers.

Onyon said voting equipment is routinely tested before every election. In the event that a voter is not satisfied with his or her recorded vote, that voter can request a new ballot and the old ballot is "spoiled." Onyon added that a rigorous count of all ballots — used, unused or "spoiled" — is kept at each polling site. All ballots are kept on file for 22 months following an election.

Voting devices are not connected to the internet, Onyon said. The laptop that checks in voters is the only computer that will be connected to the web, so that voters are able to be verified.

Precinct 3 Commissioner Paul Perry said he will ask County Attorney Ann Montgomery to research election statutes to find out if the allowance of random numbering has any basis in law, and bring an answer back for the Dec. 28 court meeting. Perry also said even though the Ellis County Elections Office is independent of the Commissioners' Court, the court does hold the budgetary purse strings for the office.

Precinct 1 Commissioner Randy Stinson said funding should be no object in the name of securing ballots.

"When it comes to elections, we have the money," Stinson said. "We need to put extra staff over there to implement the situation that we're trying to solve. I don't think any commissioner on this court would back off of that."

All court members were present.

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Column: Get set for the weirdest county commissioner race we've ever seen

Gilbert Garcia

San Antonio Express-News

December 16, 2021

https://www.expressnews.com/news/news_columnists/gilbert_garcia/article/Garcia-Get-set-for-the-weirdest-county-16708414.php

Let's say you're a politically active person living on the North Side and you've thought about running for county commissioner.

But the precinct in which you live (Precinct 3) didn't have another election scheduled until 2024, and, besides, it had a solid incumbent, Trish DeBerry, who just took office at the beginning of this year.

Given those circumstances, you recently filed to run for another office.

This must be a strange time for you.

On Monday afternoon, moments before the filing period closed for the 2022 Texas primary elections, DeBerry stunned political observers by filing paperwork to run for county judge. In doing so, she relinquished her Precinct 3 seat.

DeBerry's move triggered an obscure provision in the Texas Election Code, which states that if a vacancy occurs after the 10th day before the filing deadline, candidates have five days from the regular filing deadline in which to apply for the primary election.

In this case, that would have meant a Saturday deadline, but the Texas Secretary of State's office rolled the deadline over to Monday.

It has created one of the weirdest dynamics we've ever seen in Bexar County politics.

"People are struggling," said Jacque Callanen, the elections administrator for Bexar County. "Lots of phone calls will be made."

Callanen said some primary candidates for other offices have contacted her to inquire about switching to the Precinct 3 contest.

"They've said, 'Hey, if I'd known that, I wouldn't have filed for this slot. Can I withdraw from this slot now and run for that one?'"

The answer, of course, is they can't.

John Austin, the chairman of the Bexar County Republican Party, said no GOP candidates had filed for the Precinct 3 seat as of Thursday morning.

"I've talked to multiple individuals that are interested," Austin said. "People are just kind of mulling it over. It's so fast and whirlwind."

"A typical executive at one of the big companies in town might be interested in that at some point. But to have only four or five days to put everything in order, it's just not enough time."

There's also the issue of filing fees. Candidates for Bexar County commissioner have the option of paying a \$1,250 filing fee or submitting 500 petition signatures.

In this case, however, with only a few days in which to gather signatures, Precinct 3 hopefuls will almost certainly have to cough up the \$1,250 if they hope to get their names on the March 1 primary ballot.

It's worth considering that the race for Precinct 3 commissioner (a gig which pays nearly \$138,000 a year) is operating on two tracks.

There's the behind-the-scenes jockeying to secure an interim appointment from Democratic County Judge Nelson Wolff (whose voice mail, as I write this, is probably filling up with flattery from ambitious local Republicans). That appointment will get you the job for about a year.

Then there's the election battle, which will secure the Precinct 3 seat for the winner until the end of the 2024 election cycle. This is a solid Republican seat and most of the real action will be in the GOP primary.

Here's what we know about the Republican race:

Former Councilman (and two-time mayoral candidate) Greg Brockhouse will be running. Seven months after getting smoked by a 2-1 margin in the mayoral election by Ron Nirenberg, Brockhouse sees the Precinct 3 seat as a prime opportunity for a political comeback.

Patty Gibbons, a long-time Republican activist who finished fifth in a 10-candidate North Side field for City Council in 2017, also plans to run.

In addition, there's a slew of prominent players in the local business community who are giving this race a look.

Grant Moody, the director of policy, strategy and innovation at Valero Energy, told me that he is "prayerfully considering whether this is the right time and right opportunity for me to serve our community."

Moody majored in economics at the U.S. Naval Academy, served 10 years as a Marine F-18 pilot (including deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq) and received a gubernatorial appointment to the Texas Veterans Land Board.

Former Councilman Jeff Webster, the vice president of business development with Jacobs Engineering Group, said he is “putting it through the consideration process.” A few months ago, Webster nearly entered the race for the Texas House seat being vacated by Lyle Larson, but decided he didn’t want the aggravation.

Preston Woolfolk, the co-president of DOCUvation, said “he is giving it a lot of thought.”

The tech executive added, “It’s going to be a tight race, due to the timeline. That’s a pro or a con, depending on who’s looking at it. That’s going to be the bigger conversation piece for everybody looking at it.”

It’s definitely a major conversation piece. And prospective candidates won’t have much time to conduct those conversations.

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Texas AG Paxton's \$2.2M voter fraud unit closed three cases in 2021. GOP lawmakers still boosted its budget

Taylor Goldenstein

Houston Chronicle

December 17, 2021

<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/politics/texas/article/Texas-AG-Paxton-s-2-2M-voter-fraud-unit-closed-16708051.php>

Texas Republican Attorney General Ken Paxton has been one of former President Donald Trump's most reliable allies in spreading the myth of widespread voter fraud, particularly in the 2020 election, and frequently boasts that few states are as vigilant.

His office’s election integrity unit added two lawyers to the team in the last year, bringing it up to six staffers total, and worked more than 20,000 hours between Oct. 2020 and Sept. 2021. Its budget, meanwhile, ratcheted up from \$1.9 million to \$2.2 million during that time.

Yet records from the office show that the unit closed just three cases this year, down from 17 last year, and opened seven new ones. That includes the newly created unit focused on the 2021 local elections, which has yet to file a single case.

“This is an exorbitant amount of money that has resulted in no benefit for the average Texan,” said Austin Evers, executive director of American Oversight, a left-leaning nonprofit government watchdog that regularly files public information requests and files suits to force compliance with those requests. The organization shared some records it obtained from the Texas attorney general’s office with Hearst Newspapers for this report; others were obtained independently by Hearst Newspapers.

Evers added: “Taxpayers are funding a political stunt meant to fuel the false claim of a stolen election and justify voting restrictions.”

The scant caseload comes after Texas Republican lawmakers insisted a 2020 election audit was necessary and passed a sweeping elections overhaul bill loaded with voting restrictions that Democrats have warned will have a disproportionate effect on already-marginalized voters.

Paxton’s office has not uncovered any evidence of voter fraud in 2020 beyond isolated incidents affecting a handful of votes in an election in which more than 11 million Texans cast ballots.

Republican Gov. Greg Abbott, under pressure by former president Donald Trump, initiated reviews of election processes across the state in the fall.

Paxton's office did not respond to a request for comment for this story, but in a podcast his office produced in November 2020 about voter fraud, Paxton blamed low resources for the election integrity unit's output.

"I don't think anybody knows the degree to which it happens because even our office who probably prosecutes more election fraud than anyone else in the country ... We don't have enough resources to cover all election fraud. So it's really hard to know how large an issue this is because very few states put any resources in to actually detect or prosecute voter fraud."

It's a point he's made often before, though he's never offered specifics as to what kind of staffing or funding he would find sufficient.

Richard L. Hasen, an election law professor at the University of California Irvine, said there's a more likely explanation, noting that Paxton, who is running for re-election, has "every incentive," politically speaking, to vigorously go after voter fraud, as it's an issue that energizes his party's base.

"He's finding very little of it despite spending a lot of money and using a lot of resources looking for it," Hasen said. "The reason is not that such fraud is too hard to find. Those that commit voter fraud tend not to be brain surgeons. The reason he's not finding a lot of it is because voter fraud is rare."

Multiple academic studies and journalistic reviews have uncovered no evidence of widespread voter fraud, nor did a wide-ranging investigation of election fraud in 2020 conducted by the U.S. Justice Department.

After Texas' own director of elections Keith Ingram testified to lawmakers in March that the 2020 election was "smooth and secure," the Secretary of State failed to receive confirmation of her appointment by the Republican-majority state Senate and was forced to step down.

In one of the most comprehensive reviews to date, an AP analysis this month reviewed potential election fraud cases in six battleground states contested by Trump and found 475, nowhere near enough to have altered the results of his 2020 loss.

Paxton boasts of more voter fraud cases than ever

The biggest case closed this year by the Texas attorney general's office involved a Medina County resident who allegedly unlawfully assisted 10 voters with mail ballot applications during the 2020 election.

The other two were people in Lubbock and Guadalupe counties who allegedly made false statements on their voter registration applications and voted illegally in the 2018 election, and one of them also in the 2020 election.

In 2016, 2017 and 2019, Paxton's office also closed three cases.

Yet in a tweet in October, Paxton proclaimed that his office was "between pending cases & investigations — working more voter fraud cases than Texas has ever seen."

While it's true that the office has more cases pending this year over last year, 44 up from 38, that's not because of a surge in new prosecutions. It's because the vast majority of cases that were pending around this time last year are still making their way through the court system.

Among the cases pending include that of Hervis Rogers, a Black man from Houston who was charged this year with illegally voting while on parole, after he had made national headlines for waiting for six hours to vote in the 2020 primary election.

A new ruling from the state's highest criminal court Wednesday may afford legal relief to Rogers and potentially others, after it found that Paxton's office does not have the constitutional right to prosecute voter fraud without the consent of local prosecutors.

The office is also in the midst of investigating 386 allegations of fraud, according to its website, up by about 150 over what it reported it was looking into last year.

Paxton, members of his office and his supporters often use an unusual metric to tout the election integrity unit as a success, citing the more than 500 counts of offenses filed against defendants in pending cases, as opposed to the number of defendants, about 45.

This can prove misleading: An individual case can involve dozens of counts because the state's lawyers can file many different charges for the same action or set of actions. For example, a social worker in the Mexia State Supported Living Center was charged in October with two election fraud offenses for each of the 67 residents she registered to vote prior to the 2020 presidential election without their permission, landing her a total of 134 counts. No illegal votes were cast.

As has been the trend since the voter fraud unit began its work 15 years ago, the majority of defendants, including the three whose cases were resolved this year, have been entered into diversion programs. Those are alternatives to prosecution for low-risk, typically first-time offenders that often involve some court supervision.

Twenty-seven defendants, or 17 percent, were sentenced to deferred adjudication, which is a form of probation that gives the person a chance to avoid a criminal conviction on their record.

Under a third of defendants' cases ended in a conviction, and of those 46, a little over a dozen spent time behind bars.

The extensive use of these diversion programs makes it difficult for the public to find much information about the situations leading to the alleged crimes, which would typically be uncovered in court documents.

The Republican chairs of the committee in charge of writing the budget in the Texas House and Senate did not respond to questions about why funding increases to the election integrity unit continue to be approved despite its lack of results.

Democratic State Rep. Jessica González, vice-chair of the elections committee in the Texas House, called the spending unacceptable.

"It is clear the Election Integrity Unit receives an absurd level of funding considering their inability to find real cases of voter fraud, and this funding increase only continues to fuel their witch-hunt," González said.

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Lawsuit alleges Harris County Democrat's map disqualifies some voters for six years

Bethany Blankley

The Center Square

December 16, 2021

https://www.inforney.com/texas/lawsuit-alleges-harris-county-democrats-map-disqualifies-some-voters-for-six-years/article_3c985955-ef94-5c4a-8175-d284a759c5ae.html

(The Center Square) – Three Harris County voters and two Republican County Commissioners have sued Democratic Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo and Harris County for a redistricting plan proposed by a Democratic commissioner, alleging it unconstitutionally disenfranchises more than one million voters in next year's county elections.

Harris County is the largest county in Texas with 4.7 million residents, according to 2020 Census data. Roughly half, or 2.48 million residents, are registered to vote, according to the Texas Secretary of State's office, with 1.63 million having voted in the 2020 General Election.

The lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Harris County asks the court to issue a temporary restraining order and/or temporary or permanent injunction against the judge and county from implementing the redistricting plan.

The Commissioner's Court is comprised of four commissioners representing four districts, and the county judge. Two commissioners are Democrats (Precincts 1 and 2), two are Republicans (Precinct 3 and 4) and the judge is a Democrat.

The redistricting map proposed by Democratic Commissioner Rodney Ellis, known as the "Ellis Plan 3," would redraw the lines in such a way to ensure that Democrats would hold a supermajority on the court because it would likely eliminate one of the Republican districts.

Harris County Republicans argue the Democrats' goal is to eliminate a Republican from the court to ensure a Democratic supermajority. One way to do this is to take advantage of a stipulation in the Texas Constitution that states that elections for county commissioners, who serve four-year terms, must be staggered every two years.

Ellis' plan redraws the district lines so much so that it moves 1.1 million voters from even-numbered to odd-numbered voting precincts—thereby eliminating their ability to vote in at least the next election.

For example, under the state constitution's staggered election process, residents of Precincts 2 and 4 will vote in 2022; residents in Precincts 1 and 3 will vote for their commissioners in 2024. Voters in Precincts 2 and 4 would vote again in 2026, and voters in Precincts 1 and 3 in 2028.

Under Ellis' plan, his Precinct 1 would remain largely unchanged.

But Cagle's Precinct 4 would absorb the northeastern portion of the existing Precinct 2, and the northwestern portion of the existing Precinct 3.

Precinct 4 would include Katy in west Harris County, and Baytown in East Harris County, which are at least an hour apart without traffic.

Some of the Precinct 4 residents would also be moved to an odd-numbered precinct, and not be able to vote until 2024. If the district weren't redrawn, they'd be voting in 2022.

And the newly chopped up Precinct 4, historically a Republican stronghold, would be transformed enough to become a Democratic precinct. Then, the 3-2 Democrat-Republican court would become a 4-1 Democratic-controlled court.

"The Ellis map moves over a million Harris County voters who did not get to vote for commissioner last year to a new precinct where they won't get to vote for commissioner next year, either," Alan Vera, a conservative leader within the Harris County Republican Party and plaintiff in the lawsuit, said in a Houston Public Media report. "Those voters will have gone six years without the right to vote for a county commissioner, when they're entitled to vote for commissioner every four years."

"Democrats on Commissioners Court were so intent on padding their 3-2 majority that they callously and intentionally trampled on our clients' sacred right – the right to elect their government officials and to participate in the electoral process," the plaintiffs' attorney Andy Taylor said in a statement when announcing the lawsuit.

Officials are required to set district lines every 10 years according to new census data, to ensure "one person, one vote" proportionality. County precincts are required to be drawn with no more than a 10% population deviation.

While courts have historically upheld partisan redistricting plans, Taylor argues the districts can't be redrawn "in a manner that violates the constitutional rights of voters in those precincts."

He and the plaintiffs' other attorneys prepared an alternate redistricting map that they argue is constitutionally valid, and only moves a fraction of the number of voters compared to those moved by Ellis' plan.

Judge Hidalgo maintains the plan is legal, as does Harris County Attorney Christian Menefee. He says the county "ran a transparent and thorough redistricting process" and the map the court adopted "complies with Texas law."

Ellis has argued that Harris County was previously gerrymandered by Republicans, and that his map corrects that.

"Our plan seeks to keep communities of interest together and bring together areas that have been split apart for years," Ellis said. "For too long this county has been intentionally divided by precinct boundaries that deny people the opportunity to elect representation that accurately reflects the views of the majority of our communities. The boundaries proposed cease that continued suppression, and allows the voices and views of the people to be reflected by those who represent them."

Republicans argue the opposite.

If the court grants their request for injunction and directs the commissioners court to go back to the drawing board, and if the commissioner's court fails to adopt an acceptable redistricting plan in time for the March primaries, the county could use the current map or the plaintiffs' map for the 2022 election cycle.

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Redistricting changes raises tension in Texas before elections

Christian Del Rio

KGNS-TV

December 16, 2021

<https://www.kgns.tv/2021/12/16/redistricting-changes-raises-tension-texas-before-elections/>

LAREDO, TX. (KGNS) - Texas Governor Greg Abbott approved the new political map for redistricting for the State of Texas.

Critics of the new maps say the changes made will benefit Republican candidates keeping them in office for the next decade.

They also believe the new maps could deny the voting rights of Latino and black voters.

The Webb County Democratic Party Chair Silvia Bruni believes it's a move by the Republican Party to hold on to whatever opportunity or advantage they might have, and they particularly targeted counties that have strong democratic demographics.

Bruni encourages everyone to register to vote before it's too late and reminds you to please go out and vote when the time comes.

The new map will be in effect for next year's primary and general elections.

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Texas Democrats eye redistricting fights in state court as federal suits over gerrymandering mount

Sami Sparber

Dallas Morning News

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<https://www.dallasnews.com/news/politics/2021/12/16/texas-democrats-eye-redistricting-fights-in-state-court-as-federal-suits-over-gerrymandering-mount/>

AUSTIN — As federal lawsuits over new political maps pile up, some Texas Democrats are focusing on a pair of state court cases, arguing this year’s GOP-led redistricting effort violated the Texas Constitution.

The Legislature’s GOP mapmakers in October passed new lines that cement Republicans’ grip on power for the next decade but blunt the voting strength of nonwhite voters who fueled Texas’ population surge.

In two cases heard Wednesday and Thursday, a group of mostly Democratic, Hispanic lawmakers from both chambers challenged the legality of when and how Republicans drew the boundaries.

“All we’re asking is for Republicans, who claim to be constitutionalists, to start acting like it, and follow the plain meaning and reading of the Constitution,” said Roland Gutierrez, one of two Democratic state senators who are suing Texas.

Focusing on the timing are Gutierrez and Sen. Sarah Eckhardt, who sued to block the Legislature from redistricting in a special session this year. Also at issue are rules for keeping counties intact when drawing Texas House districts.

Similar to a suit they filed in federal court before redrawing began, the senators’ attorneys argued the Texas Constitution requires that redistricting be done in a regular session that won’t happen until 2023.

That makes the newly drawn state House and state Senate plans invalid, argued the legal team for Gutierrez and Eckhardt, of San Antonio and Austin, respectively.

The senators’ lawyers pointed to a provision in the state Constitution that requires the redistricting process to start in the first regular session after the decennial Census has been published, asking the court to block the new plans from being used.

State lawyers argued the provision does not prohibit apportionment at other times, and warned that blocking the map will disrupt the 2022 election process that is already in motion.

“The Legislature ... is perfectly free to redistrict whenever it wants,” Will Thompson, the attorney general’s deputy chief for special litigation, said at the Dec. 15 hearing in district court in Travis County.

All parties face a tight timeline for the March primaries. Overseas mail-in ballots are set to go out Jan. 15, and candidate filing ended Dec. 13.

But the court fights are not uncharted territory. The senators’ attorney, Wallace B. Jefferson, pointed out that for decades, every Texas redistricting plan has been either changed or tossed out by a federal court after being found in violation of the U.S. Constitution or the federal Voting Rights Act.

Texas argues “chaos will ensue if the court were to enjoin the maps, but the sky will not fall if that’s what the court decides,” said Jefferson, former Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice and Republican from San Antonio.

The consolidated cases have been assigned a panel of three district court judges, with Democrat Karin Crump presiding, alongside Republicans Emily Miskel and Ken Wise.

Splitting Cameron County

The senators' legal team also argued the new state House map violated the "county line rule" of the Texas Constitution, which requires that counties with sufficient population be kept intact in drawing Texas House districts.

The second challenge, mounted by the Mexican American Legislative Caucus in the Texas House, made a similar case that the rule was broken, arguing it was designed to ensure people have local representation.

Both complaints focus on the redrawing of Cameron County in the Rio Grande Valley.

As lawmakers this fall debated the new House lines late into the night, they narrowly adopted a major change in South Texas. House District 37 was redrawn from a seat President Joe Biden won by 17 percentage points, to a seat the president won by only two points over former President Donald Trump in the 2020 election.

That amendment, developed by Kingsville Republican Rep. J.M. Lozano, was denounced by some Valley lawmakers. State Rep. Eddie Lucio III, D-Brownsville, called the change a "disingenuous, last-minute attempt to do a grab."

The plaintiffs' legal team argued the county line rule requires that two districts be wholly contained within Cameron County. Yet Lozano's tweaks give Cameron County just one wholly contained district, with two that connect to adjoining counties.

The state's lawyers argued the new boundaries do not dilute votes in Cameron County, and that Cameron got the number of districts it was constitutionally entitled to. The plaintiffs' attorney rejected that interpretation of the rules.

"There is no doubt that to whatever extent Cameron County voters are a cohesive group ... they get to elect the candidates of their choice," said Thompson, one of the state's lawyers.

District 37 Democratic candidate Ruben Cortez Jr. joined the senators' suit, along with political organization Tejano Democrats. The new version of the district was joined with adjacent Willacy County.

"This Republican redistricting scheme is robbing the voice of Cameron County voters," Cortez, also a member of the Texas State Board of Education, said in a news release.

The caucus' complaint asked the court to block the Texas House map from being used in upcoming elections and allow for the creation of alternative boundaries. Both sides discussed a full trial beginning Jan. 10.

It's unclear, if the judges rule in favor of the plaintiffs on the county line rule, whether they would delay Texas House primary elections just for South Texas, or the entire state. The plaintiffs' legal team asked the court to delay the primary to May 24.

Thompson, the state lawyer, said he expects the 2023 Legislature to have to revisit the maps.

In a separate federal suit, MALC has argued the redrawn congressional, Texas House and State Board of Education maps are intentionally racially discriminatory and dilute Latino voting strength, in violation of the federal Voting Rights Act and U.S. Constitution.

The U.S. Department of Justice has joined the federal court fight, suing to block Texas' gerrymandered congressional and state House maps. Several civil and voting rights groups, as well as individual voters, are among the plaintiffs in the consolidated federal redistricting cases.

Court challengers say the redrawn congressional, legislative and State Board of Education maps do not reflect the major growth of the Hispanic community, which made up nearly half of the state's population gain since 2020. People of color accounted for 95% of the state's population boom over the last decade, with much of the growth concentrated in cities and suburban areas, census data show.

In the plan for state House elections, the number of majority-white seats increased from 83 to 89, among eligible voters. The number of majority-Hispanic districts grew from 33 to 30, and the number of majority-Black districts dropped from seven to six. Asian voters remain without majority control in any district.

The decennial process following a U.S. Census typically leads to lawsuits in Texas, with the courts largely siding with Republicans in recent years. Lawmakers can draw maps in a way that benefits their party's political future as long as they do not discriminate on the basis of race.

This year, Republican lawmakers have a clearer path toward using the lines they want, as Texas is no longer required to get federal approval on new political maps.

The new maps are generally expected to withstand lawsuits, but battles over aspects of the boundaries could last several years.

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How Out Texas Rep. Celia Israel Put Voting Rights First in 2021

Trudy Ring

The Advocate

December 16, 2021

<https://www.advocate.com/exclusives/2021/12/16/how-out-texas-rep-celia-israel-put-voting-rights-first-2021>

Celia Israel, a member of the Texas House of Representatives, stood for her principles this year even though it meant personal sacrifice. She was set to marry her partner of 26 years, Celinda Garza, on the House floor July 15, but she ended up leaving Texas for Washington, D.C., three days earlier with more than 50 other House Democrats so there would not be the number of representatives required to vote on a Republican-backed voter suppression bill. They returned eventually, though, and a later version of the bill passed. But Israel doesn't regret her action one bit.

"This summer, I was part of something larger than myself when my colleagues and I broke quorum in defense of voting rights and took the fight to Washington, D.C.," she says. "During a year in which Texas was reeling from the effects of a polar vortex that killed hundreds and a pandemic where nearly 70,000 Texans have needlessly lost their lives, I've stood firm to call out the misplaced priorities of the Texas legislature, where our democratic institutions, reproductive rights, and the LGBTQ community have been targeted."

"I fight for everyone who knows rather than using transgender children as political piñatas to placate 5 percent of the electorate, we should be working together on solutions to the gaps in our health care and infrastructure," she adds. "What is happening in our politics today is a stain on the state that I love. What motivates me are the young voters and people of color who know what's happening now in Texas and around the country is not normal and who are making their voices heard."

Israel is now being motivated to seek a different office. She announced in September that she will not seek reelection to the House, where she has represented an Austin district since 2014, and will instead consider a run for mayor of the Texas capital next year. The current mayor, Steve Adler, cannot run again due to term limits. She has formed an exploratory committee with a diversity of members.

And Israel and Garza will have their wedding. They're planning a Texas-size ceremony and party for next spring.

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Arlington approves redrawn council districts that some say dilute Black, Latino voting power

Kailey Broussard

KERA News

December 16, 2021

<https://www.keranews.org/government/2021-12-16/arlington-approves-redrawn-council-districts-that-some-say-dilute-black-latino-voting-power>

Arlington's new city council districts give slightly more voting power to voters of color, but NAACP and LULAC leaders said they do not reflect its diverse communities.

Arlington city council approved redrawn voting districts this week that some civil and voting rights groups say do not reflect growth in Black, Hispanic and Latino communities.

Council members gave final approval Tuesday to a map that redraws four of the city's five single-member districts to more evenly split Arlington residents. The city-appointed redistricting task force selected the map as the best of five put forward — three from Bojorquez Law Firm, two from residents and community groups.

The approved map moves voters in the area between North Bowen Road, West Sanford Street, Oakwood Lane, and West Randol Mill Road/Westwood Drive from District 1 to District 4. District 3 residents in the boundaries of East Arkansas Lane, New York Avenue, Sherry Street, and East Mayfield Road will become part of District 5. The maps give slightly more voting power to Hispanic and Latino voters in District 1 and to Black and African-American voters in districts 3 and 5.

The 7-1 vote was the last needed to finalize the new districts ahead of municipal elections in 2022 when residents will decide four city council seats. Ruby Faye Woolridge, at-large District 6 council member, voted against the map.

Woolridge applauded the redistricting task force's efforts and formation; the group marks the first time a community board formally advised city council during the redistricting process.

"I'm very grateful for that and I look forward to the future and the progress that will continue to be made," she said.

Mayor Jim Ross was absent from the meeting.

The final vote followed months of criticism from local NAACP and LULAC chapters, whose leaders claimed the redistricting task force and council upheld districts that dilute voices in communities of color.

"Same old, same old"

Luis Castillo, president of Arlington LULAC, said the city has historically protected incumbents who, until recent years, have been mostly white. Castillo argued the same interests caused the city to gravitate from eight at-large council members to five single-member districts and three at-large members.

"It's a continuation of the same old, same old," he said.

Castillo's group and Arlington NAACP submitted a map that stretched District 4, a majority-white voting district, to cover northwest Arlington, including Viridian, the city's master-planned community composed of upscale housing developments. The leaders have opposed the task force-recommended map, and defended their submission, drawn in a manner that would give communities of color more voting power in the city's northern, southeast and eastern regions — districts 1, 3 and 5, respectively.

Alisa Simmons, Arlington NAACP president, told council members Dec. 7 the city's 8% population growth between 2010 and 2020 was "entirely driven by Arlington's communities of color." The 2020 census put Arlington's population at 394,266, making it the 50th largest city in the United States.

"When combined, these groups can together constitute a majority of the city's voting age population in possibly three districts," she said.

Attorney Rezzin Pullum with Bojorquez Law Firm told council the same day the groups' map did not fall in line with two city-instituted requirements for redistricting: that the new lines do not alter district shape as much as possible or draw sitting council members out of their districts. The NAACP and LULAC map would have cast District 1 Council Member Helen Moise into District 4, a majority-white district.

Stephanie Swanson with the League of Women Voters of Texas said the NAACP and LULAC map did a better job of upholding section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, which prohibits practices that discriminate against race, color or languages spoken by voters.

"Preserving incumbency is a very problematic redistricting criteria to adopt," Swanson said. "There is no federal law stating that incumbents must be protected."

Bojorquez Law Firm reviewed the concerns Swanson and the groups raised during redistricting and did not find issues that would open the city to legal action, city staff said.

Incumbents' power diminished?

Moise said the term limits for mayor and council seats that voters approved in 2018 temper concerns that incumbents can leverage redrawn lines. Moise can run for one more council term under limits that confine candidates to 12 years in office, or three two-year terms holding any council seat or serving as mayor.

In her first two races, Moise said, she ran against Black or African-American candidates, and she won support from communities of color for her work to support neighborhoods. Moise was first elected in May 2018 and re-elected in November 2020.

"I love District 1; I've lived in it for 38 years," she said. "In both of my elections, I ran a campaign that said I would serve every single person in my district, and my district listened."

Moise's seat is one of four voters will decide in 2022, when the new districts go into effect. Raul Gonzalez, who represents southwest Arlington in District 2, announced he will run for re-election. Arlington voters will select two new at-large council members, as Victoria Farrar-Myers, District 7, is being termed out, and Woolridge announced she will run for Tarrant County commissioner's court.

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Court tells Texas AG, "Nah," On Election Prosecutions

Keith Reed

The Root

December 16, 2021

<https://www.theroot.com/court-tells-texas-ag-nah-on-election-prosecutions-1848229952>

A high court in Texas smacked down the state attorney general's argument that he can prosecute election offenses all by himself. The ruling means that Attorney General Ken Paxton, a Republican Trump supporter, loses a potentially powerful tool in his party's voter suppression campaign.

The Court of Criminal Appeals, Texas' highest authority on criminal cases, ruled on Wednesday that Paxton can't barge in on local criminal cases involving elections, such as possible instances of voter fraud or campaign finance violations, according to the Texas Tribune. Instead Paxton has to get the OK from a local prosecutor before he sticks his nose in.

From News 4 San Antonio

In its opinion, the Court of Criminal Appeals overturned a lower-court ruling that said the election code provision "clearly and unambiguously gives the Attorney General power to prosecute criminal laws prescribed by election laws generally whether those laws are inside or outside the Code."

Rather, the Court of Criminal Appeals said, “the Attorney General can prosecute with the permission of the local prosecutor but cannot initiate prosecution unilaterally.”

In his tweet, Paxton said the ruling means “Soros-funded district attorneys will have sole power to decide whether election fraud has occurred in Texas.” That is a reference to George Soros, the Democratic megadonor who has become a force in local prosecutor elections.

In short, Paxton thought he could overrule local district attorneys when he didn’t like their decisions on who to haul into court, or who not to, over elections. By an eight-to-one margin, a panel of Republican judges told him no.

It’s an important ruling because in Texas and many other states, some GOP officials have passed shady new laws designed to shrink voting rights in the wake of Donald Trump’s failed attempt to hold onto the presidency. Those laws were cooked up based on the Big Lie of rampant voter fraud in the 2020 election. Handing Paxton the green light on who to charge with election crimes presented the opportunity use the office to his or his party’s political advantage.

Texas is already being sued over new voting restrictions its Republican governor and legislature put in place, as well as a gerrymandered voting map.

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Controversial businessman with Dallas ties sees renewed fame as election 'expert'

Bret Jaspers

KERA News

December 16, 2021

<https://www.keranews.org/politics/2021-12-16/controversial-businessman-with-dallas-ties-sees-renewed-fame-as-election-expert>

Longtime Dallas businessman J. Hutton Pulitzer once promoted triple-edged wiper blades and a device called the CueCat that found a spot in the [Museum of Failure](#). More recently, he’s tried to sell something else – allegations of election fraud.

The [New York Times](#) is reporting former President Trump’s final chief of staff Mark Meadows submitted a PowerPoint to the congressional committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection. That PowerPoint, the Times says, “is similar to a 36-page document available online, and it appears to be based on the theories of Jovan Hutton Pulitzer, a Texas entrepreneur and self-described inventor.”

Pulitzer, also known as Jovan Philyaw, attained fame – or perhaps infamy – when he convinced several companies in the late 1990s to invest in the CueCat, a much-derided computer accessory. If you haven’t heard of Pulitzer, here are some important things to know:

- **CueCat.** *Time* magazine [ranked it Number 5](#) on a list of the 50 worst inventions of all time. A 2001 article in the *Wall Street Journal* summed it up: “a hand-held, cat-shaped scanner that attached to a PC. Hold it up to the bar code in an ad or catalog or a can of soup, and your computer whisks you to a web page connected to the product.”

• Radio Shack reportedly invested \$30 million; *The Dallas Morning News* invested even more than that. People didn’t take to it, and the legacy of CueCat is that of a humorous, expensive waste.

- **Georgia’s 2020 election.** In their efforts to support Trump’s effort to overturn the 2020 election, conservative legislators in Georgia called Pulitzer as an expert witness. In December 2020, Pulitzer spoke before the Georgia state Senate, [according to The Verge](#).

But the Georgia Secretary of State’s office [discredited his claim](#) he had hacked into a poll pad, noting Pulitzer provided no evidence. Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a Republican, excoriated the state lawmakers who invited Pulitzer to speak and described him as a “failed treasure hunter.”

“Fake news is hard enough to combat when mainstream media outlets push it out, but when a small cadre of Georgia legislators do it, it’s a whole different story,” Raffensperger said.

- **Maricopa County’s election “audit.”** Maricopa County is home to Phoenix and is the [second-largest voting jurisdiction](#) in the United States. The Arizona state Senate hired a firm with no prior election experience to conduct a much criticized “audit” of the county’s 2020 ballots. The [Arizona Mirror reported](#) auditors used Pulitzer’s technology to examine the ballots, but Pulitzer said he was unable to discuss his past experience reviewing ballots because of a nondisclosure agreement. County officials [said the audit’s final report](#) included falsehoods about elections there.

Trump also [called on Texas to conduct an audit of the 2020 election](#), and Gov. Greg Abbott complied.

Experts say claims about election fraud that are not backed up with facts and evidence [undermine faith in elections and the voting process](#).

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Nevada county where Trump won to replace voting machines

Sam Metz

Associated Press

December 16, 2021

https://www.fox5vegas.com/election_hq/nevada-county-where-trump-won-to-replace-voting-machines/article_610271e7-4b6a-5afa-a97b-55852bffbcbac.html

CARSON CITY, Nev. (AP) — Local officials in rural Nevada decided on Thursday to replace equipment manufactured by Dominion Voting Systems — a sign that unsubstantiated concerns about election machine tampering are still prevalent more than a year after the 2020 election.

In Lander County, population 5,734, commissioners approved \$223,000 in spending for new ES&S voting machines and \$69,000 for maintenance, installation and training. ES&S equipment is federally certified and used throughout the country, including in Carson City.

The equipment will replace Dominion's suite of voting equipment, which was the subject of conspiracy theories in the aftermath of the 2020 election, with Trump campaign attorneys suggesting without evidence that the company's equipment had ties to Venezuela, George Soros and Antifa.

Those claims have been largely debunked. News networks that promulgated them have faced defamation lawsuits. But Lander County residents continued to claim that Dominion's equipment swayed the election results in comments to the commission over the past several months.

The commissioners decided to replace Dominion equipment after outgoing County Clerk Sadie Sullivan, who oversees local elections, told them in October that the company had been a reliable partner. They said their scrutiny of Dominion machines wasn't because they thought Lander's elections was victim to foul play, but because they weren't sure about the machines elsewhere.

Though Trump won nearly 80% of the vote in Lander County, commissioners have considered an Arizona-style voting machine audit and earlier this year floated a proposal to hand-count ballots in future elections.

Sullivan told commissioners that it would be difficult under state law and their contract with Dominion to seize the machines and said hand-counting can lead to inaccuracies and human error.

Commissioners in Elko County are also considering new voting machines. Republicans there also say they're confident in local results, but worry about election tampering in other places where Dominion equipment is used and believe replacing them may rebuild public trust.

Republican Secretary of State Barbara Cegavske has said the results in Nevada — where President Joe Biden won by 33,596 votes — were accurate and reliable.

In Nevada, electronic voting machines are certified by the federal government and required to run on closed systems to prevent hacking and cyberattacks. Touch screen voting machines are required to print a paper audit, which is then scanned and counted by another machine.

Lander County commissioners scuttled their hand-count proposal. Officials also chose Molly Gonzalez, a county employee, to succeed Sullivan, who is among a growing list of local election officials who have announced plans to leave their posts.

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Yes, many noncitizens can now vote in New York City, but only in municipal elections

Mauricio Chamberlin and Kelly Jones

KCEN-TV

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<https://www.kcentv.com/article/news/verify/elections-verify/yes-many-noncitizens-can-now-vote-in-new-york-city-but-only-in-municipal-elections/536-cc003481-0648-48e0-8a7f-a2c769d4f998>

On Dec. 9, the New York City council voted to allow DACA recipients, green card holders and people with work permits to vote in the city's municipal elections. The bill passed 33-14 with two abstentions, according to council records.

After the bill passed, the hashtag #OurCityOurVote trended on Twitter, but not everyone was pleased with the approval. New York Senate GOP leader Rob Ort issued a joint statement with fellow Republican Sen. Andrew Lanza, calling it a "blatant disregard for our Constitution."

After news of the change to New York City voting laws broke, VERIFY audience member Betty emailed: "Is this true? In New York City, the bill — passed 33-14 — will allow almost 900,000 immigrants to vote, including DACA recipients, green card holders, and anyone with a work permit."

THE QUESTION

Can DACA recipients, green card holders and people with work permits now vote in New York City?

THE SOURCES

- [New York City council records](#)
- [Joint statement](#) from New York senators Rob Ort and Andrew Lanza
- [Ralina Cardona](#), League of United Latin American Citizens

THE ANSWER

Yes, it is true that DACA recipients, green card holders and people with work permits can now vote in New York City municipal elections. This law does not allow these groups to vote in statewide or federal elections, and does not apply to undocumented individuals and people who don't live in New York City.

WHAT WE FOUND

According to records from the New York City council, the bill that passed on Dec. 9 "would provide a process for individuals in New York City who are lawful permanent residents or are authorized to work in the United States to vote in municipal elections." Sources estimate this applies to between 800,000 and 900,000 residents of New York City who are DACA recipients, green card holders or people with work permits.

This bill does not apply to statewide or national elections, such as the presidential election.

The joint statement released after the Dec. 9 vote from New York Republican senators Rob Ortt and Andrew Lanza said the move was a "slap in the face to every law-abiding American citizen who values the sacred right to participate in our democracy, and is the latest attempt by New York Democrats to destroy the sanctity of our elections for their own political purposes."

It also said they are confident a legal challenge to the bill will be successful.

Ralina Cardona, Northeast regional vice president for the League of United Latin American Citizens, said she would not be surprised if opponents of the bill try to take it to court, but added that right now is an exciting time in history for New York City voters.

"We know many Latinos, many immigrants are essential workers. They kept this city alive, they kept the city fed, they kept the city safe and healthy. So, for me, it is exciting, because that's what this country began on taxation without representation. And they said, 'Well, wait a minute, we should be able to pick and choose who will be representing us.' And they pay their Social Security taxes. They go to the supermarket, they're paying taxes on their gas, they're paying taxes on their food, they're paying taxes on everything. So once again, it is exciting," she said.

New York City isn't the first major city to allow noncitizens to vote. In 2018, San Francisco became the largest U.S. city at the time to pass a measure allowing noncitizens to vote in local elections, but it also doesn't apply to statewide or federal elections.

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Biden met virtually with U.S. senators to discuss voting rights bill

Reuters

December 16, 2021

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/biden-met-virtually-with-us-senators-discuss-voting-rights-bill-2021-12-16/>

WASHINGTON, Dec 16 (Reuters) - President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris met virtually with lawmakers in the U.S. Senate to discuss the voting rights bill on Thursday, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters.

On Wednesday, Biden said no domestic priority is "more important than voting rights," even as the Senate is scrambling to pass his signature social spending bill, raising the stakes for a last-minute push to pass voting rights bills before the U.S. Congress returns home for Christmas.

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Voting rights advocates hold hunger strike near White House

Ellie Silverman

Washington Post

December 17, 2021

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/12/17/dc-protest-hunger-strike-voting-rights/>

They tried to do this any other way.

For months, they listened to Democrats talk about passing voting rights legislation over Republican objections. They wrote emails, canvassed and called lawmakers, urging them to protect the country's democracy. They saw other liberal protesters marching in the nation's capital all summer, getting arrested to bring attention to their fight.

None of it, they said, seemed to be enough.

So last week in Phoenix, a group of 20 college students and recent graduates stopped eating.

In starving themselves, they hoped politicians at the U.S. Capitol and White House would finally act with the urgency they say this crisis of democracy demands.

"We'd rather suffer through this hunger strike than to suffer the consequences of this bill not being passed," said Brandon Ortega, a third-year student at Arizona State University who has not eaten since the hunger strike began Dec. 6. "We're really committed to hold out as long as we can."

The group planned to stay outside the state Capitol in Phoenix, and focus their pressure on Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.) to support passing the Freedom to Vote Act, a federal voting rights bill. But to their surprise, Sinema spoke with them on Day Four. They left that meeting thinking their message needed to be elevated.

On Day Five — Friday — they flew to Washington, where new hunger strikers who heard about their protest joined them outside the White House. The group is demanding that Democrats pass federal voting rights legislation before next year, amid concern over the 2022 midterm elections.

But by Day Nine — Tuesday — their bodies seemed to be shutting down.

Too weak to walk long distances, they used wheelchairs to get to their protest spot at Lafayette Square. One hunger striker said it felt like knives were poking at her stomach. Another said she had lost more than 10 pounds. Others had to stop fasting on the advice of a doctor who checks their vital signs twice a day.

But those who were able to continue kept showing up, encouraging each other to drink water, rest and finish college assignments.

"I think my body's just kind of like giving up on me a little bit," said Emma Shockley, an 18-year-old freshman at the University of Pennsylvania. "It's kind of sad that we have to do what we're doing, but ... we're willing to do whatever it takes."

The students are part of un-PAC, which describes itself as a nonpartisan advocacy group launched in March that employs student organizers and whose first campaign has been to pressure legislators to pass federal democracy reform legislation.

As they struggled through Day Nine, the activists received a boost from some Texas state legislators they admire: Reps. Trey Martinez Fischer (D-San Antonio), Gina Hinojosa (D-Austin) and Jasmine Crockett (D-Dallas), who is running for Congress.

"Don't think people are not paying attention because they are. Don't think for a minute that you're not making an impact because you are," Martinez Fischer told the demonstrators.

He was among the Texas Democrats who broke quorum in May to block the passage of a restrictive voting bill. That group flew to Washington to turn up pressure on President Biden and Congress to pass federal voting rights protections to override the restrictions that Republicans in Texas and other states were trying to pass.

“When the history book is written on Freedom to Vote, and on the John Lewis Advancement Act, President Biden is signing those proposals into law, we’re all going to have a chapter in that story,” he said, “and yours is happening right now.”

Kyla Frank, 23, nodded as she listened, her hands clasped atop a pink journal detailing the hunger strike. As she flipped through the pages, she pointed out notes of solidarity from speakers who encouraged the group throughout the hunger strike.

Frank has participated in the hunger strike since Day One and has been drinking about 5 liters of regular water and three bottles of electrolyte-enhanced water per day. By Day Three, she felt like she was “hit by a train.” She has lost 13 pounds.

She said she is motivated to stand up for voting rights after watching her mother work so hard to care for her and her siblings.

“A lot of the struggles that she faced are a direct result of corruption in our politics that prevents our government from protecting people who are most vulnerable,” said Frank, a graduate of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in the District and Virginia State University.

In the last presidential election, she voted for Biden, hoping that he would fix a system she viewed as broken.

“He promised a lot of things,” Frank said. “If any of those promises are going to be seen this year, next year, we need to prioritize voting rights so people can have a pathway to getting those issues across the finish line.”

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Fox’s worst week? Dominion ruling adds to drumbeat of bad news for the network

Brian Stelter

CNN Business

December 16, 2021

<https://kvia.com/news/2021/12/16/dominion-voting-wins-key-decision-in-lawsuit-against-fox-news-2/>

On Sunday the Fox News Channel’s news facade was chipped away when Chris Wallace decamped to CNN. On Monday the hypocrisy of Fox’s biggest stars was highlighted by a bipartisan House committee. On Tuesday the network belatedly and weakly defended itself. And the week wasn’t even half over yet.

On Wednesday Fox’s social media team was forced to delete an antisemitic cartoon after advocacy groups shamed the network. And today, Thursday, Fox was set back in court in a big way. As Katelyn Polantz reports here, “a judge in Delaware has found that Fox News’ coverage of election fraud after the 2020 election may have been inaccurate, and is allowing a major defamation case against the right-wing TV network to move forward.”

“The ruling will now allow Dominion to attempt to unearth extensive communications within Fox News as they gather evidence for the case, and the company may be able to interview the network’s top names under oath,” Polantz explains.

For that reason, some media writers are speculating that the network will now try to settle, lest it be subjected to the embarrassment of the discovery process. “Fox loses the key motion; cases often settle at this point,” Ben Smith tweeted, “and a settlement here would likely be a big number. It’s a very strong case.”

On the other hand, Dominion wants to have its name cleared, and a confidential settlement might not seem sufficient.

“At this stage, the court must assume Dominion’s claims about Fox News are true,” Polantz writes. Still, the judge’s 52-page opinion noted that Fox “may have slanted its coverage to push election fraud, knowing the accusations were wrong.”

“Sold their souls”

“Wrong” has been a throughline in the outside coverage about Fox this week. As the network’s ranks of reporters shrank and conspiratorial ranters grew, Wallace decided not to re-up his contract. Fox’s court jester ridiculed him on the way out.

“There’s a good chance Wallace had enough of being on the wrong end of conservative wrath,” the former Fox analyst Bernard Goldberg wrote for The Hill on Thursday.

Goldberg, who was a regular on Bill O’Reilly’s show back in the day, quoted an email from a “wise, conservative friend” of his. The launch of Fox was “great for journalism and great for the country,” this person said, but then Fox “sold their souls to ... Trump and they’re too damn stupid to realize the damage they’ve done to the conservative cause they claim to espouse.”

That damage includes the Big Lie, hyped by some of Fox’s biggest stars, and now the subject of Dominion’s lawsuit...

A counterpoint about Fox’s loyal audience

The Dominion lawsuit is a legitimate and potentially very costly problem for Fox. But all the rest of the noise surrounding the network may be negligible. Fox viewers aren’t hearing analysis of Wallace’s exit or why it’s such a blow to the Fox brand. They aren’t hearing criticism of Sean Hannity and Laura Ingraham’s urgent texts to Mark Meadows on 1/6. They are hearing that Liz Cheney and her Democrat friends are illegitimate. They are hearing that “cancel culture” forces are trying to hurt Fox. Think about it, what will Fox viewers remember about mid-December 2021? That a criminal tried to burn down Fox’s artificial Christmas tree. And that Fox proudly lit up a new tree the very next day.

Fox’s ratings tell the story: The biggest shows on Wednesday were “Tucker Carlson Tonight,” with 3.46 million viewers, and “The Five,” with 3.26 million. Both shows have more than ten times as many viewers as Newsmax at the same hour. If I know anything about Fox insiders, based on my reporting work for “Hoax,” they would say they are not having a bad week at all, they are having a very successful week...

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Opening of Texas-Mexico border boosts holiday retail in San Antonio

Brian Kilpatrick

Texas Public Radio

December 16, 2021

<https://www.tpr.org/business/2021-12-16/opening-of-texas-mexico-border-boosts-holiday-retail-in-san-antonio>

Many San Antonians are flush with savings from spending all that time at home and/or receiving some federal COVID relief dollars. But Crawford said more than that, many are fully vaccinated and boosted and ready to get out of the house for their first real holiday shopping excursion since the pandemic began.

She said it’s not just locals turning out; there are plenty of out-of-town shoppers flocking back to one of the city’s best-known malls.

"The border is open from Mexico and so we are seeing those Mexican National tourists coming in and shopping," Crawford said. "And then also we are seeing the local U.S. tourists that are people getting out and

doing a little a bit of traveling as well. People always like to purchase something special when their on vacation."

Crawford said this year, malls are a more appealing option for many shoppers due to a couple of problems associated with online shopping.

"Customers are able to come in and pick up their purchase and leave with it, there are absolutely no shipping delays because their able to take it with them," she said.

Crawford said the mall's merchants, more than 200 according to North Star's website, have not reported any major supply chain issues.

She said the mall's sister shopping center, The Shops at La Cantera near Loop 1604 and La Cantera Parkway on the far Northwest Side, is also reporting brisk business.

Both are managed by Brookfield Properties.

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EXCLUSIVE-Royal Dutch Shell confirms new delay in sale of Texas refinery to Mexico's Pemex

Stefanie Esenbacher and Erwin Seba

Reuters

December 16, 2021

<https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/exclusive-royal-dutch-shell-confirms-new-delay-in-sale-of-texas-refinery-to-mexicos-pemex>

MEXICO CITY/HOUSTON, Dec 16 (Reuters) - Royal Dutch Shell RDSa.Lon Thursday confirmed a Reuters report that the sale of its controlling interest in a Texas refinery to Mexican state oil company Petroleos Mexicanos has been delayed until next year.

A review of the deal by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, an national security group chaired by the U.S. Treasury, had been expected to wrap up this month but has been extended into next year, Shell spokesperson Curtis Smith said.

Shell in May disclosed an agreement to sell its 50% interest in the 302,800-barrel-per-day (bpd) Deer Park, Texas, refinery outside Houston to partner Pemex for about \$596 million. The closing was expected this month, officials have said.

"We were hopeful we could conclude the sale before the end of the month, however, it now looks like the full amount of time will be needed," Smith said. "We will continue to cooperate with CFIUS as they review the transaction."

Pemex was not immediately available to comment.

The delay signals CFIUS has moved past its initial 45-day review and into a second, investigative period. The committee is charged with reviewing sales of critical U.S. infrastructure to foreign buyers for national security implications.

The second phase does not signal a potential rejection by the security group. Questions raised during the initial review can be resolved with a letter of agreement or a mitigation agreement, according to a former CFIUS official not involved in the Pemex review.

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Texas has built 6 miles of wire border fencing along Rio Grande under Operation Lone Star

Sandra Sanchez

Border Report

December 16, 2021

<https://www.borderreport.com/politics/texas-has-built-6-miles-of-wire-border-fencing-along-rio-grande-under-operation-lone-star/>

WESLACO, Texas (Border Report) — Since Texas Gov. Greg Abbott in June announced the state would “step up” and erect its own border barrier along the Rio Grande, only 6 miles of wire fencing so far has been completed, some of it just temporary razor fence coils laid on the ground, officials with the Texas Military Department said Thursday.

Lt. Col. Dan Garrison of the Texas Military Department, who is an engineer in charge of the fence-building that is part of Operation Lone Star, said they have secured commitments from private landholders to allow fencing to be built on a total of 62.75 miles in five counties along the Texas-Mexico border. The counties include Val Verde, Maverick, Starr, Zapata and Webb.

Currently, the Texas Military Department is building on six private properties along the border, Garrison told media during a news conference Thursday at the Texas Department of Public Safety regional office in Weslaco, Texas.

He said the barrier is being put up for the safety of migrants, as well as landowners.

“There’s a big safety aspect in building this barrier. The intent is to stop that crossing in places where people could potentially get hurt,” Garrison said.

Civil rights groups allege Operation Lone Star violates Title VI and unfairly targets Black and brown migrants. On Wednesday, 10 organizations filed a complaint with the Department of Justice requesting an investigation and asking that federal funding associated with the operation be revoked.

Two miles of the fencing has been put up in the past two weeks in rural Starr County east of Rio Grande City.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott plans to visit the site in Rio Grande City on Saturday morning along with Texas General Land Office Commissioner George P. Bush; DPS Director Steve McCraw; Texas Military Department Adjutant Gen. Tracy Norris; and a few state lawmakers, the governor’s office announced Thursday.

The Texas General Land Office gave the Department of Public Safety access to 3,100 acres of farmland to put up temporary border fencing.

But Garrison told Border Report that the wire fencing placed in Starr County is concertina wire, and the coils stand no taller than 4-feet off the ground. It is a temporary barricade that can be moved easily “in case of a caravan.”

He said the razor wire deters and entangles and stops migrants from crossing the Rio Grande and into the United States.

“If there is a need to stop movement quickly, we can surge to any area and literally place (down) miles within hours,” he said.

Abbott has repeatedly supported the operation and criticized the Biden administration for not doing enough to secure the border, in his opinion.

“President Biden’s reckless open border policies have created a humanitarian crisis that is enriching the cartels, smugglers, and human traffickers,” Abbott said in March.

Since Operation Lone Star began on March 4, there have been over 9,000 criminal arrests, and 2,347 criminal trespass arrests and over 167,000 migrant apprehensions, DPS Lt. Chris Olivarez said Thursday.

The operation has involved the placement of giant shipping containers alongside the riverbank near Eagle Pass, as well as a current boat blockade of the Rio Grande near La Joya, Texas, in Hidalgo County. Troopers work alongside National Guard troops and other agencies, and Olivarez said the border barrier is a very visual and effective way of deterring migrants from illegally crossing.

National Guard troops also have arrived in Texas from several other states to support the operation.

Currently, the Texas Military Department is negotiating to build temporary wire fencing on nearly 200 additional riverfront miles, Garrison said. Negotiations with half of those miles are with landowners in Zapata County and Webb County, which is home to Laredo.

None of those negotiations currently include land in Starr County, where Abbott plans to visit on Saturday.

The bulk of the fencing — 4.4 miles — has been built in Val Verde County, where a surge of 15,000 mostly Haitian migrants closed down the Del Rio international bridge in September as they crossed from Acuña, Mexico.

Garrison said construction is slow going, bogged down by areas of bedrock and extremely soft soil. They build at a rate of only a half-mile per day.

He says they are only signing agreements that they know they can complete within six months.

“So the faster we’re able to build, the more agreements we’re able to put on the books and the farther we can go,” Garrison said. “We’re trying to build as fast as we possibly can right now.”

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From: [Scott Marvel](#)
To: [John Scott](#); [Anu Jain](#); [Paul Falkenberg](#); [Secretary](#)
Subject: Texas Election Integrity working session

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Correcting John's email.

+ Paul

I don't think we will need an hour, but just in case we want to get deeper on some topics.

*****^**^^

Scott Marvel is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

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11:32

5G



John >

iMessage

Thu, Dec 23, 10:00 AM

Correction: we do use thermal paper. Did not think we did.

From Bryan: The good news is we have plenty for all of next year, for our full customer base. But if he wants to buy a load we will take care of him.

What is the next step?

Thank you!!!

Let me visit with my team. What kind of excess capacity to supply additional mail in ballot kits do they have?

Forgot to check that. Let me find out.



iMessage

