



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 21, 2022

Mr. Adam Bitter
General Counsel
Office of the Texas Secretary of State
P.O. Box 12887
Austin, Texas 78711-2887

OR2022-32589

Dear Mr. Bitter:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 979685 (SOS PIR No. 22-0722).

The Office of the Texas Secretary of State (the "secretary's office") received a request for four categories of communications between named individuals, certain entities, or containing particular search terms from specified time periods.¹ We understand the secretary's office will withhold access device numbers pursuant to section 552.136 of the Government Code.² You claim some of the submitted information is not subject to the Act. You also claim some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, 552.107, 552.111, 552.116, and 552.137 of the Government Code. Additionally, the secretary's office states, and provides documentation showing, it has notified the Office of the Attorney General (the "OAG") of its right to submit comments to this office as to why some of the submitted information should not be released. *See*

¹ You state the secretary's office sent the requestor estimates of charges pursuant to section 552.2615 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 552.2615. The estimate of charges required the requestor to provide a deposit for payment of anticipated costs under section 552.263 of the Government Code. *See id.* § 552.263(a). You inform us the secretary's office received the required deposit on August 2, 2022. *See id.* § 552.263(e) (if governmental body requires deposit or bond for anticipated costs pursuant to section 552.263, request for information is considered to have been received on date governmental body receives bond or deposit).

² Section 552.136(c) of the Government Code allows a governmental body to redact the information described in section 552.136(b) without the necessity of seeking a decision from the attorney general. *See* Gov't Code § 552.136(c). If a governmental body redacts such information, it must notify the requestor in accordance with section 552.136(e). *See id.* § 552.136(d), (e).

Gov't Code § 552.304 (interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released). We have received comments from the OAG. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.³

Initially, the secretary's office asserts some of the submitted information is not subject to the Act. Section 552.002(a) of the Government Code defines "public information" as information that is written, produced, collected, assembled, or maintained under a law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business:

- (1) by a governmental body;
- (2) for a governmental body and the governmental body:
 - (A) owns the information;
 - (B) has a right of access to the information; or
 - (C) spends or contributes public money for the purpose of writing, producing, collecting, assembling, or maintaining the information; or
- (3) by an individual officer or employee of a governmental body in the officer's or employee's official capacity and the information pertains to official business of the governmental body.

Id. § 552.002(a). In Open Records Decision No. 581 (1990), this office determined certain computer information, such as source codes, documentation information, and other computer programming, that has no significance other than its use as a tool for the maintenance, manipulation, or protection of public property is not the kind of information made public under section 552.021 of the Government Code. The secretary's office indicates the file names, links, usernames, passwords, IP addresses, and port numbers have no significance other than their use as tools for the maintenance, manipulation, or protection of public information. Based on these representations and our review, we find this information does not constitute public information under section 552.002 of the Government Code. Therefore, we conclude the information the secretary's office marked is not subject to the Act and need not be released to the requestor.⁴

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." *Id.*

³ We assume that the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

⁴ As we are able to make this determination, we need not address the remaining arguments against disclosure of this information.

§ 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses section 31.006 of the Election Code. Section 31.006 of the Election Code provides the following:

(a) If, after receiving or discovering information indicating that criminal conduct in connection with an election has occurred, the [secretary's office] determines that there is reasonable cause to suspect that criminal conduct occurred, the secretary shall promptly refer the information to the [OAG]. The secretary shall deliver to the [OAG] all pertinent documents and information in the secretary's possession.

(b) The documents and information submitted under Subsection (a) are not considered public information until:

(1) the [secretary's office] makes a determination that the information received does not warrant an investigation; or

(2) if referred to the [OAG], the [OAG] has completed the investigation or has made a determination that the information referred does not warrant an investigation.

Elec. Code § 31.006. You state the information you marked consists of information pertaining to allegations of criminal conduct in connection with an election that was referred to the OAG. You also state the secretary's office has no indication the OAG has completed the investigation or has made a determination that the information referred does not warrant an investigation. Based on your representations and our review, we agree the information at issue is not considered public information under section 31.006(b). Accordingly, the secretary's office must withhold the information you marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 31.006(b) of the Election Code.⁵

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information coming within the attorney-client privilege. When asserting the attorney-client privilege, a governmental body has the burden of providing the necessary facts to demonstrate the elements of the privilege in order to withhold the information at issue. *See* Open Records Decision No. 676 at 6-7 (2002). First, a governmental body must demonstrate the information constitutes or documents a communication. *Id.* at 7. Second, the communication must have been made "to facilitate the rendition of professional legal services" to the client governmental body. TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). The privilege does not apply when an attorney or representative is involved in some capacity other than that of providing or facilitating professional legal services to the client governmental body. *In re Tex. Farmers Ins. Exch.*, 990 S.W.2d 337, 340 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 1999, orig. proceeding) (attorney-client privilege does not apply if attorney acting in capacity other than that of attorney). Governmental attorneys often act in capacities other than that of professional legal counsel, such as administrators, investigators, or managers. Thus, the mere fact that a communication involves an attorney

⁵As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address the OAG's remaining arguments against disclosure of this information.

for the government does not demonstrate this element. Third, the privilege applies only to communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, and lawyer representatives. TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). Thus, a governmental body must inform this office of the identities and capacities of the individuals to whom each communication at issue has been made. Lastly, the attorney-client privilege applies only to a confidential communication, *id.*, meaning it was “not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those: (A) to whom disclosure is made to further the rendition of professional legal services to the client; or (B) reasonably necessary to transmit the communication.” *Id.* 503(a)(5). Whether a communication meets this definition depends on the *intent* of the parties involved at the time the information was communicated. *See Osborne v. Johnson*, 954 S.W.2d 180, 184 (Tex. App.—Waco 1997, orig. proceeding). Moreover, because the client may elect to waive the privilege at any time, a governmental body must explain the confidentiality of a communication has been maintained. Section 552.107(1) generally excepts an entire communication that is demonstrated to be protected by the attorney-client privilege unless otherwise waived by the governmental body. *See Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein).

The secretary’s office states the information it marked consists of communications between attorneys and employees of the secretary’s office that were made for the purpose of providing legal services to the secretary’s office. The secretary’s office also states the communications were intended to be, and have remained, confidential. Based on these representations and our review, we find the information at issue consists of privileged attorney-client communications. Therefore, the secretary’s office may withhold the information it marked under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.⁶

Section 552.111 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “[a]n interagency or intraagency memorandum or letter that would not be available by law to a party in litigation with the agency[.]” Gov’t Code § 552.111. This exception encompasses the deliberative process privilege. *See Open Records Decision No. 615 at 2* (1993). The purpose of section 552.111 is to protect advice, opinion, and recommendation in the decisional process and to encourage open and frank discussion in the deliberative process. *See Austin v. City of San Antonio*, 630 S.W.2d 391, 394 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 1982, writ ref’d n.r.e.); *Open Records Decision No. 538 at 1-2* (1990).

In *Open Records Decision No. 615*, this office re-examined the statutory predecessor to section 552.111 in light of the decision in *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ). We determined section 552.111 excepts from disclosure only those internal communications that consist of advice, recommendations, opinions, and other material reflecting the policymaking processes of the governmental body. *See ORD 615 at 5*. A governmental body’s policymaking functions do not encompass routine internal administrative or personnel matters, and disclosure of information about such matters will not inhibit free discussion of policy issues among agency personnel. *Id.*; *see also City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351 (Tex. 2000) (section 552.111 not applicable to personnel-related

⁶ As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address the remaining arguments against disclosure of this information.

communications that did not involve policymaking). A governmental body's policymaking functions do include administrative and personnel matters of broad scope that affect the governmental body's policy mission. *See* Open Records Decision No. 631 at 3 (1995).

Further, section 552.111 does not protect facts and written observations of facts and events severable from advice, opinions, and recommendations. *Arlington Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Tex. Attorney Gen.*, 37 S.W.3d 152 (Tex. App.—Austin 2001, no pet.); *see* ORD 615 at 5. But if factual information is so inextricably intertwined with material involving advice, opinion, or recommendation as to make severance of the factual data impractical, the factual information also may be withheld under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 313 at 3 (1982).

The secretary's office states the remaining information it marked consists of advice, opinions, and recommendations of employees of the secretary's office regarding policymaking matters. Upon review, we find the secretary's office may withhold the remaining information it marked under section 552.111 of the Government Code.

The secretary's office states it will redact some information subject to section 552.137 of the Government Code. Section 552.137 excepts from disclosure "an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body, "unless the member of the public consents to its release or the e-mail address is of a type specifically excluded by subsection (c). Gov't Code § 552.137(a)-(c). Section 552.137 does not apply to an institutional e-mail address, the general e-mail address of a business, an e-mail address of a person who has a contractual relationship with a governmental body, an e-mail address of a vendor who seeks to contract with a governmental body, an e-mail address maintained by a governmental entity for one of its officials or employees, or an e-mail address provided to a governmental body on a letterhead. *See id.* § 552.137(c). With the exception of the e-mail address we have marked for release, the secretary's office must withhold the remaining personal e-mail address you marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code, unless the owner affirmatively consents to its public disclosure. However, we find the information we have marked for release consists of an e-mail address that is specifically excluded by section 552.137(c). *See id.* Thus, the secretary's office may not withhold the information we have marked for release under section 552.137 of the Government Code.

In summary, the information the secretary's office marked is not subject to the Act and need not be released to the requestor. The secretary's office must withhold the information it marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 31.006(b) of the Election Code. The secretary's office may withhold the remaining information it marked under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. The secretary's office may withhold the remaining information it marked under section 552.111 of the Government Code. With the exception of the e-mail address we have marked for release, the secretary's office must withhold the personal e-mail address you marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code, unless the owner affirmatively consents to its public disclosure. The secretary's office must release the remaining information.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/members-public/what-expect-after-ruling-issued> or call the OAG's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Public Information Act may be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the OAG, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

Erin Groff
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

EMG/pt

Ref: ID# 979685

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

From: CITGO Petroleum Corporation <CITGOCorp@em.citgo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 31, 2022 11:01 AM
To: Secretary
Subject: CITGO Fuel for Thought - May 2022

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

[Click here](#) to view this email as a webpage.



As part of our commitment to accountable business practices and transparent performance, we provide this regular update to our stakeholders in the communities in which we operate. We are grateful for your engagement and encourage your insights and feedback.

May Highlights...

CITGO Profit, EBITDA, Outstanding in First Quarter Results

Powered by reliable operations and favorable market conditions, CITGO Petroleum Corporation reported strong net income of \$245 million for the first quarter of 2022, compared to net income of \$21 million for the fourth quarter of 2021 and a loss of \$(180) million for the first quarter of 2021.

CITGO generated EBITDA of \$518 million for the first quarter of 2022, compared to EBITDA of \$236 million and Adjusted EBITDA of \$139 million for the fourth quarter of 2021. Q1 2022 also saw successful major fluid catalytic cracker and alkylation plant turnarounds at the Corpus Christi refinery, with both units back in operation.

Additional Q1 2022 highlights:

- Crude throughput in the first quarter of 2022 was 731,000 barrels-per-day (bpd), resulting in overall crude utilization of 95%.
- • Health, Safety and Environmental (HSE) performance was excellent, and the Company is on pace for record-setting occupational safety and environmental performance for 2022.
- • CITGO expanded its customer base in Latin America, and export/domestic marine sales increased 61% over first quarter 2021 to 214,000 bpd. The Company's Lubricants and Light Oils business units also contributed favorably to the first quarter results.

Stephen McNabb Appointed CITGO Treasurer

Effective May 11, CITGO named Stephen McNabb the Company's new Treasurer, where he will oversee liquidity management and the company's capital structure, manage financial risk and insurance, steward bank relationships and investor relations, and assist the CFO in developing financial strategies.

McNabb previously served as Assistant Treasurer and has been with CITGO since 2016 in various financial roles of increasing responsibility. McNabb replaces Gina Coon, who retired last year.

Stephen has almost 20 years of experience in areas related to finance, accounting, planning and analysis, and consulting, primarily within the energy industry. Before joining CITGO, he served in leadership roles within the finance field while at Bridgepoint Consulting, Magnum Forge, and Protiviti. Steve holds a

Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Trinity University. In his new role, he will report directly to Chief Financial Officer and Vice President of Finance, John Zuklic.

CITGO Awards Community Resilience Grants

CITGO Petroleum Corporation recently awarded several grants to promote community resilience in its operating areas.

As part of the overall disaster resilience and relief strategy for CITGO, several of our community grants coincide with the upcoming hurricane season. In Lake Charles, La., CITGO is donating \$25,000 to the United Way to help create a pre-screening system to facilitate assistance more quickly for those in need affected by storms. In Corpus Christi, Texas, CITGO is donating \$25,000 to the United Way's resilience quick release funds, which assist partner organizations prior to and immediately after storms.

To further support resiliency in other regions of our operations, CITGO will donate \$25,000 to **Will County Habitat for Humanity in Joliet, Ill.** to assist vulnerable families in Lockport, IL with housing needs.

In the Houston area, CITGO awarded \$25,000 to Operation Impact. Funds will support the distribution of a week's worth of shelf-stable meals to seniors through Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston's Meals on Wheels program in the greater Houston area.

CITGO will also donate \$50,000 to the Gulf of Mexico Alliance to support its green design project. As a way to increase the environmental resilience of the Gulf Coast and reduce water pollution, these green design practices can reduce flooding, improve water quality and increase storm protection, while also providing increased wildlife habitat.

MANAGEMENT SPOTLIGHT: **Karl Schmidt, Vice President of Supply & Marketing**

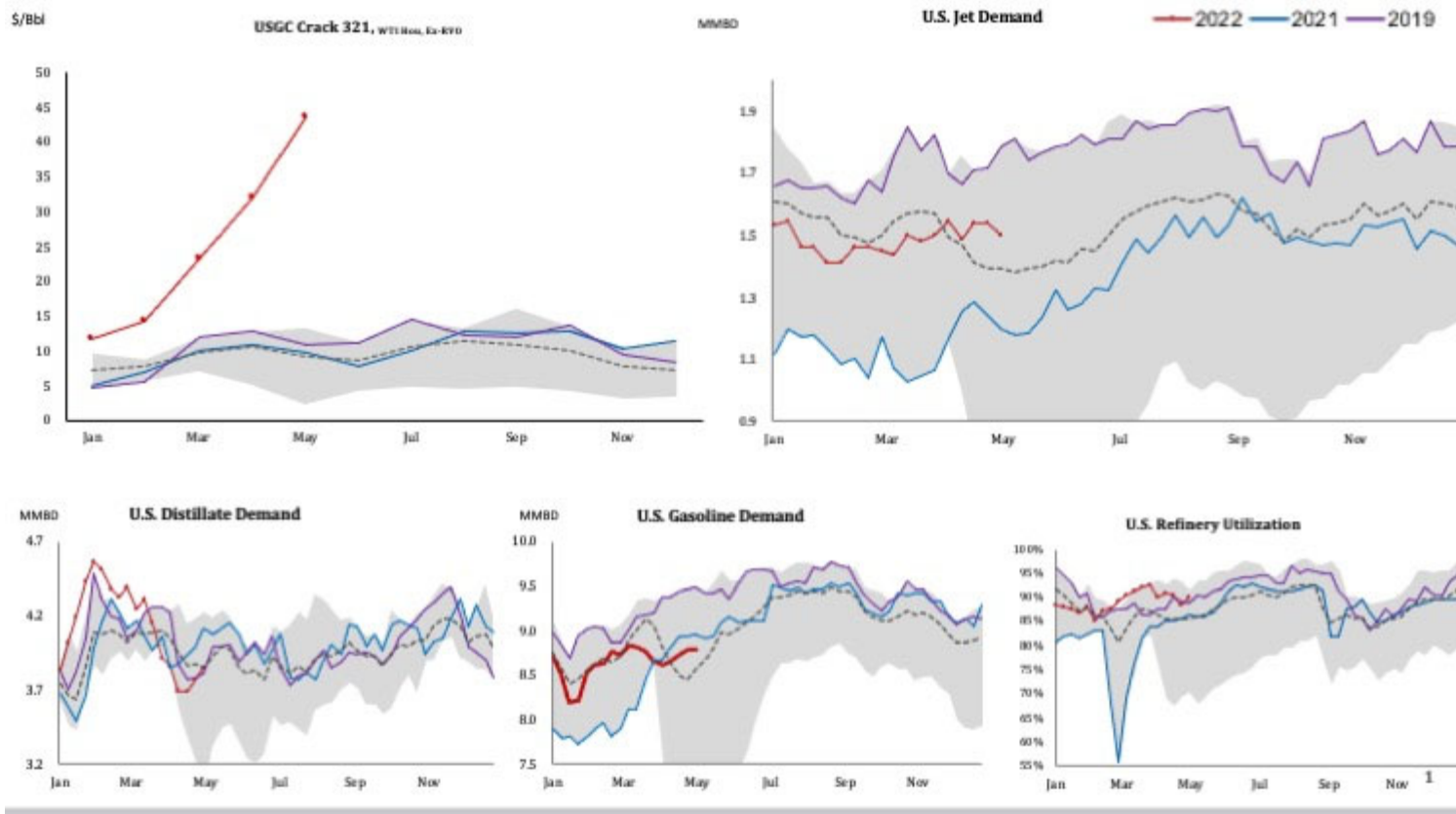


Karl joined CITGO in 1995 and has more than 30 years' experience in the petrochemical and refining industries.

Karl was named Vice President of Supply & Marketing in February 2019 and is currently overseeing the company's effort to transition to an asset-backed trading organization and achieving commercial excellence. Karl holds a Bachelor of Science degree in chemical engineering from the University of Texas and a master's degree in business administration finance from the University of Houston's Bauer School of Business.

Karl and his wife Pattie – also a chemical engineer – have been married for 26 years and have three children. Pattie works with non-profit groups like “Kids Meals” which focuses on delivering meals to under-privileged children in the greater Houston area. The family enjoys exploring the mountains in their Jeep and cooking at home. Recently, they are experimenting with sourdough breads and Napolitano-style pizza in their new pizza oven.

KEY REFINING INDUSTRY INDICES



Crude oil prices retreated from their March highs but remained elevated in April.

Demand began to recover, after falling in response to high March prices. Warmer spring weather resulted in modest improvement of gasoline and distillate consumption.

Product margins continued to strengthen, building on already historic highs. Margins were supported by refinery turnarounds that limited refinery utilization.

MORE AT CITGO.COM

Aprenda más sobre CITGO y el futuro de Venezuela en citgove.com



This email was sent by:

CITGO Petroleum Corporation

1293 Eldridge Parkway

Houston, TX 77077

USA

[Update Profile](#) | [Unsubscribe](#)

If you no longer wish to receive our marketing emails, [unsubscribe here](#). If you choose to unsubscribe, we will process your request as quickly as we can, though it is possible that you will receive an email that has already been scheduled. We apologize in advance for any inconvenience. If you have any difficulties with the unsubscribe option or email preferences, please contact us at info@citgo.com.

©2022 CITGO Petroleum Corporation. All rights reserved. The CITGO name, logo and all related marks are registered trademarks of CITGO Petroleum Corporation.

From: COVID Solutions Bulletin [REDACTED] >
Sent: Friday, April 8, 2022 10:53 AM
To: Secretary
Subject: COVID Solutions Bulletin 16

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.



COVID Solutions Bulletin

Clearing the Air to Re-Open America

April 8, 2022

Issue No. 16

In this issue:

- Disinfection devices gain equal status with ventilation and filtration as the Biden Administration pivots to give more importance to clean and safe interior air.
- The White House is making a change in its approach that's been "long in coming."
- Without disinfection devices, ventilation and filtration alone have serious drawbacks when it comes to energy consumption and effectiveness.
- Boosting an HVAC system or adding strong filtration means heightening energy use and greenhouse gases.
- Dr. Nelson opens the door for disinfection technologies to clean interior air of pathogens.
- High-level Rockefeller report urges cleaner, safer air in schools and workplaces to reduce health care costs and absenteeism and "improve productivity, academic performance and cognitive function."
- American cases, hospitalizations, and deaths decline, but a new subvariant boosted infections in Europe, and there are signs that another surge may come to the U.S.
- Can government protect those especially vulnerable to COVID in the workplace, or do we have to depend on the private sector?

White House Gives ‘Disinfection’ Equal Billing as a Way to Clear Indoor Air of SARS-CoV-2

“Let’s Clear the Air on COVID” was the title of a March 23 blog by Alondra Nelson, the head of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and formerly a chair of the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton.

The pun was common, but the blog itself was unusual. It is part of what the [Washington Post](#) on March 29 called a “pivot” by the Administration, which will follow up the blog and a [Fact Sheet](#) with a [virtual summit on “evidence for action”](#) on the afternoon of April 7. Post reporter Dan Diamond wrote that the White House action is “a move scientists say is long overdue and will help stave off future outbreaks.”

Not only did the Nelson blog emphasize the importance of clean and safe air in the fight against the SARS-CoV-2 virus, it gave “air disinfection” equal billing with ventilation and filtration as part of a “set of simple but powerful actions we can use to **bring clean air into the rooms we’re in and clean the air already in the room.**” (The boldface is Dr. Nelson’s.)

The science chief is quick to note that the “Biden Administration identified improved indoor air quality as an important tool to fight the spread of airborne diseases in the [American Pandemic Preparedness Plan](#) last September – and the [National COVID-19 Preparedness Plan](#) prioritized it again earlier this month.”

In fact, a thorough reading of the September plan finds improved air quality cited exactly once, in a section on personal protective equipment, and nowhere are specifics, even about ventilation, discussed. The plan emphasizes vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics and early-warning systems. Air quality doesn’t even merit a mention in the summary of 12 goals.

Nor can the March plan can hardly be said to “prioritize” cleansing indoor air. It does, however, pledge that the Administration will work with Congress to “secure the necessary funding to give schools and businesses guidance, tests, and supplies to stay open, including tools to improve ventilation and air filtration.”

The truth is that government has been slow to recognize the value of clean and safe indoor air in stopping the spread of COVID. And even with earlier recognition, policy makers stressed ventilation and filtration, which certainly have their place but which alone are rarely a solution.

That has now changed, as evidenced by the latest White House activity. Schools and businesses will have to take notice – and act.

A Change That’s Been Too Long in Coming

The Administration even says it will “foster ways to recognize steps taken by buildings to improve indoor air quality and protect their communities,” adding:

Similar to how programs like LEED, Fitwel, and WELL recognize buildings for their environmental and health impacts, this new effort between the federal government and external experts will develop ways to recognize steps taken by building owners for the health and safety of their communities and their achievements in improving air filtration and ventilation systems to protect and promote public health.

In other words, buildings with safe air will get a government seal of approval for clean and safe air. We will see how that process develops, but what's clear is that policy makers are beginning to understand that unsafe indoor air is at least as dangerous as unsafe water.

The change has been long in coming. In the early days of the pandemic, public health institutions, including at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO), resisted the notion that COVID could be spread in tiny aerosols that can remain suspended in the air for minutes or even hours. Instead, as we noted in [Issue No. 5 of this newsletter](#), CDC and WHO guidance stated that the SARS-CoV-2 virus was contained in droplets, which would fall harmlessly to the ground of their own weight within a few feet. More worrisome was supposed to be spread from surfaces or hand-to-hand.

But in July 2020, [an article](#) by Lidia Morawska of the Queensland University of Technology in Australia and Donald Milton of the University of Maryland School of Public Health, titled, "It's Time to Address Airborne Transmission of Coronavirus 2019," drew the support of 237 scientists in an open letter. The authors wrote:

There is significant potential for inhalation exposure to viruses in microscopic respiratory drop- lets (microdroplets) at short to medium distances (up to several meters, or room scale), and we are advocating for the use of preventive measures to mitigate this route of airborne transmission.

In November of that year, Kimberly Prather of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography, an expert on aerosols, and several colleagues wrote a [letter to Science magazine](#), explaining that aerosols were the problem:

Individuals with COVID-19, many of whom have no symptoms, release thousands of virus-laden aerosols and far fewer droplets when breathing and talking. Thus, one is far more likely to inhale aerosols than be sprayed by a droplet, and so the balance of attention must be shifted to protecting against airborne transmission.

Then, a little over a year ago, a group of 13 U.S. public health experts, including such members of President Biden's own [COVID task force](#) as Rick Bright, the former director of the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, and Michael Osterholm, a highly regarded epidemiologist at the University of Minnesota, called for "immediate action to strengthen measures to limit inhalation exposure to SARS-CoV-2."

They wrote in [a letter Feb. 16 to Rochelle Walensky](#), director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Administration COVID Coordinator Jeff Zients; and Anthony Fauci, director of NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases:

For many months it has been clear that transmission through inhalation of small aerosol particles is an important and significant mode of SARS-CoV-2 virus transmission... Numerous studies have demonstrated that aerosols produced through breathing, talking, and singing are concentrated close to the infected person, can remain in air and viable for long periods of time and travel long distances within a room and sometimes farther.

[Linsey Marr](#), an expert on aerosols at Virginia Tech who also signed the Science letter, was quoted as saying:

It's time to stop pussyfooting around the fact that the virus is transmitted mostly through the air. If we properly acknowledge this, and get the right recommendations and guidance into place, this is our chance to end the pandemic in the next six months. If we don't do this, it could very well drag on.

The CDC and WHO finally changed their guidance at the end of April 2021, precipitating a [long opinion piece](#) on May 7 in the New York Times Zeynep Tufekci of the University of North Carolina with the headline, "Why Did It Take So Long to Accept the Facts About COVID?"

She said the updates were momentous, even though the two organizations seemed to try to bury them ("no news conference, no big announcement") because of embarrassment: "These latest shifts challenge key infection control assumptions,...putting a lot of what went wrong last year in context. They may also signal one of the most important advancements in public health during this pandemic."

Better late than never, she added:

If the importance of aerosol transmission had been accepted early, we would have been told from the beginning that it was much safer outdoors, where these small particles disperse more easily, as long as you avoid close, prolonged contact with others. We would have tried to make sure indoor spaces were well ventilated, with air filtered as necessary.

Instead of blanket rules on gatherings, we would have targeted conditions that can produce superspreading events: people in poorly ventilated indoor spaces, especially if engaged over time in activities that increase aerosol production.... And we would have been less obsessed with cleaning surfaces. Our mitigations would have been much more effective, sparing us a great deal of suffering and anxiety.

Unfortunately, the shifts by the CDC and WHO did not alter mitigation efforts, but perhaps the Biden Administration's own shift will.

The Post on March 29 [quoted David Michaels](#), a George Washington University professor who previously led the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and advised Biden's transition team on the coronavirus pandemic, as saying that the new White House approach is "'a total rejection' of earlier assumptions that the virus was spread through direct person-to-person contact. "

I think much of the world has been dragged kicking and screaming into this because the World Health Organization and the CDC both clung to the infectious-disease model," said Michaels.

Ventilation, Filtration and Disinfection

Let's dig into the details of the Nelson blog.

It begins by saying, "While there are various strategies for avoiding breathing that air [i.e., air contaminated with SARS-CoV-2] – from remote work to masking – we can and should talk more about how to make indoor environments safer by filtering or cleaning air."

Nelson writes that changing the air and filtering it can reduce COVID spread, "with studies showing that five air changes an hour reduce transmission risk by 50 percent." She cites a [study in July by Rothamer](#), et al., in Science and Technology for the Built Environment, and [another by de Oliveria](#), et al., in Proceedings of the Royal Society.

Curiously, neither study is on point. The Rothamer research concerns the use of masks in ventilated environments, and the de Oliveria article describes a modeling exercise on the spread of aerosols and droplets.

If studies indeed show that an HVAC system that produces five air changes per hour reduces transmission risk by just 50%, that is hardly reassuring. There's still a lot of risk.

The deficiencies of ventilation alone, or even with filtration, have been well documented. We previously cited an extensive [article in HPAC Engineering](#) in August 2020, in Gary and Ken Elovitz of Energy Economics in Newton Centre, Mass., write:

The biggest danger for COVID-19 infection is close-range contact with infected people who are talking loudly or are otherwise exhaling heavily for at least several minutes. The HVAC system does not have much effect on those conditions.

The Elovitzes' main contribution is to deploy the Wells-Riley equation (also cited in the Rothamer study), which uses "infectious particle concentration, exposure time, and outside air ventilation" to come up with a prediction of the "likelihood that a person will be infected by a virus." (Academic research shows that, if anything, [Wells-Riley underestimates](#) risk.)

After the authors plug in the numbers, they conclude:

No practical amount of ventilation can be relied on or expected to protect occupants over long exposure times like the 6 or 8 hours people might spend together in an office or school classroom. Similarly, ventilation is unlikely to succeed as the prime means of protection for people in close contact in a small space like a private office.

The authors say that “improved filtration can reduce the risk of transmission by reducing the concentration of infectious particles in the air.” But that reduction is by no means complete. They write that, on average, “MERV 13 filters might be 60% to 70% efficient at removing particles that contain viral material.”

Higher-Capacity HVAC Systems Are Needed, But They Produce Higher Emissions

The Elovitzes also warn that higher-efficiency filters “have higher pressure drop,” which means reduced air flow and heating and cooling capacity. Bringing an HVAC system back up to its pre-filter levels of air flow requires an increased “motor load” – that is, a bigger-capacity system, which will use more energy and pose a greater threat to the environment.

One would expect that, with its focus on climate change, the Biden Administration would show concern about the increased emissions from powering up an HVAC system to achieve more air changes per hour in addition to adding additional power to compensate for the pressure drop from stronger filters. But, so far at least, no one in the Administration has mentioned the danger to the environment of what it proposes.

“Using high-quality air filters like HEPA or MERV-13 – connected to capable HVAC systems or portable air purifiers – to remove virus particles from indoor air is also important,” writes Nelson. But there are deficiencies here as well in addition to the climate-change threat.

An article in the October issue of the [ASHRAE Journal](#), a publication of the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers, acknowledged that HVAC systems are ineffective in fighting pathogens like SARS-CoV-2, even with the addition of powerful filters.

In analyzing a restaurant simulation, Zhiqiang Zhai, a professor of Civil, Environmental and Architectural Engineering at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and three colleagues write:

It is evident that if purely using the CA [that is, central air-conditioning with filtration], only a small fraction of the particles can be discharged through the ceiling exhausts. Most of the particles are spread out indoors and ultimately deposited on the occupants, tables, ground and walls.

The danger to occupants from HEPA [high-efficiency particulate air] filters placed on HVAC systems, write Zhai and his colleagues, is that some pathogens “do not get entrained into

the return air vents and may float around in a given space.” In other words, this is hardly the solution to contaminated indoor air.

Adding eight air purifier units “can clean 28% of the particles.” A table purifier placed in the center of each table in the room – only a few feet away from each occupant -- “can handle almost 80% of the particles, while slightly increasing the deposition on the tables compared to floor units.” But, clearly, placing an air purifier in front of nearly every person in a room is impractical and expensive.

The problem is that for filters to work, pathogens need to find them. If they have to travel large distances, that connection is elusive.

Nelson Opens the Door

To its credit, the Biden Administration has acknowledged that something else may be needed: “air disinfection.” Nelson writes, “By inactivating (‘killing’) airborne virus through methods like [ultraviolet germicidal irradiation \(UVGI\)](#) systems, we can add another layer of protection in indoor spaces.

She then spends the rest of the section discussing ultraviolet lights, citing [a 2015 study by Matsie Mphaephlele](#) of South Africa and colleagues that showed UVGI “about 80% effective against the spread of airborne tuberculosis, equivalent to replacing the air in an indoor room up to 24 times in an hour.” Ultraviolet disinfection also has the drawback of being [dangerous to humans](#), which is why [hospitals take great care](#) in using UV in operating rooms, requiring special equipment or clearing the rooms entirely while disinfection occurs.

But Nelson has done a great service in opening the door to the use of other disinfection approaches – particularly active systems, as opposed to passive UV. For example, [ActivePure](#), a Dallas-based company, has developed an Advanced Photocatalysis technology, [cleared by the Food & Drug Administration](#), that is capable of safely suffusing an occupied indoor space with the same oxidative particles found to clean the atmosphere naturally.

Rockefeller Report Also Stresses Safe and Clean Indoor Air

The rising White House interest in indoor air follows [“Getting to and Sustaining the Next Normal,”](#) a Rockefeller Foundation report issued in March by a distinguished group of epidemiologists and public health experts – including Bright, Michaels, Osterholm, and Ezekiel Emanuel of the University of Pennsylvania -- puts significant emphasis on safe and clean indoor air. It stated:

Indoor aerosol transmission in shared-room air, especially from people with few symptoms and who often don't know they are infected, is a key reason Covid transmission has been so difficult to control.

The authors also noted that cleaner, safer air in the workplace and schools will reduce health care costs and absenteeism and “improve productivity, academic performance and cognitive function.”

The report urges “necessary investments in ventilation, filtration, and disinfection” and says, “Specific funds must be allocated to low-income communities to enable these investments

for small businesses, schools, and other public buildings.” Also proposed by the Rockefeller group are “income-linked subsidies” to households for upgrades to systems to fight COVID indoors.

COVID Surging, Leveling Off in Europe and Rising in Parts of the United States

Masks have come off all over the United States and kids are back in school, but the COVID pandemic is not over. A surge dominated by the Omicron variant began in November and peaked in mid-January with 805,000 cases. By April 3, the seven-day average daily case count [had declined to 27,000](#), the lowest figure since July. But the slide seems to be at an end, with a national rate of 8 cases per 100,000. Some states, mainly in the Mid-Atlantic and New England regions -- are seeing sharp hikes, though their case rates remain below 20.

The increases -- 51% in two weeks in New Jersey, for example -- seem to be the result of the new Omicron subvariant, BA.2, which now accounts for the majority of infections. According to a [Yale Medicine report](#) on March 30, the subvariant is “believed to be more contagious than any previous strain of the virus.” However, say the Yale experts, “the good news is that BA.2 does not appear to cause more severe illness than the original variant, and it has not caused a widespread rise in hospitalizations in Europe. But there is still much to learn about Omicron and BA.2.”

Europe has suffered a spike in cases as a result of BA.2. [In the U.K.](#), infections went from 28,000 on Feb. 27 to 85,000 on March 22; in France, from 53,000 on March 3 to 138,000 on April 3. But both countries are seeing cases level off, a phenomenon also seen in Germany, Italy and Japan. Still, with COVID, what happens in America first happens in Europe, so it is logical to expect that the rise in cases in a few states will spread.

But, meanwhile in the U.S., hospitalizations are continuing to drop sharply -- down another 28% in the past two weeks to 21,000, the lowest level in more than a year. Deaths have fallen to 649 a day as a weekly average, down 41% in the last 14 days and at the lowest point since August.

The broader message is that we can expect a surge -- or sub-surge -- of some sort this month and that the ups and downs of COVID-19 will persist.

Protecting Vulnerable Employees in the Workplace

As COVID-19 cases decline in the U.S. and elsewhere, businesses are bringing workers back, but the work environment won't be the same. As the [New York Times](#) put it recently:

Executives are entering the next zone of return-to-office planning with what psychologists call “stress-related growth.” They have endured a sustained period of tumult. They are emerging feeling hopeful, equipped with new insights about how to respond when Covid cases surge and how to keep workers safe while businesses are open.

One of these “new insights,” especially with the Omicron surge, is that certain groups are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, especially to severe disease. The [CDC provides a long list](#) of conditions of vulnerability. They include: cancer; kidney, liver, heart, and lung conditions, diabetes; HIV/AIDS; immunocompromised states, either primary or brought on by taking medicines to weaken immune reactions after transplants, for example; mental health conditions such as mood disorders; overweight and obesity; and sickle cell disease.

Those over 65 are also far more vulnerable. CDC data, updated March 9, find that Americans aged 65 to 74 are just as likely as those aged 18 to 29 to become infected with COVID, but the [older group](#) is four times as likely to be hospitalized and 65 times as likely to die. (Some 11 million Americans over 65 are still in the workforce.)

Overall, a study found that [92 million Americans](#) are at especially high risk of serious disease if they become infected. That is 37.6% of adults aged 18 and over.

Unfortunately, the Americans With Disabilities Act does not impose an affirmative obligation to take protective steps to a person who is for example, immunocompromised. If that person asks for a “reasonable accommodation” (which often benefit other workers as well), a covered employer has to take appropriate steps to comply.

That employer has a range of possible solutions, from remote work to improving ventilation or purchasing an air disinfection system. Remote work is a popular mitigation means, but it also isolates the worker, especially as the rest of the workforce returns, post-COVID. And a worker's home environment without protection devices can be worse than the workplace.

The [Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\)](#) does have requirements that create affirmative obligations, but not for all workers. OSHA has issued an [Emergency Temporary Standard \(ETS\)](#) for health care workers only. That ETS makes minimal demands on employers when it comes to clean and safe air. It requires only that “employer-owned or controlled HVAC system(s) are used in accordance with manufacturer's instructions and the design specifications of the system(s) [and] air filters are rated Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) 13 or higher if the system allows it.”

There is no mention of air disinfection, and, based on its new “pivot,” the White House may want to get OSHA to update the ETS.

Throughout the pandemic, private employers have been the vanguard of caring for their workers. The incentives are large. Healthier workers are more productive, and clean and safe air is an attraction for potential new workers at a time of low unemployment.

COVID Solutions Bulletin | a publication providing regular updates on new and existing technologies that can help stop the spread of COVID-19, and help clear the air to open America back up.

For more information visit www.COVIDsolutionsbulletin.com.

EAH Strategies LLC | Headquarters, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

[Unsubscribe secretary@sos.texas.gov](mailto:secretary@sos.texas.gov)

[Constant Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent by [REDACTED] powered by



From: Stephen Davis <Stephen.Davis@gov.texas.gov>
Sent: Friday, June 3, 2022 8:52 AM
To: Stephen Davis
Subject: EDT Clips 3 June 2022

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

EDT Clips



June 3, 2022

Resilience and MD Anderson Launch Joint Venture to Accelerate Development and Manufacturing of Innovative Cell Therapies for Cancer – (G) (Cell Therapy Manufacturing Center, 1, MF, 1, -, 60, 70, -)

<https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20220602005856/en/Resilience-and-MD-Anderson-Launch-Joint-Venture-to-Accelerate-Development-and-Manufacturing-of-Innovative-Cell-Therapies-for-Cancer>

Cybersecurity firm Ascent Solutions Signs 33,000 SF Office Lease at Cypress Waters in Coppell – (G) (Ascent Solutions, 1, OF, 1, -, 33, -, Yes)

<https://rebusinessonline.com/ascent-solutions-signs-33000-sf-office-lease-at-cypress-waters-in-coppell-texas/>

A manufacturing company codenamed Project Penguin opts out of Marble Falls and Texas due to high property taxes

<https://www.dailytrib.com/2022/06/02/project-penguin-opts-out-of-marble-falls-and-texas-due-to-taxes/>

Georgetown, Leander are the fastest-growing cities in the nation

<https://www.kxan.com/news/local/williamson-county/georgetown-leander-are-the-fastest-growing-cities-in-the-nation/>

Ray Perryman: EU embargo stifles Russian oil; Texas rushes to fill the void

<https://fortworthbusiness.com/business/ray-perryman-eu-embargo-stifles-russian-oil-texas-rushes-to-fill-the-void/>

Texas State Fair Announces Free Concert Lineup, Including 74 Local Performers

<https://www.dallasobserver.com/music/whos-playing-this-years-state-fair-of-texas-14131532>

Music Marketplace Beatstars Has Paid Out \$200m To Creators To Date

<https://www.musicbusinessworldwide.com/beatstars-hits-200m-in-royalties-paid-out-to-creators/>

Economists expect 328,000 jobs were added in May, down 100,000 from April and likely the start of a new, slower pace of job creation

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/02/job-growth-seen-cooling-in-may-but-wage-increases-were-still-hot.html>

ADP reported Thursday that private payrolls increased by just 128,000 in May, the slowest month yet for a jobs recovery that started in May 2020

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/02/adp-jobs-report-may-2022.html>

79% of Americans making less than \$50K and 36% of Americans making \$250K+ live paycheck-to-paycheck: Survey

<https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/13-of-consumers-earning-a-quarter-of-a-million-dollars-are-living-paycheck-to-paycheck-301558733.html>

Retail sales of new cars are forecast to fall 20.9% this month compared to the same time last year, amid vehicle shortages and sky-high prices

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/25/cars/may-2022-auto-sales/index.html>

A summer of blackouts? Hot summer weather could leave states at risk

<https://news.yahoo.com/summer-blackouts-wheezing-power-grid-101030722.html>

Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar Welcomes National Association of State Treasurers to San Antonio for Annual Conference

<https://comptroller.texas.gov/about/media-center/news/20220602-texas-comptroller-glenn-hegar-welcomes-national-association-of-state-treasurers-to-san-antonio-for-annual-conference-1654198110772>

Considered one of the best fishing spots on the Gulf Coast, Bob Hall Pier in Corpus Christi is undergoing a huge makeover with demolition in progress

<https://www.ccbiznews.com/news/bob-hall-pier-demolition-starts>

Why North Texas Doesn't Need to Worry About an Industrial Space Shortage

<https://www.dmagazine.com/commercial-real-estate/2022/06/why-north-texas-doesnt-need-to-worry-about-an-industrial-space-shortage/>

Exclusive-Musk feels 'super bad' about economy, needs to cut 10% of Tesla jobs

<https://finance.yahoo.com/news/exclusive-musk-says-tesla-needs-070712003.html>

Payrolls rose 390,000 in May, better than expected as companies keep hiring

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/03/jobs-report-may-2022-.html>

New York just passed a bill cracking down on bitcoin mining

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/03/heres-whats-in-new-yorks-new-bitcoin-mining-ban-.html>

From: Announcements <info@allthingscc.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 4, 2022 2:00 PM
To: Secretary
Subject: Effective T-CPR Training You Can Afford

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

Empower your telecommunicators

Email not displaying correctly?
[View it in your browser.](#)

Effective T-CPR Training You Can Afford

Reimagined T-CPR Program Can Help Your Telecommunicators Save More Lives

A life-saving program should never be a line item that could be cut from a budget. That's why RQI Partners has reimagined our RQI Telecommunicator CPR (RQI T-CPR) curriculum. Regardless of the needs of your emergency communications center, you can help save more cardiac arrest patients in your community with our new, three-tier RQI T-CPR program.

Telecommunicators are a critical link in the chain of survival for out-of-hospital cardiac arrests (OHCA). Providing 911 callers with high-performance CPR instructions requires high-quality training. Telecommunicator CPR (T-CPR) education is key to reducing preventable deaths from OHCA, and now that education is more accessible and affordable than ever for emergency communication centers (ECC).

"The true first responders are at different stages on their path to high-quality telephone CPR and it is critical that we recognize, accommodate and adjust to the varying degrees of

The reimagined RQI Telecommunicator CPR (RQI T-CPR) training program tiers are designed to fit your ECC's needs and budget:

- **RQI T-CPR Essentials:** Lays the groundwork for T-CPR education, providing telecommunicators with a foundation in the science of resuscitation and T-CPR.
- **In RQI T-CPR Challenger:** An intermediate level, telecommunicators begin by completing core elements in the Essentials tier. They will then be challenged quarterly to demonstrate knowledge retention through a series of cognitive assessment activities.
- **RQI T-CPR Responder:** A comprehensive, advanced first responder-level training program. Aspects of Essentials and Challenger are combined with quarterly scenario-based simulation skills sessions, which are facilitated by RQI quality managers.

competence. We understand that one size does not fit all. The program's new three-tier design coupled with the True Adaptive learning experience will maximize learning potential and increase knowledge retention."

**—Julie Buckingham,
RQI Partners' RQI T-CPR program director**



The RQI T-CPR program is recognized by the International Academies of Emergency Dispatch (IAED) as the preferred solution for improving T-CPR competence. And beginning in September, the program will boast the True Adaptive™ learning design, which leverages artificial intelligence (AI). Courses will afford customized, personalized and highly efficient instruction tailored to and driven by individual needs, knowledge levels, actions and

performance.

Find the right RQI T-CPR program that will empower your telecommunications and increase OHCA survival in your community.

Learn More



Follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#) | [RQIPartners.com](#)

The American Heart Association and Laerdal Medical formed RQI Partners as their service provider for RQI, HeartCode, and other quality improvement solutions.

Copyright © 2022.

All content is intended for recipient only. If you have received this message in error, please disregard and delete.

Our mailing address is:

7272 Greenville Avenue, Suite P2020, Dallas, TX 75231

[Unsubscribe from all emails](#)

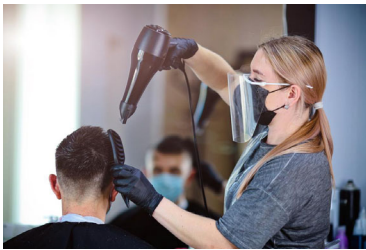
This email was sent to secretary@sos.texas.gov

[why did I get this?](#) [unsubscribe from this list](#) [update subscription preferences](#)

All Things ECC · 1894 E. William St. · 4-197 · Carson City, NV 89701 · USA

From: COVID Solutions Bulletin [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, April 14, 2022 9:13 AM
To: Secretary
Subject: ICYMI - COVID Solutions 16

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.



COVID Solutions Bulletin

Clearing the Air to Re-Open America

April 14, 2022

Issue No. 16

In this issue:

- Disinfection devices gain equal status with ventilation and filtration as the Biden Administration pivots to give more importance to clean and safe interior air.
- The White House is making a change in its approach that's been "long in coming."
- Without disinfection devices, ventilation and filtration alone have serious drawbacks when it comes to energy consumption and effectiveness.
- Boosting an HVAC system or adding strong filtration means heightening energy use and greenhouse gases.
- Dr. Nelson opens the door for disinfection technologies to clean interior air of pathogens.
- High-level Rockefeller report urges cleaner, safer air in schools and workplaces to reduce health care costs and absenteeism and "improve productivity, academic performance and cognitive function."
- American cases, hospitalizations, and deaths decline, but a new subvariant boosted infections in Europe, and there are signs that another surge may come to the U.S.
- Can government protect those especially vulnerable to COVID in the workplace, or do we have to depend on the private sector?

White House Gives ‘Disinfection’ Equal Billing as a Way to Clear Indoor Air of SARS-CoV-2

“Let’s Clear the Air on COVID” was the title of a March 23 blog by Alondra Nelson, the head of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and formerly a chair of the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton.

The pun was common, but the blog itself was unusual. It is part of what the [Washington Post](#) on March 29 called a “pivot” by the Administration, which will follow up the blog and a [Fact Sheet](#) with a [virtual summit on “evidence for action”](#) on the afternoon of April 7. Post reporter Dan Diamond wrote that the White House action is “a move scientists say is long overdue and will help stave off future outbreaks.”

Not only did the Nelson blog emphasize the importance of clean and safe air in the fight against the SARS-CoV-2 virus, it gave “air disinfection” equal billing with ventilation and filtration as part of a “set of simple but powerful actions we can use to **bring clean air into the rooms we’re in and clean the air already in the room.**” (The boldface is Dr. Nelson’s.)

The science chief is quick to note that the “Biden Administration identified improved indoor air quality as an important tool to fight the spread of airborne diseases in the [American Pandemic Preparedness Plan](#) last September – and the [National COVID-19 Preparedness Plan](#) prioritized it again earlier this month.”

In fact, a thorough reading of the September plan finds improved air quality cited exactly once, in a section on personal protective equipment, and nowhere are specifics, even about ventilation, discussed. The plan emphasizes vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics and early-warning systems. Air quality doesn’t even merit a mention in the summary of 12 goals.

Nor can the March plan can hardly be said to “prioritize” cleansing indoor air. It does, however, pledge that the Administration will work with Congress to “secure the necessary funding to give schools and businesses guidance, tests, and supplies to stay open, including tools to improve ventilation and air filtration.”

The truth is that government has been slow to recognize the value of clean and safe indoor air in stopping the spread of COVID. And even with earlier recognition, policy makers stressed ventilation and filtration, which certainly have their place but which alone are rarely a solution.

That has now changed, as evidenced by the latest White House activity. Schools and businesses will have to take notice – and act.

A Change That’s Been Too Long in Coming

The Administration even says it will “foster ways to recognize steps taken by buildings to improve indoor air quality and protect their communities,” adding:

Similar to how programs like LEED, Fitwel, and WELL recognize buildings for their environmental and health impacts, this new effort between the federal government and external experts will develop ways to recognize steps taken by building owners for the health and safety of their communities and their achievements in improving air filtration and ventilation systems to protect and promote public health.

In other words, buildings with safe air will get a government seal of approval for clean and safe air. We will see how that process develops, but what's clear is that policy makers are beginning to understand that unsafe indoor air is at least as dangerous as unsafe water.

The change has been long in coming. In the early days of the pandemic, public health institutions, including at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO), resisted the notion that COVID could be spread in tiny aerosols that can remain suspended in the air for minutes or even hours. Instead, as we noted in [Issue No. 5 of this newsletter](#), CDC and WHO guidance stated that the SARS-CoV-2 virus was contained in droplets, which would fall harmlessly to the ground of their own weight within a few feet. More worrisome was supposed to be spread from surfaces or hand-to-hand.

But in July 2020, [an article](#) by Lidia Morawska of the Queensland University of Technology in Australia and Donald Milton of the University of Maryland School of Public Health, titled, "It's Time to Address Airborne Transmission of Coronavirus 2019," drew the support of 237 scientists in an open letter. The authors wrote:

There is significant potential for inhalation exposure to viruses in microscopic respiratory drop- lets (microdroplets) at short to medium distances (up to several meters, or room scale), and we are advocating for the use of preventive measures to mitigate this route of airborne transmission.

In November of that year, Kimberly Prather of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography, an expert on aerosols, and several colleagues wrote a [letter to Science magazine](#), explaining that aerosols were the problem:

Individuals with COVID-19, many of whom have no symptoms, release thousands of virus-laden aerosols and far fewer droplets when breathing and talking. Thus, one is far more likely to inhale aerosols than be sprayed by a droplet, and so the balance of attention must be shifted to protecting against airborne transmission.

Then, a little over a year ago, a group of 13 U.S. public health experts, including such members of President Biden's own [COVID task force](#) as Rick Bright, the former director of the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, and Michael Osterholm, a highly regarded epidemiologist at the University of Minnesota, called for "immediate action to strengthen measures to limit inhalation exposure to SARS-CoV-2."

They wrote in [a letter Feb. 16 to Rochelle Walensky](#), director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Administration COVID Coordinator Jeff Zients; and Anthony Fauci, director of NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases:

For many months it has been clear that transmission through inhalation of small aerosol particles is an important and significant mode of SARS-CoV-2 virus transmission... Numerous studies have demonstrated that aerosols produced through breathing, talking, and singing are concentrated close to the infected person, can remain in air and viable for long periods of time and travel long distances within a room and sometimes farther.

[Linsey Marr](#), an expert on aerosols at Virginia Tech who also signed the Science letter, was quoted as saying:

It's time to stop pussyfooting around the fact that the virus is transmitted mostly through the air. If we properly acknowledge this, and get the right recommendations and guidance into place, this is our chance to end the pandemic in the next six months. If we don't do this, it could very well drag on.

The CDC and WHO finally changed their guidance at the end of April 2021, precipitating a [long opinion piece](#) on May 7 in the New York Times Zeynep Tufekci of the University of North Carolina with the headline, "Why Did It Take So Long to Accept the Facts About COVID?"

She said the updates were momentous, even though the two organizations seemed to try to bury them ("no news conference, no big announcement") because of embarrassment: "These latest shifts challenge key infection control assumptions,...putting a lot of what went wrong last year in context. They may also signal one of the most important advancements in public health during this pandemic."

Better late than never, she added:

If the importance of aerosol transmission had been accepted early, we would have been told from the beginning that it was much safer outdoors, where these small particles disperse more easily, as long as you avoid close, prolonged contact with others. We would have tried to make sure indoor spaces were well ventilated, with air filtered as necessary.

Instead of blanket rules on gatherings, we would have targeted conditions that can produce superspreading events: people in poorly ventilated indoor spaces, especially if engaged over time in activities that increase aerosol production.... And we would have been less obsessed with cleaning surfaces. Our mitigations would have been much more effective, sparing us a great deal of suffering and anxiety.

Unfortunately, the shifts by the CDC and WHO did not alter mitigation efforts, but perhaps the Biden Administration's own shift will.

The Post on March 29 [quoted David Michaels](#), a George Washington University professor who previously led the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and advised Biden's transition team on the coronavirus pandemic, as saying that the new White House approach is "'a total rejection' of earlier assumptions that the virus was spread through direct person-to-person contact. "

I think much of the world has been dragged kicking and screaming into this because the World Health Organization and the CDC both clung to the infectious-disease model," said Michaels.

Ventilation, Filtration and Disinfection

Let's dig into the details of the Nelson blog.

It begins by saying, "While there are various strategies for avoiding breathing that air [i.e., air contaminated with SARS-CoV-2] – from remote work to masking – we can and should talk more about how to make indoor environments safer by filtering or cleaning air."

Nelson writes that changing the air and filtering it can reduce COVID spread, "with studies showing that five air changes an hour reduce transmission risk by 50 percent." She cites a [study in July by Rothamer](#), et al., in Science and Technology for the Built Environment, and [another by de Oliveria](#), et al., in Proceedings of the Royal Society.

Curiously, neither study is on point. The Rothamer research concerns the use of masks in ventilated environments, and the de Oliveria article describes a modeling exercise on the spread of aerosols and droplets.

If studies indeed show that an HVAC system that produces five air changes per hour reduces transmission risk by just 50%, that is hardly reassuring. There's still a lot of risk.

The deficiencies of ventilation alone, or even with filtration, have been well documented. We previously cited an extensive [article in HPAC Engineering](#) in August 2020, in Gary and Ken Elovitz of Energy Economics in Newton Centre, Mass., write:

The biggest danger for COVID-19 infection is close-range contact with infected people who are talking loudly or are otherwise exhaling heavily for at least several minutes. The HVAC system does not have much effect on those conditions.

The Elovitzes' main contribution is to deploy the Wells-Riley equation (also cited in the Rothamer study), which uses "infectious particle concentration, exposure time, and outside air ventilation" to come up with a prediction of the "likelihood that a person will be infected by a virus." (Academic research shows that, if anything, [Wells-Riley underestimates](#) risk.)

After the authors plug in the numbers, they conclude:

No practical amount of ventilation can be relied on or expected to protect occupants over long exposure times like the 6 or 8 hours people might spend together in an office or school classroom. Similarly, ventilation is unlikely to succeed as the prime means of protection for people in close contact in a small space like a private office.

The authors say that “improved filtration can reduce the risk of transmission by reducing the concentration of infectious particles in the air.” But that reduction is by no means complete. They write that, on average, “MERV 13 filters might be 60% to 70% efficient at removing particles that contain viral material.”

Higher-Capacity HVAC Systems Are Needed, But They Produce Higher Emissions

The Elovitzes also warn that higher-efficiency filters “have higher pressure drop,” which means reduced air flow and heating and cooling capacity. Bringing an HVAC system back up to its pre-filter levels of air flow requires an increased “motor load” – that is, a bigger-capacity system, which will use more energy and pose a greater threat to the environment.

One would expect that, with its focus on climate change, the Biden Administration would show concern about the increased emissions from powering up an HVAC system to achieve more air changes per hour in addition to adding additional power to compensate for the pressure drop from stronger filters. But, so far at least, no one in the Administration has mentioned the danger to the environment of what it proposes.

“Using high-quality air filters like HEPA or MERV-13 – connected to capable HVAC systems or portable air purifiers – to remove virus particles from indoor air is also important,” writes Nelson. But there are deficiencies here as well in addition to the climate-change threat.

An article in the October issue of the [ASHRAE Journal](#), a publication of the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers, acknowledged that HVAC systems are ineffective in fighting pathogens like SARS-CoV-2, even with the addition of powerful filters.

In analyzing a restaurant simulation, Zhiqiang Zhai, a professor of Civil, Environmental and Architectural Engineering at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and three colleagues write:

It is evident that if purely using the CA [that is, central air-conditioning with filtration], only a small fraction of the particles can be discharged through the ceiling exhausts. Most of the particles are spread out indoors and ultimately deposited on the occupants, tables, ground and walls.

The danger to occupants from HEPA [high-efficiency particulate air] filters placed on HVAC systems, write Zhai and his colleagues, is that some pathogens “do not get entrained into

the return air vents and may float around in a given space.” In other words, this is hardly the solution to contaminated indoor air.

Adding eight air purifier units “can clean 28% of the particles.” A table purifier placed in the center of each table in the room – only a few feet away from each occupant -- “can handle almost 80% of the particles, while slightly increasing the deposition on the tables compared to floor units.” But, clearly, placing an air purifier in front of nearly every person in a room is impractical and expensive.

The problem is that for filters to work, pathogens need to find them. If they have to travel large distances, that connection is elusive.

Nelson Opens the Door

To its credit, the Biden Administration has acknowledged that something else may be needed: “air disinfection.” Nelson writes, “By inactivating (‘killing’) airborne virus through methods like [ultraviolet germicidal irradiation \(UVGI\)](#) systems, we can add another layer of protection in indoor spaces.

She then spends the rest of the section discussing ultraviolet lights, citing [a 2015 study by Matsie Mphaephlele](#) of South Africa and colleagues that showed UVGI “about 80% effective against the spread of airborne tuberculosis, equivalent to replacing the air in an indoor room up to 24 times in an hour.” Ultraviolet disinfection also has the drawback of being [dangerous to humans](#), which is why [hospitals take great care](#) in using UV in operating rooms, requiring special equipment or clearing the rooms entirely while disinfection occurs.

But Nelson has done a great service in opening the door to the use of other disinfection approaches – particularly active systems, as opposed to passive UV. For example, [ActivePure](#), a Dallas-based company, has developed an Advanced Photocatalysis technology, [cleared by the Food & Drug Administration](#), that is capable of safely suffusing an occupied indoor space with the same oxidative particles found to clean the atmosphere naturally.

Rockefeller Report Also Stresses Safe and Clean Indoor Air

The rising White House interest in indoor air follows [“Getting to and Sustaining the Next Normal,”](#) a Rockefeller Foundation report issued in March by a distinguished group of epidemiologists and public health experts – including Bright, Michaels, Osterholm, and Ezekiel Emanuel of the University of Pennsylvania -- puts significant emphasis on safe and clean indoor air. It stated:

Indoor aerosol transmission in shared-room air, especially from people with few symptoms and who often don't know they are infected, is a key reason Covid transmission has been so difficult to control.

The authors also noted that cleaner, safer air in the workplace and schools will reduce health care costs and absenteeism and “improve productivity, academic performance and cognitive function.”

The report urges “necessary investments in ventilation, filtration, and disinfection” and says, “Specific funds must be allocated to low-income communities to enable these investments

for small businesses, schools, and other public buildings.” Also proposed by the Rockefeller group are “income-linked subsidies” to households for upgrades to systems to fight COVID indoors.

COVID Surging, Leveling Off in Europe and Rising in Parts of the United States

Masks have come off all over the United States and kids are back in school, but the COVID pandemic is not over. A surge dominated by the Omicron variant began in November and peaked in mid-January with 805,000 cases. By April 3, the seven-day average daily case count [had declined to 27,000](#), the lowest figure since July. But the slide seems to be at an end, with a national rate of 8 cases per 100,000. Some states, mainly in the Mid-Atlantic and New England regions -- are seeing sharp hikes, though their case rates remain below 20.

The increases – 51% in two weeks in New Jersey, for example -- seem to be the result of the new Omicron subvariant, BA.2, which now accounts for the majority of infections. According to a [Yale Medicine report](#) on March 30, the subvariant is “believed to be more contagious than any previous strain of the virus.” However, say the Yale experts, “the good news is that BA.2 does not appear to cause more severe illness than the original variant, and it has not caused a widespread rise in hospitalizations in Europe. But there is still much to learn about Omicron and BA.2.”

Europe has suffered a spike in cases as a result of BA.2. [In the U.K.](#), infections went from 28,000 on Feb. 27 to 85,000 on March 22; in France, from 53,000 on March 3 to 138,000 on April 3. But both countries are seeing cases level off, a phenomenon also seen in Germany, Italy and Japan. Still, with COVID, what happens in America first happens in Europe, so it is logical to expect that the rise in cases in a few states will spread.

But, meanwhile in the U.S., hospitalizations are continuing to drop sharply – down another 28% in the past two weeks to 21,000, the lowest level in more than a year. Deaths have fallen to 649 a day as a weekly average, down 41% in the last 14 days and at the lowest point since August.

The broader message is that we can expect a surge – or sub-surge – of some sort this month and that the ups and downs of COVID-19 will persist.

Protecting Vulnerable Employees in the Workplace

As COVID-19 cases decline in the U.S. and elsewhere, businesses are bringing workers back, but the work environment won't be the same. As the [New York Times](#) put it recently:

Executives are entering the next zone of return-to-office planning with what psychologists call “stress-related growth.” They have endured a sustained period of tumult. They are emerging feeling hopeful, equipped with new insights about how to respond when Covid cases surge and how to keep workers safe while businesses are open.

One of these “new insights,” especially with the Omicron surge, is that certain groups are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, especially to severe disease. The [CDC provides a long list](#) of conditions of vulnerability. They include: cancer; kidney, liver, heart, and lung conditions, diabetes; HIV/AIDS; immunocompromised states, either primary or brought on by taking medicines to weaken immune reactions after transplants, for example; mental health conditions such as mood disorders; overweight and obesity; and sickle cell disease.

Those over 65 are also far more vulnerable. CDC data, updated March 9, find that Americans aged 65 to 74 are just as likely as those aged 18 to 29 to become infected with COVID, but the [older group](#) is four times as likely to be hospitalized and 65 times as likely to die. (Some 11 million Americans over 65 are still in the workforce.)

Overall, a study found that [92 million Americans](#) are at especially high risk of serious disease if they become infected. That is 37.6% of adults aged 18 and over.

Unfortunately, the Americans With Disabilities Act does not impose an affirmative obligation to take protective steps to a person who is for example, immunocompromised. If that person asks for a “reasonable accommodation” (which often benefit other workers as well), a covered employer has to take appropriate steps to comply.

That employer has a range of possible solutions, from remote work to improving ventilation or purchasing an air disinfection system. Remote work is a popular mitigation means, but it also isolates the worker, especially as the rest of the workforce returns, post-COVID. And a worker's home environment without protection devices can be worse than the workplace.

The [Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\)](#) does have requirements that create affirmative obligations, but not for all workers. OSHA has issued an [Emergency Temporary Standard \(ETS\)](#) for health care workers only. That ETS makes minimal demands on employers when it comes to clean and safe air. It requires only that “employer-owned or controlled HVAC system(s) are used in accordance with manufacturer's instructions and the design specifications of the system(s) [and] air filters are rated Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) 13 or higher if the system allows it.”

There is no mention of air disinfection, and, based on its new “pivot,” the White House may want to get OSHA to update the ETS.

Throughout the pandemic, private employers have been the vanguard of caring for their workers. The incentives are large. Healthier workers are more productive, and clean and safe air is an attraction for potential new workers at a time of low unemployment.

COVID Solutions Bulletin | a publication providing regular updates on new and existing technologies that can help stop the spread of COVID-19, and help clear the air to open America back up.

For more information visit www.COVIDsolutionsbulletin.com.

EAH Strategies LLC | Headquarters, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

[Unsubscribe secretary@sos.texas.gov](mailto:secretary@sos.texas.gov)

[Constant Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent by [REDACTED] powered by



From: [OOG News Alerts](#)
Subject: Morning News Clips 3.29.22
Date: Tuesday, March 29, 2022 8:34:44 AM
Attachments: [Morning News Clips 3.29.22.pdf](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

Morning News Clips 3/29/2022

- [Texas Take](#)

- [Texas Tribune: The Brief](#)

- [Politico Playbook](#)

State News

Texas Tribune – Brooke Park and Jose Luis Martinez: [The Stories Behind The Texans Lost To COVID-19 \[Web\]](#)

Texas Tribune – Abby Livingston: [Amid Russian aggression, Fort Worth Leaders Say The F-35 Fighter Jet's Value Is Now On Display In Europe \[Web\]](#)

Austin American Statesman – Claire Osborn: [Tornadoes Damaged 1,122 Structures In Williamson County, More Than 600 Were In Round Rock \[Web\]](#)

Dallas Morning News – Sriya Reddy: [Dallas Mayor Eric Johnson Meets With Ukraine Official To Express Support \[Web\]](#)

Houston Chronicle – Nora Mishanec: [Houston To Consider Ban On E-Cigarettes, Vaping And Hookahs In Public Areas \[Web\]](#)

Education

San Antonio Express News – Danya Perez: [San Antonio ISD's Biggest Elementary School Might Be The Next Campus To Partner With UTSA \[Web\]](#)

Dallas Morning News – Valeria Olivares: [Texas A&M's Law School Joins Ut Among The Top Ranked Programs In The Country \[Web\]](#)

Business/Economy

- *Austin American Statesman* – Kara Carlson: [Austin-Area-Based Firefly Aerospace Gets New Owner, Gears Up For 2nd Launch \[Web\]](#)

Immigration/Border Security

-
Texas Tribune – Karen Brooks Harper: [In Laredo, A Bus Brigade Is Vaccinating Mexican Citizens With COVID-19 Shots That Texans Aren't Using](#) [Web]

Transportation

Austin American Statesman – Sarah Asch: [What's Happening At Austin's Airport? Reports Of Long Lines, Abandoned Rental Cars Abound](#) [Web]

Houston Chronicle – Timothy Fanning: [‘Never Seen Anything Like This’: Abandoned Rental Cars And Long Lines At Austin Airport](#) [Web]

Environment

-
San Antonio Express News – Taylor Pettaway and Jacob Beltran: [Medina Fire Largely Contained After Burning Nearly 1,100 Acres](#) [Web]

Criminal Justice

-
Texas Tribune – Reese Oxner: [Child Welfare Monitors Say There's “Ample Evidence” Kids Were Abused At Bastrop Foster Care Facility, Disputing Texas Rangers](#) [Web]

Opinion/Editorial

-
Austin American Statesman – John Young: [Young: And This Is What Passes For GOP Leadership](#) [Web]

-

#

State News

The Stories Behind The Texans Lost To COVID-19

By Brooke Park and Jose Luis Martinez

Texas Tribune

At 16, Sha’Niyah McGee could see her future clearly. She wanted to go to college to become a pediatrician and own a nail salon and somehow, some way, she wanted her younger siblings to come to a university with her.

“She’s that kind of person,” her grandmother, Laurena Ellis, said. “She didn’t have a bad bone in her body.”

But unfortunately, none of this will come to pass. On Sept. 28 — the day Sha’Niyah emerged from her bedroom where she spent days recovering from COVID-19 to return to school — she collapsed in her Dallas home and died, becoming one of over 100 Texas coronavirus fatalities under the age of 19.

As the coronavirus pandemic moves into a third year, recent data provides a clearer picture of COVID-19’s deadly impact in Texas. Today marks the one-year anniversary of when vaccines were widely available to anyone over the age of 16 and in that time, deaths have slowed considerably.

Vaccines became available to those older than 12 last May. Between then and January, COVID-19 killed about 29,000 Texans. About 82% of those deaths, including Sha’Niyah’s, were among people who had not been vaccinated.

Behind these figures are real families, broken by the deaths of loved ones lost too early to a disease that often infects several members of a family at once. Sha’Niyah’s mother, Felicia Boulden, eventually recovered only to arrange her oldest daughter’s funeral.

Ellis said her granddaughter Sha’Niyah had planned to get the shots after she fully recovered from COVID-19. Now, everyone eligible in the family has received the vaccines. Ellis and Boulden have struggled to understand how Boulden lived but Sha’Niyah died.

“We think she bargained with God to leave her mother for her sisters and her brother,” Ellis said.

“One of an unnecessarily large number”

Vaccination has dramatically changed the impact of the coronavirus, which first appeared in the United States in early 2020. Before vaccines were available to everyone a year ago, Texans 80 and older died most frequently from COVID-19.

But when the coronavirus’ delta variant hit last September, a high vaccine rate for older

Texans protected them, while deaths among younger residents began rising. Adults in their 60s died more often than any other age group during the surge, followed by those in their 70s and those in their 50s.

Brent Earles, 65, of Dallas, was one of those Texans in January. He worked as a shopping mall Santa for years, hoisting children onto his lap and listening to their Christmas wishes.

“My mom commented that it was probably one of the happiest times that she’s ever seen him was being Santa at this [last] event, but it is almost certainly where he contracted COVID,” his son Jared Earles said.

On New Year’s Eve, doctors rushed an unvaccinated Brent Earles, as he struggled to breathe, into the intensive care unit, where he remained for a near monthlong fight against COVID-19.

On Jan. 25, he died four days after his 65th birthday, one of the nearly 2,000 Texans in their 60s who have died in the first two months of this year from the virus.

“It’s the natural order of things that at some point in your life, your parents die,” Earles said. “Certainly, I didn’t want or expect it to be like this, so suddenly and so needlessly. My dad had a lot of living left and he had a lot more to give.”

In the beginning, Earles’ family and doctors thought Brent would make it. He had battled with COVID-19 pneumonia in both lungs. Two weeks in the hospital stripped him of 20 pounds, but he had improved enough that doctors prepared to move him out of the ICU.

In those early days at the hospital, Jared said, his father began to think seriously for the first time about getting the shots.

Brent had held concerns about the vaccine’s safety, which he and his son regularly discussed. His son wanted him to get vaccinated, but the older man refused. That seemed to be changing as Brent slowly regained his strength.

“On one hand, my dad is a number. To most people, he’s just one of an unnecessarily large number. And he also fits in that unvaccinated camp,” But, Jared Earles added, “He was much more than a statistic to me.”

As Brent was preparing to move out of the ICU, Brent’s mother, who was unvaccinated, died of COVID-19. Soon after, new scans revealed a severe regression in Brent’s lungs.

“His lung scans kind of went from mostly clear to terrible,” Jared said. “[For] COVID cases, it’s a long, slow, arduous recovery, and setbacks are extremely fast and often fatal. And that’s what happened.”

In Brent’s last moments, the father passed the torch to his son. Jared had moved back to Texas seven years ago to work with his father.

“He told me ... that I had surpassed him,” Jared said. “And it was my time to continue on.”

The future of the pandemic

About two months have passed since the omicron surge, which took the lives of at least 6,000

Texans, and the state is seeing a relative respite from the pandemic as COVID-19 restrictions begin to lift.

Texas is now averaging about 60 deaths a day, down from over 200 daily deaths at the height of omicron. During the delta variant peak, there was an average of 300 deaths in one day.

While death rates have slowed, the United States is still on track to reach 1 million COVID-19 deaths in the coming weeks. Texas leads the nation with the second-highest number of COVID-19 deaths behind California, which records about 2,000 more deaths despite having 10 million more people. Overall, Texas has had 296 deaths per 100,000 residents since the pandemic began, ranking it roughly in the middle of all states.

However, other variants will be coming. A mutation of omicron, called BA.2, is currently causing surges across Europe. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said it is at least 50% more transmissible than its predecessor but does not appear to cause a deadlier illness. Federal data showed the new strain accounting for 1 in 4 new U.S. COVID-19 cases.

While Fauci is expecting an uptick in domestic cases, it is unclear if the increase will reflect the intense surges seen this past January and last September.

Rebecca Fischer, an infectious disease epidemiologist at the Texas A&M University School of Public Health, said Texans should keep their guard up.

“We’re doing OK right now, but this is the time to gain ground on the virus,” Fischer said. “By no means is this a time to act like the pandemic is over.”

Despite the virus’ mutations, vaccines are still the best defense against COVID-19. Right now, the state’s fully vaccinated rate sits at just below 60%. Booster rates are even lower and now there’s a second booster to be made available this month. Only 22% of Texans have received a booster shot. Increasing these rates will not only prevent death but will make the emergence and transmission of new variants more difficult.

Fischer does believe there will come a time where the individual and public health measures will have largely suppressed the virus, and that time could be close, but only with significant investment in public health services.

“Public health [experts] have been screaming this forever. But now, it’s becoming really apparent,” Fischer said.

Earlier this month, Republican pushback prompted Congress to cut \$15.6 billion for COVID-19 relief that would have paid for treatments, vaccines and testing. If Congress does not release additional funds, the money for COVID testing and treatment for America’s tens of millions of uninsured people could likely run out in April.

As global COVID-19 cases rise, Fischer said the United States must move aggressively before the wave hits here to combat future deaths.

“When I look at the numbers that 100 Texans a day are dying, I think the numbers are a little bit down now, but that’s not OK. It’s never been OK,” Fischer said. “It’s never been OK to see

those numbers and think that we don't need to do anything and it's all OK and normal now.”

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Amid Russian aggression, Fort Worth Leaders Say The F-35 Fighter Jet's Value Is Now On Display In Europe

By Abby Livingston

Texas Tribune

In the storied history of the factory known as Air Force Plant 4 on Fort Worth's western edge, there has never been a fighter jet to roll off the assembly line quite like the F-35: It's an aeronautical marvel, a fiscal disaster and a North Texas economic linchpin.

Military budget hawks call its development a “boondoggle” and a financial “rathole” and floated the idea of scrapping it. Fort Worth lawmakers have steadfastly defended it, touting its value both to the military and the local economy.

But as Western countries scramble to counter Russian aggression in Ukraine, the pride of Fort Worth — Lockheed Martin's F-35 — is now at the center of American diplomacy and in demand all over Europe. For those who have fought for the program, it's a validation of that work.

“What's happening at the plant matters right now,” said Democratic U.S. Rep. Marc Veasey, who grew up underneath the screeching planes of Fort Worth during the twilight of the Cold War. “It seems like that we're back in that same sort of mindset, that same sort of posture now, because it's just as serious now, if not more serious than, quite honestly, back then.”

There is almost no conceivable scenario in which the United States would give the Ukrainian military an F-35, according to interviews with several defense policymakers and observers. It's not even remotely a topic of open discussion because such an action would likely escalate the Ukrainian conflict and pilots would have to be trained on the complex aircraft.

Even so, the F-35 is having an indirect impact in Europe, as countries reconsider their defense readiness in the wake of Russia's aggression.

Beginning earlier this year, western officials publicized eastward F-35 deployments into and around Europe, announced via tweets, press releases and confirmed news reports. There is likely more classified F-35 activity, and aviation experts regularly track online other F-35 sightings in Eastern Europe.

What is known in published news reports is that American F-35s have migrated to Europe. And Western European countries are deploying their own F-35s into allied countries and airspace in proximity to Russia, in places like Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania and Romania. Some are American military planes and others are owned by allies, like the Netherlands.

Aaron Stein, the director of research at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, told The Texas Tribune that American F-35 European air patrols offer “reassurance to the eastern [NATO] members, a symbol of U.S. support for the alliance and also as a signal to the Russians to stay out.”

Other allies are on buying binges of a fighter jet with a price tag in the ballpark of \$100 million.

Just prior to the invasion, Finland formalized the purchase of 64 F-35s on Feb. 4, that country's largest military procurement ever. Earlier this month, American military officials welcomed Finnish Minister of Defence Antti Kaikkonen for a tour of a Florida F-35 training facility, an occasion military officials detailed in a news release. Finland is not a member of NATO.

Most dramatically, German leaders announced three weeks after the Russian invasion their own purchase of 35 F-35 jets. Germany has had a historical reluctance to engage in a military build-up after the horrors of World War II, and that announcement was part of a major shift in policy.

And on Monday, the Canadian government announced that it would buy 88 of the fighter jets, a purchase for which it has reportedly budgeted about \$15 billion. These fresh foreign purchases will help offset recent announcements from American military leaders about cuts to their own F-35 orders.

An economic boon

The F-35 is manufactured in several places, but Air Force Plant 4 is at the heart of the operation.

The midsection is built in a Northrop Grumman plant in California, and the plane's tail is built in the United Kingdom, which is the United States' closest F-35 partner. These pieces come together for final assembly in Fort Worth, where the front section is manufactured. There are also final F-35 assembly facilities in Italy and Japan.

Many people in the city know someone who works on the F-35, or at the very least, within the plant. Local pride in the aircraft abounds, so much so that it is beginning to compete with the steer and the oil derrick as a civic symbol. Every Christmas season, the city hosts a Lockheed Martin-sponsored college football bowl game. F-35s fly above the Amon G. Carter Stadium on game day. In the lead-up to the 2016 bowl game, locals waited in long lines in downtown Fort Worth for a chance to climb into the cockpit of an F-35 model.

The facility is the third-largest employer in Fort Worth and claims to directly or indirectly employs about 55,500 Texans, according to Lockheed Martin.

The jet was proposed in 1990s, after a rocky time for Fort Worth.

The local congressman, Jim Wright, had recently fallen from power as the U.S. speaker of the House, diminishing the area's political clout. And then came the drawdown of the Cold War defense spending after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Fort Worth, with its air base and local defense contractors, was hit particularly hard.

In 1991, then-U.S. Defense Secretary Dick Cheney recommended the closure of Carswell Air Force Base and months later, canceled another Fort Worth plane project, the A-12, at the next-door plant.

But a few years later, the base was repurposed and military planners announced the need for a

new generation of fighter planes. American leaders decided to replace various models of planes with a single plane that functioned almost like a Swiss Army knife.

The result was the F-35, a plane that can dogfight, drop bombs, shoot missiles, conduct reconnaissance, fly stealth and supersonic and offers its single pilot a situational awareness that was inconceivable a generation ago. There are three different versions of the plane, to accommodate the different types of landings and take offs: land-based runways, aircraft carriers and vertical hovering.

But its many competing goals meant the plane was overweight, over-budget and late, incurring the wrath of those worried about military spending. A Congressional Research Service analysis earlier this year of the plane estimated the plane's production and maintenance will eventually cost \$1 trillion.

In 2016, the F-35 ran into serious trouble after President Donald Trump won the presidential election. That December, a briefing for the president-elect included a chart noting a history of trouble, cataloging lapsed deadlines, design flaws and including the language, "Difficult to Overcome a Troubled Past, but Program is Improving."

"The F-35 program and cost is out of control," Trump tweeted that month. "Billions of dollars can and will be saved on military (and other) purchases after January 20th."

The comments set off panic in Fort Worth.

Two Texas leaders most closely identified with the F-35 were junior members when military planners dreamed up the plane. As criticism mounted over the years, U.S. Reps. Mac Thornberry of Clarendon and Kay Granger, the former Fort Worth mayor, matured in power, and successfully pursued Congressional assignments that allowed them to protect the plane.

From these perches, Thornberry, who retired last year, and Granger delicately defended the F-35, amid the rancor around its spending.

Veasey, the Fort Worth congressman, has lived with the plane's development his entire career. As a Congressional staffer in 1996, he attended the announcement that Lockheed Martin would compete for the government contract. Now in Congress himself, he oversees the F-35 also as a member of the House Armed Services Committee.

Other Texas officeholders like U.S. Sen. John Cornyn have kept up the drumbeat of support, signaling their support for the F-35, including via letters to Congressional leaders.

Feels "like the '80s all over again"

Not every country can purchase an F-35 from Lockheed. A group of eight countries joined together early on to share the costs and take part in the production of the plane. Since then, other countries have earned approval to buy the plane through a government program called Foreign Military Sales.

In the international community, there are defense and economic alliances, like NATO and the European Union. But there is also something of an F-35 club, and American officials who support the plane's development argue that the draw of membership is part of the power of the plane.

“Look at the countries that want to buy it, and those countries want to be a part of this generation of aircraft,” said U.S. Rep. August Pfluger of San Angelo, who is a retired Air Force fighter pilot and sits on the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

He added: “It strengthens our bonds with those countries. It strengthens our relationships by saying, ‘We trust you. We want to have closer relationships with you. We want to deter the same enemies that you want to deter.’”

It is such an advanced tool that maintenance — particularly in the realm of software development — is likely to keep countries closer to Lockheed and the United States.

“At the operational level, it allows our pilots and our war planners and our military professionals to have a platform and a common language, a common weapons system to fight with,” Pfluger said.

“Diplomatically, it’s very, very important,” he added.

Michael O’Hanlon, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution think tank, said those alliances extend beyond NATO, pointing to the Finland purchase. The F-35 “tightens our [bonds] with certain non-NATO countries (esp Finland, in fact) that may complicate any designs Putin would have to attack say the Nordic states,” he wrote in an email to the Tribune.

It’s a sentiment with which Kaikkonen agreed in a U.S. Air Force news release.

“Building on our great F-18 cooperation since the 1990’s, the F-35 program will be a solid foundation for the Finland and United States defense relationship in the coming decades,” he said.

O’Hanlon noted the F-35’s other diplomatic play: Putin deterrence.

By loading up the western side of the Russian border with F-35s, it’s a near constant reminder to Russian President Vladimir Putin of American military strength.

“It helps reinforce deterrence of Putin should he consider any moves against NATO states,” O’Hanlon wrote to the Tribune. “The geography of Europe, with lots of airfields within combat range of Russia, makes the F-35 especially relevant to that theater.”

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Jack Reed of Rhode Island suggested last week that policymakers will keep a close eye on how the F-35 performs in Europe.

“Once we have reached the point of validation, and particularly observing what they do in Europe, we can be more confident going forward with the system,” he said, according to Air Force Magazine.

Veasey, the Fort Worth congressman, grew up near the Fort Worth defense plant and the Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base, which was once Carswell Air Force Base. Throughout his boyhood, planes roared overhead, taking part in test flights and exercises. The racket above is known colloquially as “the sound of freedom.”

The exercises continue to this day, but Cold War intrigue and paranoia long ago faded in

Cowtown. Veasey said last week the future is back in his hometown.

“I’ve seen the ups and downs, and it is really crazy because of what’s happening in Europe right now,” he said. “It really does feel like the ’80s all over again.”

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Tornadoes Damaged 1,122 Structures In Williamson County, More Than 600 Were In Round Rock

By Claire Osborn

Austin American Statesman

Williamson County has slightly increased the number of structures damaged in the tornadoes that hit last week. The number now stands at 1,122 homes, businesses and other structures damaged or destroyed in the county, Connie Odom, a county spokeswoman, said Monday.

Help with the cleanup continues this week with the opening of a new resource center in Taylor for storm victims from Williamson and Bastrop counties.

County commissioners decided Monday to provide free vouchers to people using the Williamson County landfill for tornado cleanup.

A disaster relief fund has been started for survivors of the tornado in Round Rock.

No one died or was seriously injured in the two twisters that hit the county on the evening of March 21. The city of Round Rock suffered the most damage.

Volunteers remove debris in the Windy Park neighborhood in Round Rock on Saturday after a tornado severely damaged many homes in the area.

More than 600 structures were damaged or destroyed, Mayor Craig Morgan said Monday. He said the damage is estimated at \$30 million.

The county estimated last week that 1,000 structures had been damaged, including several hundred in Round Rock.

The number of structures damaged in Williamson County includes 343 in unincorporated areas, nine structures outside of Granger, 24 homes in Jarrell and three Jarrell businesses.

An update on the number of structures damaged in Hutto was not available Monday. Taylor also had roofs blown off a few buildings, officials said.

Representatives from the Federal Emergency Management Agency will arrive in the county Wednesday to assess the damage, Odom said.

Cars in Round Rock's Windy Park neighborhood show the effects of a tornado.

A multiagency resource center to provide help for tornado survivors from Williamson and Bastrop counties will be open Tuesday through Thursday at the Williamson County Expo Center at 5350 Bill Pickett Trail in Taylor.

It will provide food, clothing, resources for youths, documentation recovery, animal

assistance, debris removal, financial advice and housing. Mental health services also will be available to help people cope.

Spanish speakers will be at the resource center, which will be open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Thursday.

More than 600 structures were destroyed in Round Rock when a tornado hit on March 21, Mayor Craig Morgan said.

Anyone who is not able to visit the center can call the Austin Disaster Relief Network survivor hotline at 512-806-0800 for help.

The network and the American Red Cross are partnering with other agencies to run the resource center in Taylor.

Williamson County and Waste Management, which operates the county landfill, have teamed up to provide vouchers for free dumping of 750 tons of tornado debris at the landfill. Vouchers will be given to affected property owners through the Precinct 4 constable's office.

A relief fund, managed by the Greater Round Rock Community Foundation, was started Friday to help those who suffered tornado damage in Round Rock.

More than \$260,000 has been committed by the Nelson Family Life Foundation, Dell Technologies, the Greater Round Rock Community Foundation, the city of Round Rock, the Round Rock Chamber, Emerson, the Jay Latham family, the Nyle Maxwell family and the Jim Boles family, according to a news release.

"Many of our families and businesses face a long and difficult road ahead," Morgan said in the news release. "This fund is intended to help people impacted by the storm get back on their feet faster, and give them some peace of mind so they can start rebuilding their lives."

Angel Maldonado, left, and Masa Takino remove debris in the Windy Park neighborhood in Round Rock on Saturday.

Those wishing to contribute to the fund can do so at rrcommunityfoundation.org.

An application for tornado survivors to seek financial assistance will be available in the coming days, the news release said.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Dallas Mayor Eric Johnson Meets With Ukraine Official To Express Support

By Sriya Reddy

Dallas Morning News

Dallas Mayor Eric Johnson met with Ukraine Consul General Vitalii Tarasiuk on Monday afternoon in a show of support following the City Council's resolution earlier this month that suspended ties with Russia due to its invasion of Ukraine.

Johnson presented the resolution, which was unanimously approved by the council, to Tarasiuk at City Hall. Tarasiuk was accompanied by Andrii Protsan, assistant to the consul general; Nataliya Shtanyuk, president of the Ukrainian Cultural Club of Dallas; and Michael

Balahutrak, head of Ukrainian-American Cultural Club of Houston.

The resolution states that the city of Dallas will stand with Ukraine, suspend all diplomatic ties with Russia and refuse to authorize city contracts that have significant ties to Russia. It also encourages companies and communities to support Ukraine.

“We want to see this aggression ended,” Johnson said. “We don’t engage directly with foreign policy. That’s not a regular occurrence for the Dallas City Council to get this involved in foreign policy, but this matter was important to us. This is a humanitarian issue.”

Johnson said that he supports the people of Russia, but not Russian President Vladimir Putin’s regime.

While there are not many strong Russian ties, the mayor said that they are looking at pension funds and investments that are connected to Russia.

Tarasiuk has been traveling throughout Texas speaking to different cities, companies and to the Ukrainian community. He said that he appreciates Dallas’ support from day one and how much the Dallas Ukrainian community is doing for its country.

“I thank the mayor for his leadership and moral compass and for supporting Ukraine,” he said.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Houston To Consider Ban On E-Cigarettes, Vaping And Hookahs In Public Areas

By Nora Mishanec

Houston Chronicle

-

City Council on Wednesday will consider a proposal to bar the use of e-cigarettes and any kind of vaping in public spaces under Houston’s smoking ordinance.

The move would update the city’s rules for public smoking, which were written before electronic cigarettes existed, Health Department spokesman Porfirio Villarreal said Monday.

Houston currently prohibits tobacco smoking in enclosed public places and seating areas, and within 25 feet of any building. Smoking in covered bus stops and light rail stops also is barred.

The measure would add all forms of vaping — including electronic cigars, pipes and hookahs — to the smoking ban, enacted in 2007 to reduce public secondhand smoke exposure.

Health officials proposed the amendment in light of rising e-cigarette use among middle and high school students, Villarreal said. As many as one in 10 Houston middle school students vape, according to health department data.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Education

San Antonio ISD's Biggest Elementary School Might Be The Next Campus To Partner With UTSA

By Danya Perez

San Antonio Express News

In a muted echo of its pre-pandemic rush to embrace such partnerships, the San Antonio Independent School District is seeking the state's OK to turn Graebner Elementary School into an in-district charter campus partly run by University of Texas at San Antonio educators.

If approved by the Texas Education Agency, Graebner would join 39 other SAISD schools operating under contracts with a variety of nonprofit education organizations that include charter networks, the Center for Montessori in the Public Sector and the Centers for Applied Science and Technology, known as CAST. A handful of the newest collaborations are with UTSA.

Thirty-one of SAISD's in-district charter schools were created through Senate Bill 1882, a 2017 law that provides more state funding to schools that turn over some of their management to an outside partner.

That's about a third of the district's nearly 100 campuses, a measure of how quickly and enthusiastically former Superintendent Pedro Martinez adopted the so-called SB1882 partnerships.

Graebner would be the latest such school if the TEA signs off on the agreement. It would work with UTSA's College of Education and Human Development to expand its existing dual-language program and cultural offerings and increase community engagement.

"What has always been sustained throughout our history is our community involvement, our parent participation, our excellence in academics and our interest in cultural performances," its principal, Rebecca De Leon, told the SAISD board at its March 21 meeting.

Graebner was built in 1932 and is the largest elementary school in the district, with 667 students and 40 teachers, De Leon noted. Through a bond program approved by voters in 2020, it expects to undergo a full campus renovation.

That offered a good opportunity to mold a new campus around the school's needs and goals and to use UTSA's expertise in dual-language education to give teachers and staff the tools to "collaborate deeply with one another, collaborate with parents in the pedagogy of how we teach our students," De Leon said.

"We want to re-engage the community, we want to be a community school," she said.

The university has similar partnerships — known as the UTSA Community Lab Schools — with other SAISD campuses, including Bonham Academy and the Irving and Twain dual-language academies.

The schools are part of SAISD but run by both institutions, with UTSA overseeing the principal, coaching teachers and bringing in support from university staff and students. In turn,

the university is responsible for the academic outcome of each partnering campus.

“My job is to protect the great things that are already happening at these campuses, while bringing along the collective experience of UTSA professors and San Antonio ISD leaders to ensure that each campus works towards academic excellence, organizational strength and financial strength,” Juanita Santos, executive director of UTSA’s Dual Language Community Lab Schools, told SAISD trustees.

While academic and cultural growth will be the focus of the change, a big attracting factor is the additional state funding that flows to SB1882 partnerships, an estimated \$300,000 per year in the case of Graebner, said John Norman, executive director of the SAISD Office of Innovation.

The school also would be eligible to apply for a two-year federal startup grant that could provide about \$800,000 in additional aid.

“The financial resources is a big reason why our schools and our partners are interested in doing these (partnerships),” Norman said. “Not the only reason, but it is important, particularly for a school like Graebner.”

The district will submit its application to the TEA this week and expects to receive a response by May.

Pandemic slowdown

The SAISD in-district charter partnerships are less than 4 years old, with the first one approved in spring 2018.

Before the board voted unanimously to approve Graebner’s application, trustees brought up questions on accountability, or, amid the pandemic, the lack thereof.

Older partnerships turning 3 years old in 2021 were scheduled to be assessed by the board last fall, based on academic achievement, financial standing and teacher and parent feedback. But the pandemic made it nearly impossible for any campus, under a partnership or not, to develop full data sets to measure success.

The State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness wasn’t administered in 2020, and this and other shortages of academic metrics gave the partnerships an extra year to be assessed.

The partnerships with UTSA began in 2021.

“As we are making this decision, I’d like for us to think that if we are expanding partnerships, that we have data behind what we are doing,” trustee Sarah Sorensen said before voting yes on Graebner’s application. “I certainly would not want to deny an opportunity to any campus.”

A slowdown in the number of applications for these types of schools was very intentional, Norman said, partly because of the pandemic and partly to ensure community engagement was still a part of the development process.

“Like any strategy, you want to grow the right amount, but not grow so much that you don’t have the systems in place and the structures to make sure that they are successful, make sure

they are supported,” Norman said. “It’s a new strategy for any district to partner with an outside organization, so it does require different ways of operating.”

By fall, the schools will undergo a formal review and their academic standing will be a big part of deciding if a program moves on as is or gets placed on probation for a year.

It’s not far-fetched to think some of the partnerships could need to be adjusted, Norman said, considering how young these programs are. The plan would not be to close schools but to reassess partnerships and eventually, if no change is seen for those on probation, to revoke contracts.

“The idea behind the charter is, we think, that bringing in this new partner, this new program, it will be better for students, it will lead to better outcomes,” Norman said. “And if, after three years, we found that it didn’t lead to that ... then the board may decide, ‘We don’t think that partner and that program is the right one for the school.’”

“So what will happen to the school and what will change will really depend on the circumstances,” he said.

Community perception

The application for Graebner and the approval by the board seemed less rushed and to have more of the community engagement that was supposed to be part of the process for all partnerships, said Alejandra Lopez, president of the San Antonio Alliance of Teachers and Support Personnel.

But the contracts should be examined carefully before approval, considering the outside partners have a lot of say-so in the daily working conditions of SAISD staff, she said.

“(The partner) has autonomy over aspects like the workday, different extra duties, and that is something that we feel is problematic,” Lopez said. “Public school districts are structured in a way to where there is a very clear way to address these issues, but with 1882 partners, it adds a third party in the mix and it can be very difficult to address concerns.”

With UTSA, the benefit is that it is a local partner, Lopez added, and the community and staff might have greater access to voice concerns or issues.

For some parents who have the time, knowledge and resources to seek choice schools, in-district charters at SAISD have been a game changer, said Inga Cotton, founder and executive director of SA Charter Moms, a nonprofit focused on providing school choice resources for area parents.

She said the schools have the potential to appeal to both a small subset of parents who feel more comfortable knowing that these schools are run in part by an elected board of trustees but also the vast majority who are not worried about who is making what decision as long as the school offers the programs that meet their needs.

“For the most part, parents are not as concerned about who the industry partner is or who the university partner is. They want to know what is unique about that school,” Cotton said. “But I think that there are still some who want good governance and good transparency.”

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Texas A&M's Law School Joins Ut Among The Top Ranked Programs In The Country

By Valeria Olivares

Dallas Morning News

Texas now has two law schools nestled within the top 50 of a new ranking from the U.S. News & World Report.

Ranked at No. 46, Texas A&M University's law school in Fort Worth joins the University of Texas at Austin's own among the top campuses in the country for students seeking a career in the legal industry. UT's law school stands at No. 17.

"Since we decided to invest in the school and really try to turn it around, we went from unranked just a couple of years ago to shooting up the rankings," Texas A&M University System spokesperson Timothy Eaton said. "It usually doesn't happen like that."

The state has 10 law schools, including Southern Methodist University, the University of North Texas at Dallas and Baylor University, among other institutions. For a long time, the state only boasted UT's law school among the best rated.

Texas A&M's school has gone up more than 100 places out of the nearly 200 law schools accredited by the American Bar Association since it was acquired by the system in 2013.

"We have not seen a law school advance this far this quickly," Texas A&M's School of Law Dean Robert Ahdieh said. "In some sense, that is very much a reflection of the mindset of Texas A&M."

The rapid rise comes eight years after the Texas A&M system purchased the Fort Worth school for a total of \$73.5 million from Texas Wesleyan University in 2013 — making it the first public law school in North Texas. The system had been interested in adding a law school for more than 40 years.

A year later, the University of North Texas at Dallas opened its school, which was recently fully approved by the American Bar Association.

Texas A&M's school currently has about 1,200 students and 60 full-time faculty members.

System officials announced last year that they're planning a new campus in downtown Fort Worth, which will include space for the law school. They expect to break ground this summer.

In addition to the core programming around training future lawyers, the system offers a master's degree program for non-lawyers.

The school now enrolls nearly 700 students working in healthcare, banking and finance, the energy sector, human relations, cybersecurity and more where a law background is valuable, but where they're not looking to practice, Ahdieh said.

"We have students who are debating where to go to law school," he said. "This presents them

with another very strong Texas option for them to consider.”

Janson Westmoreland, a third year law student who focuses on intellectual property, said the school’s upward projection was obvious.

“A&M is on the way up and it’s going to be, eventually, one of the best law schools in the country,” he said.

However, Westmoreland said the faculty is not focused on the school’s position on the board, but rather the students’ experience, careers and success.

“(The ranking) comes as a byproduct of how good our professors are and how they are preparing us for the real world as attorneys,” he said.

Through the various clinics offered on campus — which give students the opportunity to apply their knowledge by working with real clients who may find it difficult to find counsel elsewhere — he’s been able to get real-world experience that will prepare him for future work.

Alexis Symcheck, a second year student who has been focusing on intellectual property, said the law school’s students have the advantage of being located in a market full of potential for their careers.

Although it used to be considered as some students’ back up plan, Symcheck added that many are now picking the Texas A&M law school over Ivy League campuses because of its rising notoriety in the legal industry and overall cost of attendance.

Tuition and fees are about \$32,600 per year for Texas residents. The national average for in-state students at a public university was about \$29,600 during the 2021-2022 academic year, according to the U.S. News’ annual survey of full-time law school programs.

“That’s unheard of, it’s unprecedented,” said Karen Gren Scholer, U.S. district judge for the Northern District of Texas, about Texas A&M “catapulting” its way up.

The school’s efforts to establish itself as a national leader in the area is “paying off dividends” and that the legal community will recognize its work, Gren Scholer said.

“Watch out Longhorns,” she said, noting the A&M-UT rivalry. “Don’t look over your shoulder because — true to their mascot Reveille — the Aggies are nipping at your heels.”

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Business/Economy

-

Austin-Area-Based Firefly Aerospace Gets New Owner, Gears Up For 2nd Launch By
Kara Carlson

Austin American Statesman

Firefly Aerospace has a new majority owner as the Central Texas-based aerospace company prepares for its second rocket launch.

AE Industrial Partners, a private equity firm, has acquired a majority stake in Firefly Aerospace, the company announced.

The Cedar-Park-based company also raised \$75 million in a funding round led by AE Industrial Partners. Firefly said it now estimates its valuation at more than \$1 billion.

Founded in 2014, Firefly Aerospace is among an emerging group of launch providers serving the small satellite market. The company, which moved its headquarters from California to Cedar Park in 2014, has contracts with multiple commercial and government customers, including NASA and General Atomics.

Firefly launched its flagship rocket, an unmanned spacecraft dubbed Alpha, from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California last year. The 95-foot long spacecraft was able to achieve liftoff and fly for two and a half minutes, but the flight ended in an explosion after Space Force officials that were overseeing the launch detonated the rocket when it tipped sideways and off course before reaching low earth orbit.

Alpha and other rockets the company is working on are designed to serve the small-satellite market as launch vehicles to transport payloads to space.

'New, exciting chapter'

The new ownership and funding injection comes as Firefly has big plans for its space vehicles in the coming months. The company said it expects to launch Alpha a second time in the second quarter of 2022, and that the vehicle recently completed acceptance testing of both stages and would be ready for launch in the next few months.

Firefly said it also is making progress with its Blue Ghost lunar lander, which recently completed the “Critical Design Review” phase and is now working towards final prefabrication which is expected to be presented in April.

Tom Markusic, Firefly’s CEO, said the new ownership and additional funding positions the company for growth.

"AE Industrial’s ownership marks a new, exciting chapter for Firefly,” Markusic said in a written statement. “These investments allow Firefly to build on the momentum from last year’s financing, and better position us for future growth. We’re eager to work with the AEI team and benefit from their industry and financial markets experience.”

AE Industrial Partners has acquired space companies in the past. In 2020, it bought aerospace company Deep Space Systems and merged it with Adcole Space, a space products manufacturer, ultimately forming Redwire, a space infrastructure company.

In becoming majority owner, AE Industrial Partners acquired all of Noosphere Venture Partners’ stake in Firefly Aerospace. Noosphere Venture Partners is led by Ukrainian investor and Firefly co-founder Max Polyakov, who helped fund Firefly after it filed for bankruptcy in 2017 and had been the company's largest investor.

In late 2020, Polyakov left Firefly’s board, though he remained a shareholder, and in February announced he would sell his stake in the company amid security concerns raised by the U.S.

government. In May 2021, Noosphere Ventures also sold about \$100 million of its holdings of Firefly equity to unnamed investors, Firefly said at the time. Firefly Aerospace has said it plans to rapidly expand its workforce in Cedar Park.

Poised for growth

Firefly's ownership change comes in the wake of a busy year for the rocket-maker. Last year the company also raised \$75 million to prepare for its first launch. At the time, the company said its goal is to raise an additional \$300 million this year to fund its growth plans through 2025.

The company has also said it plans for significant growth in Cedar Park. Firefly is expected to quadruple its workforce and add hundreds of jobs at its headquarters in coming years as it expands into a new facility.

Last year, the Cedar Park City Council approved a 10-year economic development agreement for Firefly's expansion in the city, with incentives valued at \$4.3 million. In exchange, the company agreed to add 682 new jobs over the same timeline and announced it was planning to buy a 45,000-square-foot facility to accommodate its expansion. At the time the company had about 165 Cedar Park-based employees.

Firefly is part of an emerging ecosystem of space-focused companies in the Austin area, including several that have raised funding in recent months. Central Texas has attracted a number of companies in the aerospace field, including potentially SpaceX, Elon Musk's aerospace company, which has hinted that it plans to have operations in the Austin area.

This month, Slingshot Aerospace raised \$25 million as it looks to commercialize its products and grow its team. CesiumAstro, which makes hardware and software for space communication, also raised \$60 million to expand its team and grow its research, development and manufacturing capabilities.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Immigration/Border Security

-

In Laredo, A Bus Brigade Is Vaccinating Mexican Citizens With COVID-19 Shots That Texans Aren't Using

By Karen Brooks Harper
Texas Tribune

The COVID-19 vaccine shot that went into Nohemi Lima Eusebio's arm as she sat on a dusty yellow school bus at the U.S. border checkpoint in Laredo was just days away from going in the trash in Dallas.

The dose had been in a batch earmarked for Texas residents, but it was about to expire at a clinic nearly 500 miles away because nobody used it.

Instead, it turned out to be a potential lifesaver for Lima Eusebio, a 44-year-old single mom whose job in the close quarters of a factory across the border in Nuevo Laredo put her at risk for the virus and made her fear for the safety of her loved ones.

“I was worried a lot because my elderly mom lived with me, and I was worried that going to work was a risk of contracting the virus, and I would infect my mom and my [15-year-old] daughter,” she said.

Getting a shot in her hometown — where persistently high demand and low supply meant long lines at places that had vaccines — took hours and made her miss too much work.

That’s how Lima Eusebio wound up in a secure area of the Gateway to the Americas International Bridge on a cloudy weekday morning earlier this month, sitting on the bus with her sleeve rolled up, surrounded by her factory coworkers.

As the bus idled on the Laredo side of the bridge, Mexican and U.S. health care workers traipsed down the aisle carrying vaccine doses stacked in buckets hanging around their necks — the kind that children use to sell gum to tourists on the corners near the mercado in downtown Nuevo Laredo.

They injected Lima Eusebio, signed her vaccine card and then the bus turned around and took them all back into Mexico.

The dose Lima Eusebio received, flown down on a private plane piloted by the attorney son of Laredo’s local top health official, was among nearly 200,000 that have been administered to Nuevo Laredo residents since last summer — part of a unique binational vaccination program that’s credited with bringing up vaccine rates and fighting the virus on both sides of the Rio Grande.

“This is a very essential humanitarian effort because, in order to get herd immunity in our area, we need to make sure everybody’s vaccinated to avoid variants and to avoid cross-border transmission,” said Victor Treviño Jr., who oversees the program and whose father, Dr. Victor D. Treviño, is the Laredo Health Authority.

Launched last June as the state grappled with both a rising wave of deaths related to the delta variant and a sharp drop in demand for the vaccine in Texas and nationally, the cross-border vaccination program aimed to address a dismally low vaccine rate — an estimated 7% at the time — in Nuevo Laredo that was creating problems in highly vaccinated Laredo, which was reporting 10 times that vaccination rate, among the highest in the state.

Launched in June, a cross-border effort using buses and donated vaccines is helping roughly 2,000 Nuevo Laredo residents per day get COVID-19 shots in Laredo. The Texas Tribune It was also a good way, organizers said, to use up doses that had suddenly become a surplus in the U.S., where nearly 50% of the population were fully vaccinated by the time the Laredo program was up and running.

Meanwhile, Mexico’s early vaccine rollout was painfully slow because the country’s government had prioritized people in rural areas where social distancing was easier. The rollout was also hampered by logistical issues, with some people reportedly waiting in line for up to 12 hours for their first dose. By the time the cross-border vaccination program launched in June, Mexico was reporting only a 10% vaccination rate.

About 10 months after its launch, the program is still giving about 2,000 doses per day,

Treviño Jr. said — which means the buses going back and forth across the bridge represent roughly 10% of the total doses being administered across Texas on a daily basis.

Nuevo Laredo, which has nearly half a million residents, has seen its vaccination rate soar to about 50% now, by most estimates — still far below Laredo's 96.5% rate but seven times more than when the program began.

"It's now one of the most highly vaccinated cities in Mexico," Treviño Jr. said.

Shots arrive by car, plane and 18-wheeler

The doses used by the Laredo program are donated by providers like doctors, hospitals and pharmacies who would rather give away their excess supplies than throw them out, the senior Treviño said.

They're picked up by car, plane and truck — any secure way they can find, organizers said.

"Sometimes there are 18-wheelers that are coming from other states passing through Dallas or San Antonio or somewhere, and we coordinate with trucking companies and if they can pick them up, they do that," Treviño Sr. said. "So it's quite a show. But it's worth the effort."

A provider that donated nearly 20,000 doses this week had initially "tried to give them back to the state because they said demand completely stopped," said Treviño Jr., who frequently picks up the doses in his plane or car. "But they said to use them or transfer them."

Workers enter records on computers at an office space on Thursday, March 3rd, 2022 in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. Workers from Nue...

Workers in Nuevo Laredo enter vaccination records on computers in early March. Credit: Sergio Flores for The Texas Tribune

The state stopped warehousing doses months ago after supplies exceeded the demand, so providers now order them directly from the federal government, which purchases them and allocates them at no cost to the providers.

"It's a bedrock public health principle that reducing an infectious disease on one side of a border will help reduce that disease on the other side, especially when there is a lot of cross-border traffic," said Chris Van Deusen, spokesperson for the Texas Department of State Health Services.

Texas health officials say the state is not directly involved in the program, other than to track the doses donated by Texas providers to the binational effort. But they say that addressing the virus on both sides of the border is an effective approach for this vibrant and close-knit border community.

The program is slated to continue at least through April, when it will be reevaluated to see if it's still needed.

A look at the numbers shows that there's still very much a demand: Last week, Treviño Jr. said he picked up 10,000 doses in his car from a provider in San Antonio. This week, he'll be picking up 17,000 more.

A spin class sparks a solution

Laredo and Nuevo Laredo have been linked for the better part of two centuries, their downtowns separated by only a narrow slice of river.

“It’s one city. It just happens to be in two countries,” said state Rep. Richard Peña Raymond, a Laredo Democrat and early proponent of the program.

Adults and children in Nuevo Laredo often go to work and school every day in Laredo, and a large number of Laredoans have family on the other side of the river. Traveling back and forth for shopping, medical care and celebrations is the norm.

“We work hand in hand, and we feel like we have the same purposes because we cross the bridge daily,” said Estefania Araiza, a Nuevo Laredo nurse who administers doses on the bus for the program.

Last summer, Treviño Sr. was disturbed by the vaccination numbers.

Laredo had one of the highest vaccination rates in the state, but the hospitals were still getting patients every day who were close to death, many of them Nuevo Laredo residents. Treviño, who is also a family doctor, said he had patients from Nuevo Laredo whose family members weren’t yet vaccinated. Doctors and nurses across the river were dying at an alarming rate, he said, because they couldn’t get vaccinated.

Treviño knew that there was no way to truly protect both cities unless both sides of the border were highly vaccinated.

Victor Trevino poses for a portrait on Friday, March 4th, 2022 in Laredo, TX. Victor and a fellow nurse would make quick work...

Victor Treviño Jr. and a fellow nurse made quick work of giving an entire bus full of people vaccines against COVID-19. Credit: Sergio Flores for The Texas Tribune

One day in late May, Treviño’s son was brainstorming the problem with a friend while they pedaled side by side in a spin class at a Laredo gym.

They talked about collecting expiring doses and delivering them to Nuevo Laredo, but that idea came with a raft of logistical issues, the biggest of which was that the U.S. government had no authorized program to donate those doses.

And even if the U.S. government approved cross-border donations, the doses would likely end up mired in the same kinds of logistical problems that were bogging down Mexico’s vaccination effort.

“It was almost impossible to get a shot” in Mexico at the time, recalled Araiza, the nurse who helps administer the vaccine on the buses.

Treviño Jr. and his friend discussed administering the shots to Mexican citizens in Laredo, but dismissed the idea because at the time, the bridge was closed to all but essential workers from Nuevo Laredo.

“What if we vaccinate them on the bridge?” Treviño Jr. suggested. That way, people who did not have essential worker status wouldn’t technically be entering the U.S. as long as the buses didn’t leave the secured checkpoint area, which would work as long as border officials agreed

to the plan.

The friend was enthusiastic and, while they pedaled in the spin class, placed a call to Carmen Lilia Canturosas, a relative who was running for mayor of Nuevo Laredo at the time — she won the election a few weeks later.

She used her connections to get the program rolling — her father and brother were both former mayors, “so she knew everyone,” Treviño Jr. said.

After winning her election, Canturosas called the Mexican Consulate in Laredo, who reached out to U.S. Customs and Border Protection, which runs the checkpoints on the U.S. side of border bridges. CBP officials agreed to let them vaccinate people in the secure area of the bridge only if the Nuevo Laredo residents stayed on the buses.

A few weeks later, the factory workers and their families arrived at the bridge on factory-owned school buses for shots. Treviño’s father, meanwhile, reached out to a prominent doctor’s association in Nuevo Laredo and began getting groups of front-line health workers vaccinated on buses owned by hospitals. Modern buses owned by Mexican bus lines soon joined the effort as more people signed up for shots.

Then in November, the international bridges reopened to all visitors on the U.S.-Mexico border just in time for the Christmas holiday, and popularity of the program exploded, Treviño Jr. said.

For Fabiola Escobar, a 32-year-old factory worker, getting the opportunity to get her booster shot on the bus with her coworkers rather than miss another day of work trying to get one in Nuevo Laredo was a game changer.

She can be less fearful, she said. And she can start getting back to normal life.

“When the pandemic first started, we were all worried we’d get sick and for it to get more serious,” Escobar said. “But now that we have our boosters, I feel like we can be less worried and work more comfortably.”

In late November, Nuevo Laredo city officials honored the senior Treviño’s efforts to vaccinate their residents, which included several programs in addition to the buses, by awarding him the keys to their city in a unanimous decision.

“It is a monumental effort we’re doing,” Treviño Sr. said. “And hopefully it’ll go down in history.”

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Transportation

-

What's Happening At Austin's Airport? Reports Of Long Lines, Abandoned Rental Cars Abound

By Sarah Asch

Austin American Statesman

Abandoned rental cars snaked down the road outside Austin-Bergstrom International Airport on Monday morning and passengers waited in a security line that reached outside the terminal and onto the sidewalk.

Some travelers waited in security lines for hours, missed flights or even had to make alternate travel arrangements over the weekend as the airport was unable to handle unusually high passenger traffic generated in part by several high-profile sporting events.

Airport officials on Monday even took the step of issuing a fuel shortage alert due to a lack of available fuel supply — a measure an airport spokesperson said is becoming more common as the airport gets busier with more flights scheduled. A fuel shortage alert calls for flights to arrive with more fuel than normal in case there is no fuel available for them at ABIA.

Airport officials said in a statement that ABIA regularly sees high volumes of passengers, especially Thursdays, Fridays, Sundays and Mondays before 8 a.m. Staffers with the federal Transportation Security Administration moved almost 9,000 passengers before 8 a.m. Sunday, March 27 and about 8,250 before that time Monday.

“These volumes reflect thousands of Austin visitors traveling home after attending events,” including the Texas Relays, the World Golf Championships-Dell Technologies Match Play and NASCAR races at Circuit of the Americas, the statement said. “In response to the strong demand for air travel, (the airport) continues to expedite terminal improvements through the Airport Expansion and Development Program and through working alongside our partners, like the TSA, to fill staff vacancies.”

Sandy Musa, who lives about 20 minutes from the airport, said she didn’t even bother with the security line Monday morning when she saw it was outside the building. She arrived at 6 a.m., about 90 minutes before her flight to Las Vegas for a work conference. When she spoke to a security staff member, she said, she was told there was no way she was going to make her flight.

“The line was wrapped from one end of the airport to the other,” she said. “It’s not like it was just a few people hanging out by the automatic doors. You had to go to one end or the other of the airport to be in one of those lines. I would never have made it even if I got there two hours before.”

Musa said she was frustrated that the airport didn’t communicate to passengers on social media in advance how early they should plan to arrive to make flights, given the unusual volume of people. She said she was still deciding whether she wanted to try to catch another flight later Monday or give up on the trip altogether.

Patricia Mancha, a spokesperson for the TSA in southwestern states including Texas, said the Austin airport had 15,000 more visitors a day this weekend compared with the normal course of travel. She cited the sporting events in the area as well as airlines adding flights to their schedules out of Austin as factors.

Mancha said the TSA in Austin prepared for the weekend by bringing in additional staffing and approving overtime hours. Mancha also said Austin isn’t alone in increased travel volume. Nationwide, 2.3 million people passed through an airport security checkpoint Sunday,

compared with 1.57 million on that day last year.

The Austin airport also had a line of abandoned rental cars to contend with Monday morning, causing some people additional delays.

“The rental car return line was due to a bit of an irregular situation. What happened was one rental car stalled out at the drop-off curb,” airport officials said in a statement. “Rental car staff instructed the customers to go ahead and leave the vehicle with the keys in it. This caused other passengers with rental cars to follow suit, and leave their rental cars alongside the curb. Once airport staff was alerted to this, we got in touch with the rental car company to request additional staff be dispatched ... to move the vehicles from the curb.”

Kelly Nagel, who was in Austin over the weekend for a wedding, said she was among those who left her rental car with the keys on the front seat to make her flight after sitting in line to return the vehicle for about 30 minutes Monday morning.

Nagel said she was able to bypass much of the security line because she has TSA PreCheck and was able to make her flight home to Pennsylvania. She said she got a call during her layover from the rental car company that the vehicle had been safely returned.

Mancha said the best way people can help make security move more quickly is by arriving with plenty of time to spare and not packing prohibited items in their carry-on luggage. People should plan to arrive at the airport two hours before a domestic flight and three hours before an international one, she said.

“When people bring prohibited items to the checkpoint, they slow down the line,” she said. “TSA, the airport, the airlines, we’re all working together to get folks to their final destination. So it’s really important for people to pack their patience. Our folks are really trying to help you get through.”

-
[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

‘Never Seen Anything Like This’: Abandoned Rental Cars And Long Lines At Austin Airport

By Timothy Fanning
Houston Chronicle

During a rush of travelers returning from spring break and other major weekend events, lines at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport wrapped outside the entrance, and rental cars were left abandoned at the drop-off area Monday morning.

“Never seen anything like this,” said Kelly Williams Nagel, who posted an image of a long line of abandoned rental cars at the airport. “TSA lines are 3K deep, wrapped outside ... ridiculous.”

On HoustonChronicle.com: ‘We don’t want people to needlessly kill them’: Texas park officials urge people not to kill rattlesnakes

In an emailed statement, an airport spokesperson said the rental car issue began with one stalled-out car blocking the drop-off curb.

“Rental car staff instructed the customer to go ahead and leave the vehicle with the keys in it,” the spokesperson said. “This caused other passengers with rental cars to follow suit, and leave their rental cars alongside the curb.”

Regarding TSA security lines, the spokesperson said more travelers were attempting to fly out of Austin than normal before 8 a.m. Security officials screened 8,252 passengers before 8 a.m., well above their typical 6,600 passenger screening level.

The higher follow likely came from spring break travelers leaving Texas and others who attended events such as the Texas Relays, Dell Masters and NASCAR over the weekend.

Passengers took to social media to express their frustration.

Joey Dillion, who posted about his experience on Twitter, called his experience leaving Austin Monday morning an “apocalypse.”

Dillion included an image that showed several travelers unloading suitcases from their vehicles well ahead of the drop-off gate.

Closer to the security checkpoint, and a day earlier, Alex Wild said on Twitter that he spent 90 minutes at the TSA checkpoint on Sunday. He shared photos of the line snaking around outside the terminal.

“Made my flight by just 2 minutes but there were a lot of ppl in line with me who missed theirs,” he said in his tweet.

To address the issue, the spokesperson said the airport would work to fill staff vacancies and help expedite future airport expansion plans.

“While operations have returned to normal, we continue to ask passengers to arrive a minimum of two hours in advance now through early April,” the spokesperson said.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Environment

-

Medina Fire Largely Contained After Burning Nearly 1,100 Acres

By Taylor Pettaway and Jacob Beltran

San Antonio Express News

The Das Goat Fire burning near Medina Lake, which has destroyed nearly 1,100 acres, was 70 percent contained as of late Monday afternoon, officials with the Texas A&M Forest Service said.

Three homes have been lost since the fire started late Friday. No injuries or deaths have been reported.

Officials expected to let residents return to their homes Tuesday morning. It is uncertain how many people were evacuated.

Firefighters estimate that they may have the fire completely under control by Tuesday night, James Wettstaed with the Forest Service said.

The blaze started after a vehicle driving along a road caught fire, Wettstaed said. When the driver pulled over, the sparks hit nearby grass and brush, igniting the wildfire.

Weather played a critical part, Wettstaed said, rapidly spreading the flames across land heavily loaded with dry grass and brush.

“That combination for us has been really bad,” Wettstaed said.

Looking at a small portion of where the fire initially spread Friday along along County Road 271, Wettstaed said the blaze met “no resistance” from the elements as a strong wind aligned to move it up a mountain ridge across about 100 acres.

“When the wind goes the same direction the topography does, that’s when the fire really goes,” he said. “It just accelerates.”

More than 100 firefighters from 28 agencies have battled the wildfire.

Medina County Fire Chief Clint Cooke on Tuesday said firefighters were confident that they had controlled 70 percent of the blaze, with about 40 personnel still tending to it.

He said they are working with residents affected in High Mountain Ranch, which has 25 homes.

The residents, who were evacuated Saturday afternoon, will be escorted to their homes by firefighters in case of an unexpected shift or change in the fire’s status.

Officials said they will survey the damage to the homes Tuesday. They hope to open roads to the subdivision by around noon.

“When the residents ... see what took place in there, they’re going to understand the impact of the success that the crews had,” Cooke said.

He said the flames — which took down three homes, including two in the subdivision and one just outside — encroached on a deck of one house but did not enter the home.

Cooke said resources and other assets were made available by the state to stop the blaze within two hours of its ignition Friday.

“The destruction still took place, but we feel like it could’ve been far, far worse,” he said.

Medina County Judge Chris Schuchart said residents were able to get their belongings Sunday, many of them with tears in their eyes. He said many will now remember the destruction a small match or spark can cause.

The community has also provided a lot of food to feed displaced residents for months to come, the judge said.

“I think it’s great the way everybody in this community came together,” Schuchart said.

Cooke said firefighters are working to shore up the rest of the blaze and make sure the burned areas will not reflash as they monitor the area overnight.

“The fact that it only took out three [homes] is truly amazing,” Schuchart said.

He praised state firefighters for their skill, saying that you could see the “pinpoint” accuracy in which aircraft dropped water on the blaze.

“They came to fight fire, and you just gotta be proud to be a Texan,” Schuchart said.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Criminal Justice

-

Child Welfare Monitors Say There’s “Ample Evidence” Kids Were Abused At Bastrop Foster Care Facility, Disputing Texas Rangers

By Reese Oxner

Texas Tribune

Court-appointed watchdogs of Texas’ troubled foster care system found "ample evidence" that former sex trafficking victims were abused at a foster care facility, contradicting the Texas Rangers’ findings earlier this month.

After reviewing thousands of documents and recordings, the monitors said in a court filing Monday there is evidence to substantiate allegations of child sex abuse, exploitation, neglectful supervision and physical abuse at The Refuge Ranch in Bastrop. The monitors also called a letter from Department of Public Safety Director Steven McCraw to Gov. Greg Abbott, which said there was no evidence kids at the shelter were sexually abused or trafficked, “was, at best, premature.”

Two of the Refuge’s residents told shelter leaders in late January that one of their caretakers offered them drugs in exchange for them to take nude pictures of themselves. The alleged perpetrator was fired after the initial report, according to Refuge leaders, and is under criminal investigation, according to McCraw’s March 16 letter to Abbott.

Abbott ordered the Texas Rangers to investigate the situation shortly after it became public in a federal court hearing. The shelter has been temporarily ordered to close.

Staff members also were accused of helping children to run away from the facility. Four employees were fired and are also being investigated, McCraw said in his letter. One has also been arrested for lying to the FBI, he wrote. Details of both incidents came out in previous reports and hearings.

“There were no allegations or evidence that these residents were sexually abused or assaulted

by anyone,” McCraw wrote in initial findings released less than a week after The Texas Rangers started its investigation.

At least one child victim was not interviewed by a Texas Ranger “until well after the DPS letter became public, and that the child was upset by the Rangers’ conclusions,” according to the monitors’ report.

DPS and the governor’s office did not immediately respond to a request for comment late Monday. The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services declined to comment.

The monitors’ report was filed as part of a yearslong lawsuit over foster care in Texas. Paul Yetter, the attorney representing foster care children in the federal lawsuit, previously disputed the Texas Rangers’ assertion that there was no evidence of sexual abuse or assault when it first came out, calling it “surprising and extremely troubling” since the investigation is ongoing.

A court hearing is scheduled for 9 a.m. Wednesday in which state leaders, attorneys and U.S. District Court Judge Janis Jack will discuss the situation at The Refuge. Jack ordered state officials to provide the recorded interviews of the children who were placed at the shelter. In 2015, Jack had ruled that the state was violating foster children’s constitutional right to be free from an unreasonable risk of harm, saying that children “often age out of care more damaged than when they entered.”

The monitors wrote in Monday’s report that there were repetitive “managerial lapses” and serious risks to the children’s safety.

“The monitoring team’s review revealed evidence that numerous children were denied a safe placement while at The Refuge,” the monitors wrote. “There is ample evidence of violations of high and medium-high standards related to child safety, and of child abuse, neglect or exploitation. The evidence of serious risks to child safety at The Refuge includes, but is not limited to, a strong possibility of human trafficking based on staff’s inducement of children to sell nude photographs in exchange for drugs.”

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Opinion/Editorial

-

Young: And This Is What Passes For GOP Leadership

By John Young

Austin American Statesman

One would think Ken Paxton had sufficient issues unto himself.

Securities fraud for one. At least a grand jury thought so. For two, allegations of abuse of office and bribery. So assert some of his former staffers. And then there’s the issue of conspiring to nullify 81 million votes on Jan. 6, 2020.

So why would a busy Texas attorney general, which we assume Paxton to be, arise on a lovely morning in March – my favorite Texas month – and make the birth gender of Rachel Levine an issue?

Why? Well, of course, Ken Paxton felt the need to oppress someone.

I say “of course” because this is what Paxton and his party do.

Levine, U.S. assistant secretary of Health and Human Services, is transgender. Last week she was named one of USA Today’s women of the year.

Between his coffee and his OJ, this caused Paxton to flex the same Twitter finger that would scratch Donald Trump’s itch.

“Rachel Levine is a man,” Paxton tweeted.

This is what stands for leadership in today’s Texas Republican Party.

Nice tweet. It’s sort of like, say, in 1947, a dismayed reader finding Jackie Robinson’s picture on the sports page and sending the clip to the editor with the words, “This man’s skin is a swim in melanin.”

Yes, once upon a time, dignifying a person born with that pigment was something the dignified did not do, especially in the South.

Things changed, and whole industries of indignation sprouted forth when “they” made headlines with their marches and alarming orators.

The voice of the oppressor could be heard as well – loudly and clearly, his path lit by wooden crosses.

And don’t you know politicians lent an ear. Or what’s a Southern Strategy for?

What’s this got to do with Rachel Levine and Ken Paxton’s itchy Twitter finger?

It has to do with the Republican Party playbook and the success it has had in making “others” objects of fear, derision and wedge politics.

One thing about the GOP playbook is that it’s a loose-leaf binder. The party itself might be narrow, but inside is ample room for “others” to use as wedge concerns.

There were brown people who didn’t speak “our language.” There were black “welfare mothers” driving their Cadillacs. There was the “gay agenda.” There were Muslims plotting “sharia law” for all.

Any strategist will acknowledge a problem when a political playbook grows yellow and weathered. Fortunately for the GOP, the 21st century discovery of transgender people in our midst provides for newly Xeroxed strategies on crisp, white paper.

Did we say “industry of indignation”? To judge by actions in Republican-controlled legislatures, one would think that no greater threat exists than a transgender individual in a bathroom stall.

Of course, it is no threat at all – no more so than the “threat” posed by gay teachers or gay office supervisors, or gay soldiers or sailors or Marines, or governors.

But it certainly makes for fresh wedge politics to appeal to those dismayed by equal treatment of “others.”

And so, a rash of do-something legislation. Bills to keep trans athletes in their place. Measures to treat transitioning as child abuse. And let’s not talk about gender issues in school, though some Republican policy makers can’t stop talking about them.

So there’s little mystery as to why Texas’ attorney general would think a March day is a good day to mock a transgender person.

He’s running for re-election and has a stout opponent in a GOP run-off.

He doesn’t want Republican voters to think about securities fraud allegations or alleged professional misconduct or his role in attempting to overthrow a lawful election.

And they won’t if he can change the subject – say to one woman’s gender

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

From: [OOG News Alerts](#)
Subject: Morning News Clips 4.4.22
Date: Monday, April 4, 2022 8:33:16 AM
Attachments: [Morning News Clips 4.4.22.pdf](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

Morning News Clips 4/4/2022

- [Texas Take](#)

- [Texas Tribune: The Brief](#)

- [Politico Playbook](#)

Greg Abbott News

Austin American Statesman – Nusaiba Mizan: [Fact-Check: Does The Texas Grid Have 15% More Power Generation Capacity Than Last Year? \[Web\]](#)

Dallas Morning News – Gromer Jeffers Jr.: [Are The 2022 Midterm Elections A Lost Cause For Texas Democrats? \[Web\]](#)

State News

Axios – Tasha Tsiaperas: [Women Are Underrepresented In Texas City Offices \[Web\]](#)

Texas Tribune – Alexa Ura: [Texas Is Quietly Using Redistricting Lawsuits To Launch A Broader War Against Federal Voting Rights Law \[Web\]](#)

Dallas Morning News – Maggie Prosser: [‘Not In Our Dallas.’ Protesters Rally Against Alleged LGBT Discrimination At Dallas Arboretum \[Web\]](#)

Education

San Antonio Express News – Eric Killelea: [UTSA Sharpens Research Focus On Space Exploration, Seeks Out SpaceX \[Web\]](#)

Houston Chronicle – Juhi Varma: [Fort Bend ISD Announces District Wide Rollout Of UV-C Disinfection Devices \[Web\]](#)

Business/Economy

-
Houston Chronicle – Chris Tomlinson: [Financial Technology Company Hopes To Boost Small Business Loans](#) [Web]

-
Immigration/Border Security

-
Texas Tribune – Jolie McCullough: [Texas' Border Operation Is Meant To Stop Cartels And Smugglers. More Often, It Arrests Migrants For Misdemeanor Trespassing.](#) [Web]

Criminal Justice

-
KWTX – Juan A. Lozano: [Lawyers Hope New Evidence Can Stop Execution Of Texas Woman Accused Of Killing Daughter](#) [Web]

Houston Chronicle – Nicole Hensley: [4 Men Accused In Harris County Law Enforcement Deaths Expected In Court](#) [Web]

National News

-
Bloomberg – Giles Turner and Craig Trudell: [Elon Musk Takes 9.2% Stake In Twitter After Hinting At Shake-Up](#) [Web]

Opinion/Editorial

-
San Antonio Report – Robert Rivard: [American Reboot: Will Hurd's Call For A 'Return To Normal' As He Considers A Presidential Run](#) [Web]

Texas Tribune – Ross Ramsey: [Analysis: In Texas Elections In 2022, Economic Concerns Loom](#) [Web]

Dallas Morning News – [Have College Credits But No Degree Or Credential? Here's How Texas Hopes To Help](#) [Web]

-

#

Greg Abbott News

Fact-Check: Does The Texas Grid Have 15% More Power Generation Capacity Than Last Year?

By Nusaiba Mizan

Austin American Statesman

As temperatures dropped in early February and Texans braced for severe winter weather, state officials assured the public the power grid was better prepared to handle freezing temperatures compared to 2020.

In a Feb. 3 news conference, Gov. Greg Abbott listed the reasons why he believed Texans should have confidence in the grid: "As compared to last year, Texas has about 15% more power generation capacity."

Seasonal data from grid operator Electric Reliability Council of Texas indicates available generation capacity is at 85,000 megawatts for winter 2021-2022, up from 83,000 megawatts in winter 2020-2021.

That comes out to be a 2% increase. So where did Abbott get 15%?

Abbott referred to installed capacity

Abbott's office referred PolitiFact Texas to the Texas Public Utility Commission, which oversees ERCOT.

According to ERCOT and PUC officials, the 15% cited by Abbott describes an increase in total installed capacity from 102,874 megawatts in winter 2020 to 118,257 megawatts in winter 2021.

Total installed capacity refers to the maximum amount of power that can be generated under ideal conditions.

"That's just if everything we had on the grid was operating at its full output. That's what it could make," said Joshua Rhodes, research associate at the University of Texas at Austin Energy Institute and Webber Energy Group.

However, at any given time, the grid isn't producing at 100% potential, experts told PolitiFact Texas. For example, the sun isn't always shining for solar energy, or the wind isn't always

blowing for wind energy, Doug Lewin, energy consultant and president of Stoic Energy Consulting, said as example.

"It's sort of more of a theoretical potential," Lewin said.

"There is no resource that has a 100% operational capacity," Lewin said. "That does not exist, but generally thermal plants have a higher operational capacity. But when you start to put together enough wind and solar, and they're spread out across a broad enough geographic area, their overall capacity factors or operational capacity increases."

Rhodes also said a lot of the capacity added in the last year included wind and solar, which would not operate at 100% capacity all the time.

"We don't expect all the wind and all the solar to be available during a winter peak event," Rhodes said.

ERCOT officials said in February that the grid has a total generating capacity at about 86,000 megawatts if needed, the American-Statesman reported then.

Access the digital replica of USA TODAY and more than 200 local newspapers with your subscription.

The value Abbott cited described what the grid is capable of creating, though the amount of available power might be less than total installed capacity.

"I don't think there's anything wrong with saying we added a whole lot of capacity in the last year," Lewin said.

Aidan Tuohy, program manager of Grid Operations and Planning at the research and development firm Electric Power Research Institute, said resource adequacy assessments have processes to account for wind patterns and sunlight in its seasonal estimates.

"One, that let's say ERCOT used, they look at historical performance and then take either an average during stressful conditions, or some other statistical measure during stressful conditions," Tuohy said. "And then another way to do that is to actually simulate operations. For example, in California, they simulate a thousand different patterns of generator outages and wind and solar patterns based on historical data and then try to come up with what the expected observed load will be."

ERCOT included risk assessments for thermal resources based on historical information, Tuohy also noted.

Our ruling

As Texas braced for the effects of cold weather, Abbott assured Texans: "Compared to last year, Texas has about 15% more power generation capacity."

Experts say Abbott was referring to the total installed capacity if power generation infrastructure were running at 100% capacity. However, that is a theoretical figure. Instead, stations generate at a fraction of the total installed capacity. The amount of available power in an emergency situation would be less than the installed capacity.

We rate this as Mostly True.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Are The 2022 Midterm Elections A Lost Cause For Texas Democrats?

By Gromer Jeffers Jr.

Dallas Morning News

Texas Democrats had hoped that the 2022 elections would usher in a new era of Lone Star politics. They fancied winning their first statewide contest since 1994, particularly upending a supposedly weakened Attorney General Ken Paxton. Maybe Beto O'Rourke could upset Republican incumbent Greg Abbott for governor.

Instead of a sweet dream, 2022 will likely be a horror story for Democrats, who still have a structural disadvantage against Republicans in Texas and are hindered by a tough national climate and the unpopularity of President Joe Biden.

Democrats must question whether November's statewide contests are a lost cause.

"If Biden doesn't recover to some extent, it doesn't matter what any candidate in Texas does," said Democratic strategist Harold Cook. "They can run perfect campaigns, well-funded campaigns. None of that will matter. They're going to get creamed."

Though they haven't controlled Texas politics in nearly three decades, Democrats have closed the gap with Republicans since 2014, when Abbott won his first term by beating former state Sen. Wendy Davis by 20 percentage points.

The watershed year was 2018, when O'Rourke, a former congressman from El Paso, came within 2.6 percentage points of beating incumbent Republican U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz. Democrats gained 12 seats in the Texas House. Lizzie Fletcher of Houston and Colin Allred of Dallas wrestled two congressional seats from Republicans.

Texas, a GOP stronghold, was suddenly considered a battleground that was trending purple. But Republicans rebounded in 2020 by holding both chambers of the Legislature. Donald Trump beat Joe Biden by about 5 percentage points.

The disappointing 2020 elections put the 2022 contests, when the state's top leadership posts are up for grabs, into the familiar gloomy outlook for Democrats.

Now the situation is worse.

Not only are Democrats fighting Texas Republicans, but they are trying to avoid being stifled by their national brothers and sisters. Right now, Biden is a millstone around the neck of local party officials. His unpopularity assures a strong GOP turnout, which will propel Republicans such as Abbott.

If Paxton gets past Land Commissioner George P. Bush in the GOP primary runoff, he'll be favored against the winner of the Democratic race for attorney general between former ACLU lawyer Rochelle Garza and former Galveston Mayor Joe Jaworski. That would be especially

galling for Democrats, since Paxton is saddled with legal problems, including an FBI investigation into public corruption allegations.

Nationally and locally, Democrats have been slow to figure out the issue of parental control in schools, and culture war topics are setting them back as well, even as they make principled stands for transgender residents and immigration reform. Republicans view prohibiting transgender girls and women from participating in women's sports and investigating medical procedures offered to transgender kids as winning political issues. Border security and a tough approach on illegal immigration have long been a GOP staple issue.

The national noise about environmental policies like the Green New Deal are non-starters here, but popular attack lines for Republicans. Abbott is getting traction by telling residents he's fighting to stop socialism.

More troubling is the inability of Biden and national Democrats to sell voters on their accomplishments, including legislation that helped bring the nation through the worst of the pandemic and a bipartisan infrastructure bill.

Texas Democrats sustain the national criticism, but don't enjoy the victories.

"I have seldom been more pessimistic about national Democrats. I think they've been terrible," Cook said. "When they have a win, it's like they want to keep it a secret. They have accomplished some real stuff in the last two years and nobody knows about it."

Despite the odds, Democrats won't quit. But they have to make adjustments to get in position to pull off an upset.

Because Democrats enjoy advantages in the growing urban areas and are competitive in the suburbs, Democrats have what is described in boxing as a puncher's chance. One big shot could change the fight.

But party operatives must do the hard work of registering voters and turning them out in November. It's almost too late for such an effort, but it's necessary because there are more Republicans in the Texas electorate than Democrats.

To inspire voters, Democrats have to deliver a compelling and clear message, something that's been elusive since 2018.

It's unlikely that any of it will work.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

State News

-

Women Are Underrepresented In Texas City Offices

By Tasha Tsiaperas

Axios

Texas women are underrepresented in city offices compared to the rest of the country, new

data show.

Why it matters: Half of Texans are women, except women only hold 29% of municipal offices in the state, according to data collected by the Center for American Women and Politics.

Women make up just 27% of the state legislature.

Yes, but: Texas rose two ranks to 34th in the country this year. So there's that.

The intrigue: Only one woman — Texas railroad commissioner Christi Craddick — holds a statewide office.

Zoom in: Fort Worth is the third most populous U.S. city with a female mayor behind Chicago and Phoenix.

Mattie Parker last year succeeded her former boss, Betsy Price, who was mayor for a decade.

Zoom out: Non-continental U.S. states Hawaii and Alaska rank the highest in the percentage of women in municipal government — 50% and 48%, respectively.

Colorado ranks third.

Mississippi is the only state in which less than 20% of municipal offices are held by women.

-
[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Texas Is Quietly Using Redistricting Lawsuits To Launch A Broader War Against Federal Voting Rights Law

By Alexa Ura
Texas Tribune

Beyond the immediate legal fight over whether Texas lawmakers again discriminated against voters of color when drawing new political districts, a quieter war is being waged that could dramatically constrict voting rights protections nationwide for years to come.

For decades, redistricting in Texas has tracked a familiar rhythm — new maps are followed by claims of discrimination and lawsuits asking federal courts to step in. Over the years, Texas lawmakers have repeatedly been ordered to correct gerrymandering that suppressed the political power of Black and Hispanic voters.

The pathway to federal court has been through the Voting Rights Act. Key portions of the landmark law have been weakened in the last decade, but Texans of color still find a way to file lawsuits under its Section 2, which prohibits discriminatory voting procedures and practices that deny voters of color an equal opportunity to participate in elections.

Those protections are the vehicle being used by voters and various civil rights groups to challenge political maps for Congress and the state legislature drawn by Texas Republicans in 2021 to account for population growth. In what promises to be a protracted court fight, Texas will defend itself against accusations that it discriminated — in some cases intentionally — against voters of color.

But tucked into the legal briefs the state has filed with a three-judge panel considering the redistricting lawsuits are two arguments that reach far beyond the validity of the specific maps being challenged.

First, the Texas attorney general's office is arguing that private individuals — like the average voters and civil rights groups now suing the state — don't have standing to bring lawsuits under Section 2. That would leave only the U.S. Department of Justice to pursue alleged violations of the act, putting enforcement in the hands of the political party in power.

Second, the state argues that Section 2 does not apply to redistricting issues at all.

Should either argument prevail — which would almost certainly require it to be embraced by a conservative U.S. Supreme Court that has already struck down other portions of the law — the courthouse door will be slammed shut on many future lawsuits over discriminatory map-drawing and voting practices.

“Fundamentally, this Supreme Court thinks we are past the time in which we need the Voting Rights Act, so of course if you're a state like Texas, you're going to bring every argument that's ever been made to challenge the constitutionality of the rest of it,” said Franita Tolson, a vice dean and law professor at the University of Southern California Gould School of Law.

For now, the Texas redistricting fight is in the hands of a three-judge panel in El Paso. An assembly of individual voters, organizations that serve Texans of color and the U.S. Department of Justice is challenging the redrawn maps, claiming they illegally diminish the voting strength of voters of color while giving white voters more political power.

The case won't go to trial until the fall, but the panel has already recognized Texas' attempt to steer voting rights law onto new terrain.

The state's challenges to Section 2 first surfaced in its failed efforts to convince the court to throw out the lawsuits without even considering the merits of the challengers' claims. The panel — made up of one Democratic and two Republican appointees — rejected the argument on standing, deeming it “ambitious” for a court to agree with the state in light of “precedent and history.”

“Absent contrary direction from a higher court, we decline to break new ground on this particular issue,” the court said in December.

State lawyers themselves have acknowledged their second argument on whether Section 2 applies to redistricting is “currently foreclosed by precedent.”

But in consequent filings, the state has been clear it is inserting the arguments into the case to lay the groundwork for appeals and possible consideration by the Supreme Court — where, experts in voting law and civil rights advocates say, the state may find a more receptive audience.

The attorney general's office did not respond to a request for an interview with a member of the legal team on the case. In its briefs, the state argues the Supreme Court has never actually decided whether Section 2 gives private individuals “implied” standing to sue, quoting from a recent opinion by conservative appointees to the court that describes the issue as “an open

question.”

The state’s claim that Section 2 does not apply to redistricting was initially contained within a footnote but remains brief, pointing to equally brief statements by conservative appointees to the court.

Since its enactment in 1965, the Voting Rights Act has proven a powerful stopgap to the state’s attempted discrimination against its own residents. Texas has not made it through a single decade without a federal court ruling it violated federal law by illegally discriminating against voters of color in some fashion.

For much of that time, the legal fights took place under a process known as preclearance; Texas and other states with a history of discrimination were required to get federal approval for new districts. That put the burden on the state to prove that its redistricting work did not set back voters of color — a test which the state repeatedly failed.

Noting that conditions for voters of color had "dramatically improved," the Supreme Court dismantled the preclearance regime in a 2013 decision. As part of its reasoning, the court pointed out that Section 2 would continue to stand as a bulwark against voter suppression.

But the high court has subsequently weakened what remains of the Voting Rights Act, including a decision in Texas’ last redistricting cycle granting state lawmakers a high presumption of acting in “good faith” when enacting new maps — which legal experts have argued makes it harder to convince the courts of violations.

The turnover at the Supreme Court has cracked the door for “audacious attacks on Section 2,” that would have “never had a chance” under previous iterations of the court, said Rick Hasen, a law professor at the University of California, Irvine who specializes in voting law. Texas is trying to push the door wide open.

In legal briefs, Texas’ argument that Section 2 does not apply to redistricting relies almost exclusively on a series of comments in opinions by Justice Clarence Thomas, who has plainly endorsed the idea in cases dating back to 1994. Justice Neil Gorsuch, a Trump appointee who joined the court in 2017, echoed the view in one of Thomas’ recent opinions.

In a recent case over Arizona voting laws, Thomas and Gorsuch also joined an opinion indicating they agreed with the argument Texas is offering now that private individuals cannot sue to enforce the Voting Rights Act.

The fallout if the Supreme Court agreed with the state on either argument would be radical, upending long established procedures for litigating claims of discrimination in voting and redistricting, and making it harder to enforce what has endured as the chief federal protection for voters of color in a post-preclearance world.

Covering its bets, the state is also pressing a backup argument — that even if individual voters are allowed to sue under Section 2, organizations that serve voters of color cannot bring claims on their behalf. That could knock out of the box groups like the NAACP and LULAC who may have more resources and membership across the state to prop up the complex challenges.

If affirmed by the court, that prospect would put even more pressure on private individuals to

protect themselves from alleged discrimination by the state, said Noor Taj, a lawyer with the Southern Coalition for Social Justice who is representing various civil rights and community groups that serve Texans of color, particularly Asian Texans, in a lawsuit against the maps.

“It’s either taking their rights altogether or increasing the burden,” Taj said. “Both ends of that are problematic and incorrect.”

If the high court ultimately decides redistricting lawsuits simply aren’t allowed under Section 2, the recourse left for Texans of color to challenge political maps would be litigation under the U.S. Constitution’s broader promise of equal protection.

That would require challengers to show lawmakers intentionally discriminated against them — “which is the hardest case to win, particularly before a Supreme Court,” said Nina Perales, the vice president of litigation at the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

The state’s efforts to overturn protections for voters of color is ironic given its long history of violating the same law it is now looking to gut, said Perales, who is suing the state over its latest maps on behalf of a group of individual voters and organizations that represent Latinos.

“Since the beginning of the modern era of decennial redistricting, Texas has been found liable for violating the voting rights of Latinos in every single cycle,” Perales said.

The more “aggressive attacks” on Section 2 have come as it’s getting harder for Republicans to comply with the law while preserving their power, Hasen said.

In the first decade freed from preclearance, the Republican-controlled Legislature last year used the redistricting process to draw maps that solidified the GOP’s political dominance in Texas while weakening the influence of voters of color.

To that end, Republicans looked beyond packing voters of color into the fewest number of districts, taking an almost surgical approach to slicing up diverse suburban communities that were trending against them. Voters of color in those areas were left stranded in sprawling districts that stretch into more rural areas where majority white electorates will overpower their votes.

The Supreme Court’s recent posture on voting rights “has emboldened states like Texas to do what they think they can do to enhance the power of white Republicans in the state of Texas and roll the dice in front of a much more favorable judiciary than they faced a decade ago,” Hasen said.

Republican lawmakers defended their map-drawing, arguing districts were reconfigured to equalize population while following various traditional guidelines, such as preserving political subdivisions, communities of interest and geographic compactness. One of the chief map-drawers characterized the drawing as a “race-blind” exercise with maps later presented to legal counsel who cleared them as compliant with the Voting Rights Act.

But the redistricting sprint — under complete Republican control — drew complaints for being rushed and closed off. Throughout the process, the public was limited in its ability to weigh in on the new maps. Some public hearings were carried out within days of new maps being revealed or with just a 24-hour notice. Much of the feedback from Texans who told

lawmakers their maps were not reflective of their communities was ignored.

In committees and on the House and Senate floors, the fate of the GOP's drafting often appeared to be predetermined, sure to advance even before the public or Democratic lawmakers had been heard.

The state's current effort to now undermine protections for voters of color is an extension of its pattern of manipulating the rules at the expense of voters of color it has historically discriminated against, said Tarrant County Commissioner Roy Brooks.

Brooks is among the plaintiffs in the lawsuits over the new maps who would be unable to sue the state under the scenario Texas is looking to cement in challenging the Voting Rights Act.

"It very clearly demonstrates that those in power are determined to hold onto it by any means necessary," Brooks said. "If that means trampling on the rights of Black and Hispanic voters, then they are more than willing to do that again and again and again."

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

'Not In Our Dallas.' Protesters Rally Against Alleged LGBT Discrimination At Dallas Arboretum

By Maggie Prosser

Dallas Morning News

About 20 activists and allies gathered outside the gates of the Dallas Arboretum on Sunday afternoon to protest the firing of an LGBT employee and claims that their termination is illustrative of a culture of discrimination within the institution.

Next to the gardens' bustling entrance on Garland Road, the group held up signs and gay pride flags in response to recent allegations detailed in a discrimination complaint filed by the former employee.

It was the group's second action outside the arboretum. On March 19, about 40 people protested at the same corner demanding institutional change, according to organizer Steve Atkinson.

"There are problems here that need to be fixed," Atkinson said as cars and passersby blasted their horns and cheered in a show of support. "It's just not OK, and we're not going to stop this until it's fixed. ... Not in our Dallas."

The discrimination complaint was filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the city of Dallas' Fair Housing Office in November. Shelly Skeen, a lawyer with Lambda Legal representing the former employee, said Sunday the complaint was currently in the "investigation" phase.

The complaint says the former employee, who is genderqueer and uses she and they pronouns, was terminated after dissent by management about their use of gender-expansive pronouns. The former employee was told not to put their pronouns in their email signature, wear pins that read "they/ellos" and "she/ella," or introduce themselves internally with their pronouns, they previously told The Dallas Morning News.

The former employee previously agreed to speak with The News on the condition of anonymity because they have not told their family about their gender identity. They were ultimately fired following a meeting where managers said “the Arboretum is a ‘conservative institution,’ that donors had complained about employees’ use of pronoun pins, and that the Arboretum could ‘not promote an agenda,’” the complaint says.

“People are allowed to be who they are and not have to hide who they are,” demonstrator Nadia Haghighatian said while holding a sign that read, “We are all flowers from the same garden.”

“Your name, your identity is a fundamental part of every person and no one should feel ashamed or oppressed for just being themselves,” she said.

Haghighatian, 35, and Evren Yurchak, 35, said they live in the neighborhood and have been members of the arboretum for at least four years and were saddened to hear about the allegations.

Institutions “think they can walk all over people who are gender nonconforming or trans because there’s not a lot of voices out or because they don’t think they are valid,” Yurchak said. “We get laughed at, we get ridiculed, and we’ve had enough.”

Many of the protesters championed change. Robert Emery, 62, and Patti Fink, 60, called for “meaningful” efforts, including comprehensive diversity and inclusion training for staff and acknowledgment by arboretum leadership of malpractice.

“We love living in Dallas — Dallas is a bighearted, openhearted, progressive city. So what the heck is this?” Emery said of the discrimination charge.

He added, “We’re not fighting against the arboretum. We’re fighting for the arboretum to be the beautiful place we know it can be, inside and out.”

A spokeswoman for the arboretum declined to comment on the demonstration.

The arboretum — located on 66 acres of city-owned land on the southeastern shore of White Rock Lake — is managed by the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Society and is funded largely by donations and admission fees. The News is a sponsor of the gardens.

The arboretum receives a sliver of its funding from taxpayers — less than 2% — as well as a stipend from the city and support from the city’s Park and Recreation Department. More than 1 million people visited the gardens in 2021.

The arboretum’s operational agreement with the city includes a nondiscrimination clause that says the arboretum cannot discriminate against any employee based on a slew of characteristics, including “sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.”

Dallas’ city charter also protects against discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, Skeen previously told The News.

“I love the arboretum. ... It is a jewel of our city. But they must live under the same laws that

the rest of us live under,” Emery said.

Atkinson said the group plans to continue picketing outside the gardens’ gates until substantive change is achieved. A date for the next demonstration has not yet been set.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Education

-

UTSA Sharpens Research Focus On Space Exploration, Seeks Out SpaceX

By Eric Killelea

San Antonio Express News

Aaron Morrison wants to know if moon settlers in the near future can use rocks that litter the lunar surface to build a base camp, roads, and landing and launch pads.

The postdoctoral fellow in earth and planetary sciences at the University of Texas at San Antonio is studying gray, volcanic basalt, which is similar to rocks found on the moon. Among other things, he wants to know how much heat it would take to melt them.

His aim is to learn “how we could use those as construction materials,” said Morrison, 29, who tests basaltic rocks at the university’s NASA MIRO Center for Advanced Measurements in Extreme Environments.

Located on the university’s main campus on the Northwest Side, the center — known as CAMEE — was developed with a \$3 million grant from NASA in 2019.

The space agency is looking to return astronauts to the moon in 2025 for the first time since the Apollo 17 mission half a century ago — through its Artemis program — and to eventually establish a lunar settlement. And it’s drawing on an army of outside experts.

UTSA is one of the higher-education institutions that NASA and other federal agencies are turning to for assistance. Since 2015, the university has won 10 research grants worth a total of \$3.89 million to help advance NASA programs.

That’s a sliver of the research grants UTSA receives from the federal government. The university reported \$34.3 million in federal grants in 2020 and \$34.5 million the year before.

Still, UTSA had no NASA funding a decade ago.

CAMEE has received two of the awards for work tied to the Artemis program.

“This is undeniably cool, what we’re doing,” said Morrison, whose research is funded by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, an arm of the Defense Department, not NASA. “This is our generation’s Apollo. I am intimately involved in that process that has implications for humanity and moving forward as a species.”

NASA is relying on the private sector more than ever for space exploration. For the next moonshot, NASA selected Elon Musk’s SpaceX to build the first commercial lander.

The close public-private collaboration has convinced UTSA to begin reaching out to SpaceX in hopes that the new neighbor — it's developing the Starship vehicle in South Texas — will support academic research and open doors for students seeking internships and jobs.

Morrison said the fact that NASA, SpaceX and a host of other government and industry partners are heading back to the moon "is definitely a motivator" for CAMEE researchers.

Hello, SpaceX

The center pulls together dozens of academics from several departments to research a broad range of issues, including polar ice and ocean warming, hurricanes, forest fires and droughts. They also investigate how NASA space vehicles traveling at hypersonic speeds would fare when re-entering Earth's atmosphere.

"The knowledge that we gain from these extreme events is what we could use later on in space problems," said CAMEE director Kiran Bhaganagar, a professor of mechanical engineering at UTSA. "Everything in space is uncertain, but we'll have this knowledge. Eventually, our goal, our vision, our dream is to expand to answer questions in space."

In recent months, CAMEE requested \$2 million in NASA grants to continue research for the Artemis program — named after the goddess of the hunt and twin sister of Apollo in Greek mythology.

While awaiting NASA's funding decision, Bhaganagar has been trying to make connections with SpaceX, which is building the Starship spacecraft and Super Heavy rocket at its Starbase space port in Boca Chica, near Brownsville.

So far, she's had no luck making contact with Musk's privately held company. But she's hopeful SpaceX will see the benefits of partnering with her team.

"The time has come," she said. "I'm very confident our research can help them. We have a common vision."

For years, NASA has recruited UTSA students in its search for technical talent. At least 30 UTSA students or alumni are currently interning or holding jobs at the agency.

As part of the CAMEE funding, NASA offers summer internships to researchers at the Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California and the Langley Research Center in Virginia.

Academics hunger to see their research applied to solve problems on Earth — and in space. That is why Bhaganagar said she's excited about SpaceX's ability to set aggressive, far-reaching goals — namely, developing Starship, returning astronauts to the moon and eventually landing them on Mars — and to move fast.

"The advantage of the fast-paced private industry is that they're putting the technology out there, so now the university is trying to figure out the science behind it," Bhaganagar said.

Dr. Kiran Bhaganagar, a professor of mechanical engineering at UTSA, is the director of the school's Center for Advanced Measurements in Extreme Environments program. She works

with students from several departments to research a broad range of issues, including polar ice and ocean warming, hurricanes, forest fires and droughts.

Dr. Kiran Bhaganagar, a professor of mechanical engineering at UTSA, is the director of the school's Center for Advanced Measurements in Extreme Environments program. She works with students from several departments to research a broad range of issues, including polar ice and ocean warming, hurricanes, forest fires and droughts.

Sam Owens, Staff Photographer / San Antonio Express-News

After the last Apollo moon landing, in 1972, NASA spent three decades building space shuttles and the International Space Station, while relying on robots to explore Mars and deep space.

But there's been a renewed push for human space exploration in recent years, thanks in part to Musk's efforts to spark interest in building a human settlement on Mars.

The Trump administration directed NASA to get to the moon by 2024, but Congress didn't come up with enough funding for the bullish goal.

President Joe Biden also wants to deliver astronauts to the moon and beyond.

Last week, he requested \$26 billion for NASA's 2023 budget, including \$7.5 billion for space exploration that would help the Artemis program reach the moon in 2025. NASA also wants to return astronauts to the lunar surface once a year throughout the following decade and send humans to Mars by 2040.

The White House budget request includes \$1.5 billion for commercially owned and operated human landing systems that would lower astronauts onto the moon. After selecting SpaceX for the lunar mission in 2021, NASA announced last week that SpaceX and a yet-to-be-selected company would develop landers that could be used for subsequent missions.

"It's the largest request for science in NASA history," agency administrator Bill Nelson said during his recent State of NASA address. "But greater than any number or statistic or fact is what this budget request represents. It's a signal of support of our missions in a new era of exploration and discovery."

Of course, Congress will decide how much the space agency will receive for its big plans.

Back at CAMEE, San Antonio native Iyare Oseghae, 23, is researching hyperspectral imaging. Think about a drone flying over the moon's surface and sending images to computers showing how objects look in ultraviolet and infrared wavelengths.

"It's basically your eyes before you make a touchdown onto planetary bodies," he said.

Oseghae believes his research could help NASA and SpaceX on future missions to Mars.

He's interned for NASA twice. For one of his projects, at the Ames Research Center in Silicon Valley, he studied the roughness of lava flows on Mars.

"That project had implications for someday having a Mars habitat," he said. "You use remote sensing to study the landscape and determine which areas would be possibly good for a

landing spot and which areas are made of this type of rock that could be used to make housing and structures.”

Bhaganagar, the CAMEE director, said she’s “very optimistic” that NASA will approve the requested renewal grant to carry on with Artemis-related research.

If UTSA wins the renewal, some of the NASA funding also could go toward building a lunar test facility in San Antonio — a site that mimics the moon’s environment. CAMEE has completed enough related research over the last three years, Bhaganagar said, to pursue donors and additional federal funding needed to build the site.

“We hope that NASA and SpaceX could use the facility,” she said.

The lunar facility is in the preplanning stage. Bhaganagar said CAMEE is talking with Port San Antonio about possibly housing it on the 1,900-acre campus on the Southwest Side.

A Port San Antonio spokesperson confirmed ongoing discussions with UTSA “to explore ways in which we could host such an endeavor.”

Bhaganagar said San Antonio “is an exhilarating city” where CAMEE has garnered a lot of support from the public and private sectors. She hopes the rush of interest in space exploration leads to more funding and more options for student internships and jobs for graduates.

In addition to NASA funding, CAMEE has received grants from the Air Force and the National Science Foundation.

“It’s a good time for us to leverage,” she said. “We have a good edge of moving from extreme events to space.”

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Fort Bend ISD Announces District Wide Rollout Of UV-C Disinfection Devices

By Juhi Varma

Houston Chronicle

All Fort Bend Independent School District buildings are equipped with UV-C disinfection devices, the district announced on Thursday.

Working in partnership with bio-safety technology company R-Zero, the Fort Bend ISD has installed 135 Arc UV-C systems across its 82 campuses and 20 additional support facilities in the district. These sustainable devices were purchased with funds from the 2021-22 COVID-19 School Health Support Grant.

“R-Zero’s Arc will enhance our existing disinfection processes and adds another measure to keep our students and staff safe,” said Fort Bend ISD Superintendent Christie Whitbeck. “We purchased three Arcs per high school, two per middle school, one per elementary school and one per administrative building so we could disinfect each room, every day.”

The Arc units are portable and will be wheeled from classroom to classroom where they will run for about seven minutes. The UV-C technology inactivates bacteria, viruses, fungi and

mold. The R-Zero Arc can destroy more than 99.99 percent of microorganisms in a 1,000 square-foot space in about seven minutes, according to the R-Zero website. The devices should only be used in unoccupied rooms.

In January, the district's 78,000 students and 12,000 staff members returned to their classrooms for in-person instruction.

Fort Bend ISD, like many other school districts, is experiencing a shortage of custodians at a time when extra cleaning is required to stop the spread of COVID-19, said Damian Viltz, executive director of facilities and maintenance at FBISD.

"There are challenges faced by our district due to the pandemic such as staffing shortages," said Viltz. "And that's further complicated by the fact that there are now higher cleaning expectations from our staff. So, to make our staff and parents feel comfortable about returning, we decided to purchase the Arc units, so that we could clean and disinfect our classrooms."

The Arc units have been welcomed by the custodial staff who appreciate not being exposed to harmful cleaning chemicals, Viltz said.

"Two years ago, R-Zero was founded with the intent to make indoor spaces healthy for students," said Deena Morgan, vice president at R-Zero. "Schools were our key vertical in order to make sure they were able to return to learning as they were before the pandemic."

The data-driven technology behind R-Zero will allow administrators, parents, and teachers to see which classrooms have been disinfected at what time, Morgan said.

The UV-C technology has been used since 1910 in wastewater treatment, and since the 1920's and 30's for air and surface disinfection.

R-Zero has delivered almost 2,000 units to school districts across the country, Morgan said.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Business/Economy

-

Financial Technology Company Hopes To Boost Small Business Loans

By Chris Tomlinson

Houston Chronicle

Making loans to small and medium-sized businesses has been hard for community banks since the Great Recession, a consequence of tighter regulations designed to prevent another financial crisis, and it is stymying aspiring entrepreneurs.

A new Texas-based financial technology firm, though, wants to make it easier for community banks to approve loans for local businesses. Collateral Edge partners with banks by offering an easy-to-use tool that boosts their income while ensuring companies get the capital they need.

"We allow the bank on the edge to basically find a way to say yes," Joe Beard, the start-up's

co-founder and CEO, told me on the sidelines of the SXSW Interactive Technology Conference in Austin. “The way that we do that is we will provide collateral coverage.”

When business owners apply for a loan, they typically have a plan for how to use every penny. Many times, though, when the loan officer plugs the numbers into their underwriting system, the borrower doesn’t meet the criteria to get what they need for their plan.

Maybe they’re a new business without a track record, or the entrepreneur doesn’t have enough personal assets.

The problem has gotten worse since the Great Recession of 2008. Congress passed the Dodd-Frank Act to tighten lending standards to avoid another crisis caused by sub-prime borrowers.

Small commercial and industrial loans have fallen by more than 9 percent at large banks and by even more at smaller banks, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research, a federal agency. Since businesses are built on loans and lines of credit, Dodd-Frank has hurt local economies.

“These financial reform acts have significantly contributed to increasing the fixed costs of starting firms, thereby slowing the pace of business formation in the U.S.,” the NBER study concluded.

Small and medium-sized businesses have resorted to other sources of capital, such as non-bank lenders that charge high-interest rates and fees. Community banks, which make significant revenue on small business loans, also suffer because they attract fewer business customers, who also open checking accounts and pay fees for other services.

Beard noticed the problem while working for Perot Jain, an early-stage venture capital firm in Dallas, where he led investments in more than 45 companies. As a West Point graduate and African American, Beard also noticed that historically under-represented business people such as minorities, women and veterans struggled the most.

“One of the things that I learned over that time is that if you have a good entrepreneur, with the work ethic, the intelligence, the grit; and if you can help them get efficient access to capital, they’re gonna go change the world,” he said. “They’re gonna hire people. They’re gonna build great products. They’re gonna provide great services, and that’s all a benefit to the community.”

Beard’s team at Collateral Edge developed an algorithm and a computer application that integrates into a bank’s existing workflow for examining and approving business loans. He said his company meets with banks, analyzes their loan criteria and then integrates the app into their system.

If a loan officer is working through the loan and discovers that a borrower does not meet the bank’s criteria for the total amount requested, the officer can click on the app and see if the borrower meets Collateral Edge’s criteria.

Collateral Edge’s cloud computing system uses a proprietary algorithm to make a risk calculation using 60 data points in addition to using financial data from Moody’s rating service. Within seconds, the app lets the loan officer know if Collateral Edge will put up the

extra collateral and the annual fee to secure it.

Banks can pay the fee or pass it on to the borrower. Beard is confident Collateral Edge's algorithm makes the right decision most of the time. The bank then gets to provide the loan and collect interest, while the small business gets to execute its complete plan.

After the first year, the bank can either release the collateral or renew it with another fee. Providing more loans also helps the bank with another federal law. The Community Reinvestment Act requires banks to invest a certain amount in their community.

"Not only can we help this generation of entrepreneurs, but if kids in college right now see an easier, better pathway to access capital, then maybe there is somebody who is contemplating being an entrepreneur, instead of going to be an accountant, and maybe that person gets the confidence to stretch and try to build something amazing," Beard said.

Sometimes all a small business needs is a bit of strategic help. As financial technology becomes more sophisticated, companies like Collateral Edge can make a big difference.

-
[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Immigration/Border Security

Texas' Border Operation Is Meant To Stop Cartels And Smugglers. More Often, It Arrests Migrants For Misdemeanor Trespassing.

By Jolie McCullough
Texas Tribune

For the past year, thousands of Texas National Guard members and state troopers have been sweeping through brush along the Rio Grande and cruising border-town roadways. Their eyes scan the horizon for the cartel operatives and smugglers whom Gov. Greg Abbott vowed to hold at bay when he launched his multibillion-dollar campaign to secure the border.

But more often, the troopers arrest men like Bartolo, a Mexican farmworker who came to the United States looking for work, according to his lawyers. They've also slapped cuffs on asylum-seekers like Gastón, a human rights attorney who said he fled Venezuela after being targeted by the Maduro regime for defending political opponents.

Though they don't fit the specter of the hardened criminals that Abbott conjured when launching his border security initiative, men like Bartolo and Gastón are typical of the thousands arrested under Operation Lone Star, which is intended to combat drug and human smuggling.

In July, four months after the operation started, Abbott announced that, with the permission of landowners, the state for the first time would punish people suspected of illegally crossing the border by arresting them on suspicion of trespassing on private property. The unprecedented "catch-and-jail" system allowed the Republican governor to skirt constitutional restrictions that bar states from enforcing federal immigration law.

The misdemeanor charges quickly became a major piece of the governor's border security

crackdown. While Abbott has publicly focused on arrests of people accused of violence and drug trafficking, an investigation by The Texas Tribune, ProPublica and The Marshall Project found for the first time that trespassing cases represented the largest share of the operation's arrests.

Of the more than 7,200 arrests made by state police over seven months, about 40% involved only charges of trespassing on private property, according to an analysis of Texas Department of Public Safety data by the news organizations. In February, the majority of the border operation's arrests were of people booked solely for trespassing.

Trespassing arrests may help boost statistics for the operation, but they don't deter cartels or gangs, said Victor Manjarrez, a former Border Patrol sector chief. Instead, he said, they hurt people who cross the border on their own, without using smugglers.

"I would rather have people like that spend time away," Manjarrez said, referring to smugglers, "as opposed to someone who was just unlucky and an economic migrant."

Under Abbott's operation, men like Bartolo and Gastón are thrown into state prisons for weeks or months. There they languish in cells where they are given little food and face poor conditions and harsh treatment, detained men and their family members claim. Prison officials deny the accusations.

"As a migrant, I never imagined such a thing," Gastón said in Spanish about his arrest and imprisonment, adding that he fled Venezuela to run away from a regime that was "going to lock you up and deprive you of your liberty."

(The Texas Tribune, ProPublica and The Marshall Project agreed to identify those who were arrested by their first names alone because they fear publicity may affect their pending immigration or criminal cases.)

Last year, at Abbott's urging, Texas lawmakers set aside nearly \$3 billion for border security efforts, including nearly \$24 million to retool state prisons as jails for people rounded up in Operation Lone Star, and more than \$36 million for the related defense attorney, prosecutorial and court costs. Nearly \$250 million was parceled out to DPS to pay for overtime and new troopers to police the border.

Abbott celebrated a year of the massive initiative last month by touting seizures of high levels of fentanyl and more than 11,000 criminal arrests. An investigation by the Tribune, ProPublica and The Marshall Project found that the state's reported success has included both arrests that had nothing to do with the border or immigration and statewide drug seizures by troopers who are not part of the operation.

There is also little evidence that trespassing arrests have lowered the levels of illegal crossings, which remain at record highs along the southern U.S. border, including in the regions heavily targeted by the operation. The governor's office, however, claims his approach deters potential caravans of people seeking entry to the U.S., and he measures success in arrests and drugs seized.

"Arrests and prosecutions both increase public safety and act as a deterrent to other potential

law breakers,” Nan Tolson, an Abbott spokesperson, said in a statement.

Republican state leaders and some local border officials hail the operation as a necessary and tough stance against a continuing rise in illegal immigration. Hunting ranch managers and riverfront property owners said they hoped the arrests would eventually lead to fewer people trudging through their open fields, slashing fences and occasionally stealing or breaking into houses, as some residents have reported to police and media.

“It has turned into a new way of life. You have to go check your fences all the time because illegals are cutting them and you’re going to have livestock getting out,” said Cole Hill, property manager of an 8,000-acre hunting ranch that sits about 30 miles from the Texas-Mexico border in Kinney County, a small, conservative region where the majority of the trespassing arrests have been made. DPS reports obtained by the news organizations show at least a handful of foreign nationals have been arrested and accused of trespassing on Hill’s property and damaging a vehicle.

Eight months of mass arrests in Kinney county, however, doesn’t seem to have had the intended effect of keeping people from crossing the border there.

Chris Olivarez, a DPS lieutenant, said on Twitter last month that the county “continues to see an uptick in illegal immigrants trespassing on private ranches.” Abbott’s office said the mass trespassing arrests secure the border and protect local communities, even though they may not slow immigration. DPS did not respond to questions about the initiative’s effectiveness.

Hill, who hoped the arrest tactic was working when he began seeing fewer people he suspects had just crossed the border on his property at the end of last year, was disillusioned when activity picked up again shortly thereafter.

“I was thinking that Operation Lone Star in general had been slowing some of the traffic, but I think at this point it just seems a perpetual game of cat-and-mouse,” he said last month.

The trespassing arrests have led civil and migrants’ rights groups to level accusations of discriminatory arrest practices and overreach, and the operation has drawn legal challenges and legislative calls for federal investigations. President Joe Biden’s administration has not announced any action in response to the concerns, and constitutional court battles are ongoing. State courts have ruled that the system illegally imprisoned people accused of trespassing by violating due process laws.

Still, the operation is expanding. Though some officials in the most populous border counties called for more humanitarian aid instead of law enforcement when border crossings began climbing last year, the governor’s office has funneled millions in grant dollars to border counties willing to prosecute crimes like trespassing. In recent months, several south Texas counties began facilitating trespassing arrests, with more expected to join.

For men like Bartolo swept up into Texas’ criminal system, the operation’s impact is clear. In most cases, after spending as much as several months locked up with little information about what is happening, they shuffle through prison halls to sit in front of a camera for their virtual introduction to the Texas courts.

With concrete walls behind him, Bartolo stared dully into the camera in December and asked

to be free from the state's grasp, even if it meant he had to plead guilty and be deported. He cast his eyes down to his orange jumpsuit and swallowed hard.

"I've been in 103 days today," he said in Spanish. "I want to get out."

Prison for asylum-seekers

In July, state troopers were given new orders in two border counties where the number of border crossings was sharply increasing: capture anyone suspected of crossing into Texas illegally who can be tied to a state criminal offense.

The mass arrests began in Del Rio, a small border city about 150 miles west of San Antonio. It hadn't been a hot spot for crossings for decades, but immigration authorities in the area encountered more than 300,000 border crossers last year, with crossings spiking to record highs in March and climbing throughout Operation Lone Star. The uptick has overwhelmed local resources and pushed Republicans to ramp up rhetoric against illegal immigration. "President Biden turned our southern border into a porous mess where illegal immigrants wandered across the Rio Grande without anyone there to interdict them," Abbott said last month in a video promoting the anniversary of Operation Lone Star. "I refused to stand by and let our state be overrun by criminals, deadly drugs like fentanyl and victims of human trafficking."

The Biden administration did not respond to questions about Abbott's claims. While Biden has sought to change some immigration policies enacted by former President Donald Trump, the current president has been criticized by members of his own party for continuing others. That includes Title 42, a provision of public health law enacted during the pandemic that allows the federal government to immediately send back the majority of foreign nationals encountered near the border; the rule is expected to remain in effect until May.

But most people returned under Title 42 were sent to Mexico, which only agreed to accept citizens of Central American countries. In Del Rio, many people were coming from countries like Venezuela, Haiti and Cuba and did not face immediate expulsion.

With Del Rio's official port-of-entry bridge closed during the pandemic, many of those seeking entry to the U.S., sometimes hundreds a day, would wade the river and trudge in sweat-soaked clothes toward several gates along a wrought-iron border fence. The men, women and children who knew to approach these gates as entry points into Texas were detained by Border Patrol agents and either processed for asylum claims or quickly returned to Mexico or their home countries.

Under international and U.S. law, people who flee their countries to escape persecution on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinions can apply for asylum, which, if granted, allows them to legally stay in the country.

But many people crossed elsewhere along the river, where Texas troopers waited with orders to arrest and imprison any man who was on private property and not in a family group — and sometimes took men into custody even if they were with relatives. State police were directed under the operation not to arrest women, children or families and instead refer them to Border Patrol. Asylum requests were not considered by the troopers making arrests, Olivarez, with DPS, said in October.

Gastón learned that the hard way.

A longtime defender of political protesters and government opponents in Venezuela, the 57-year-old lawyer said he fled to the United States after he began getting threatening phone calls from police and witnessed his client arrested by Venezuelan military officials during a softball game last summer. President Nicolás Maduro's government and its security forces have been accused by human rights organizations of jailing, torturing and killing political opponents, and last year officials made a high-profile arrest of another human rights defender.

After multiple trips on planes and buses, Gastón arrived in Ciudad Acuña, the Mexican city across the border from Del Rio. At midday on Aug. 8, he waded through the ankle-deep Rio Grande — stopping to help a family nervous to cross the river with their young daughter, he says. He stepped onto an open road in sight of police, which he was later told was on private property.

Calmly, he told officers he was seeking asylum from persecution in his home country. He stared in shock as handcuffs were snapped onto his wrists.

“As a lawyer and defender of human rights, never in my life had I been handcuffed. Never,” Gastón said.

State trooper Serapio Flores wrote in his arrest report that Gastón emerged from the river onto property marked with a “No Trespassing” sign. The owner, like many in the area, had agreed to let DPS make trespassing arrests on the private land. Gastón said he saw no sign.

After a long night on a metal bench in a large tent, quickly erected outside the local jail to process the new swell of arrestees, Gastón was loaded into a van heading to a state prison more than 100 miles away.

The Briscoe Unit, a medium-security prison between Laredo and San Antonio that previously housed Texas felons, had been emptied to serve as a jail for those arrested under Operation Lone Star, mostly for those expected to be charged with trespassing.

In the prison, the detained men sat in cells unsure of when or how they would be able to leave or what would happen to them after they did, they and their families said. Many men and their family members begged for the detained men to be released and deported. Groups gathered nightly to pray.

Gastón said that during his stay in prison he lost 14 pounds and his faith in America's compassion.

“It's a wound that's there, something you will never be able to forget,” he said.

Still, Gastón had it easier than many of those arrested for trespassing. He was picked up in Del Rio's Val Verde County, the birthplace of Abbott's trespassing effort, where a local Democratic prosecutor has since said he would not pursue cases against people seeking asylum under federal laws.

About a month after Gastón's arrest, Val Verde County Attorney David Martinez dropped the charge against him “in the interest of justice,” according to the dismissal document.

Since then, Martinez said he's dismissed or rejected many more — about two-thirds of trespassing charges in his county. He credited his decision to DPS Director Steve McCraw's comments to lawmakers in August. Despite his agency's arrests of numerous asylum-seekers, McCraw told lawmakers that state troopers on the border "were not looking for anyone who's trying to give up, who are looking for asylum."

DPS did not respond to questions about the discrepancy between McCraw's statements and the arrests of asylum-seekers.

The prosecutor dropped other charges linked to questionable arrests, including those of 11 men who said they were marched to private property by authorities. State police and Border Patrol officials have denied the allegation. Another man's case was dropped after Martinez said an officer's body camera footage showed a trooper stepping aside from an open gate to private property, as if inviting the man forward, and then arresting him when he crossed the threshold.

After his release from prison, Gastón was processed by federal immigration authorities in September and eventually released into the United States to await an asylum hearing, which has not been scheduled. The treatment he faced, and which he said others still endure, troubles him not only as an asylum-seeker but also as a human rights lawyer.

"What we are seeing is terrible," he said. "That in the 21st century we are seeing how human beings crossing the river to seek protection from the U.S. government are being criminalized by the Texas governor."

"I want to get out"

With Martinez routinely tossing out state charges against people seeking asylum, trespassing arrests dwindled in Val Verde County before nearly stopping altogether in November, according to the prosecutor and DPS arrest data.

"In counties where there is not a willing local partner, arresting more individuals does no good because the local prosecutor will not prosecute," Tolson, Abbott's spokesperson, said.

Abbott's operation found a more accommodating criminal justice system in the sparsely populated, conservative county next door.

Kinney County is home to about 3,100 Texans spread over nearly 1,400 square miles, about 15 miles of which are on the vast Texas-Mexico border. More than 70% of the county's voters opted for Trump in the 2020 presidential election. Along the main two-lane highway, numerous metal gates are adorned with letters identifying ranches, many offering private exotic game hunting. Aside from the county seat of Brackettville and a railroad ghost town, ranches cover most of the county's plains.

It was here that Bartolo was arrested.

He and five other people suspected of crossing the border were spotted in September by state troopers in the brush of a Kinney County hunting ranch about 10 miles from the international border. If he'd been apprehended by or turned over to Border Patrol, the 27-year-old Mexican looking for work would likely have been immediately deported.

His journey through Kinney County's court system took much more time and taxpayer money than a fast expulsion would have, but it ultimately led to the same result.

Unlike in Del Rio, both the Kinney County judge — who handles county administrative duties and all misdemeanor proceedings — and the lone prosecutor for low-level crimes have publicly supported Operation Lone Star. The county sheriff has said that law enforcement has engaged in high-speed pursuits in human smuggling cases, and some police reports have depicted property damage ostensibly caused by people crossing the border.

“As the County Attorney, the residents of Kinney County are who I work for. Not Austin or Washington, DC,” Brent Smith, the newly elected Republican prosecutor who has no prior experience in criminal law, said in a statement. “The residents of Kinney County have demanded meaningful action in the face of the lawlessness and destruction of private property.”

Though the county supports Abbott's goals, its minuscule court system quickly became and has remained overwhelmed with the massive caseload. Bartolo was one of about 2,500 men arrested in Kinney County on trespassing charges between July and February.

By September, more than 100 men had been kept in prison for weeks without being assigned attorneys, and hundreds more spent more than a month in the lockup without having any charges filed against them. The delays violated state laws meant to protect detainees' due process rights, a state district judge found, and the men were released from prison on no-cost bonds and sent to immigration officials.

The state sent in a slew of defense attorneys, prosecutors and judges to help, but the arrests continue, stranding men in prison for months before they have a chance to go before a judge and enter a plea. Illegal imprisonments are commonplace, defense attorneys said in a court filing last month. They estimated that the lag between an arrest and an initial court date would soon widen from months to a year, the maximum sentence for trespassing in Texas. Kinney County officials, including Smith, have not responded to questions about the claims of prolonged and illegal detentions.

Bartolo first appeared in court through a video camera inside the Briscoe prison in December. He had languished in prison for more than 100 days, unable to pay a \$2,500 bond. At that point, he simply wanted out.

One of his meals that day had largely consisted of raw chicken, he told the judge, and it was one of many times over the last few months when he'd been left hungry. His attorney asked the judge to let Bartolo out without having to put up cash — or at least to lower his bond — while his case wound through the overburdened court.

After listening to the request, newly assigned Judge Allen Amos furrowed his brow. A former county judge whom Kinney County had called in to help from a town about 150 miles north, Amos said he wasn't confident Bartolo would come back to court if there was less money on the line. He found that \$2,500 — which would have to be posted in full because bond companies have not taken on cases linked to border crossings — was “not that much money.”

But there was another way out. If Bartolo pleaded not guilty, Amos said he would push the

man's case along to a hearing more than a month away and possibly set a jury trial further out, all while the farmworker remained in prison. If Bartolo entered a guilty plea, the judge said, "you can possibly get out today, maybe tomorrow."

It had to be Bartolo's decision though, the judge stressed. "I'm not going to twist your arm."

"Well, I want to plead guilty," Bartolo responded in Spanish, quickly adding, "I want to get out."

His last words lost him the plea bargain. His lawyer argued his plea was being coerced since he said "in the same breath" that he wanted to plead guilty to be released, not because he felt he was guilty. (To be found guilty of trespassing under Texas law, a person must have had an indication that they were on private property, like a fence or sign.) After a quick one-on-one conversation with his lawyer, Bartolo came back online and stated flatly he would plead not guilty.

He was sent back into the prison corridors without any indication from authorities of how much longer he would be stuck there.

Nine days later, the legal group representing him raised enough money to post his bond. On Christmas Day, he was released from the prison where he had been held for 111 days and delivered into the hands of immigration officials, his lawyers said.

He was deported the same day.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Criminal Justice

-

Lawyers Hope New Evidence Can Stop Execution Of Texas Woman Accused Of Killing Daughter

By Juan A. Lozano

KWTX

During hours of relentless questioning, Melissa Lucio more than 100 times had denied fatally beating her 2-year-old daughter.

But worn down from a lifetime of abuse and the grief of losing her daughter Mariah, her lawyers say, the Texas woman finally acquiesced to investigators. "I guess I did it," Lucio responded when asked if she was responsible for some of Mariah's injuries.

Her lawyers say that statement was wrongly interpreted by prosecutors as a murder confession — tainting the rest of the investigation into Mariah's 2007 death, with evidence gathered only to prove that conclusion, and helping lead to her capital murder conviction. They contend Mariah died from injuries from a fall down the 14 steps of a steep staircase outside the family's apartment in the South Texas city of Harlingen.

As her April 27 execution date nears, Lucio's lawyers are hopeful that new evidence, along with growing public support — including from jurors who now doubt the conviction and from

more than half the Texas House of Representatives — will persuade the state’s Board of Pardons and Paroles and Gov. Greg Abbott to grant an execution reprieve or commute her sentence.

“Mariah’s death was a tragedy not a murder. ... It would be an absolutely devastating message for this execution to go forward. It would send a message that innocence doesn’t matter,” said Vanessa Potkin, one of Lucio’s attorneys who is with the Innocence Project.

Lucio’s lawyers say jurors never heard forensic evidence that would have explained that Mariah’s various injuries were actually caused by a fall days earlier. They also say Lucio wasn’t allowed to present evidence questioning the validity of her confession.

The Texas Attorney General’s Office maintains evidence shows Mariah suffered the “absolute worst” case of child abuse her emergency room doctor had seen in 30 years.

“Lucio still advances no evidence that is reliable and supportive of her acquittal,” the office wrote in court documents last month.

The Cameron County District Attorney’s Office, which prosecuted Lucio, declined to comment.

Lucio, 53, would be the first Latina executed by Texas and the first woman since 2014. Only 17 women have been executed in the U.S. since the Supreme Court lifted its ban on the death penalty in 1976, most recently in January 2021.

In their clemency petition, Lucio’s lawyers say that while she had used drugs, leading her to temporarily lose custody of her children, she was a loving mother who worked to remain drug-free and provide for her family. Lucio has 14 children and was pregnant with the youngest two when Mariah died.

Lucio and her children struggled through poverty. At times, they were homeless and relied on food banks for meals, according to the petition. Child Protective Services was present in the family’s life, but there was never an accusation of abuse by any of her children, Potkin said.

Lucio had been sexually assaulted multiple times, starting at age 6, and had been physically and emotionally abused by two husbands. Her lawyers say this lifelong trauma made her susceptible to giving a false confession.

In the 2020 documentary “The State of Texas vs. Melissa,” Lucio said investigators kept pushing her to say she had hurt Mariah.

“I was not gonna admit to causing her death because I wasn’t responsible,” Lucio said.

Her lawyers say Lucio’s sentence was disproportionate to what her husband and Mariah’s father, Robert Alvarez, received. He got a four-year sentence for causing injury to a child by omission even though he also was responsible for Mariah’s care, Lucio’s lawyers argue.

In 2019, a three-judge panel of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned Lucio’s conviction, ruling she was deprived of “her constitutional right to present a meaningful defense.” However, the full court in 2021 said the conviction had to be upheld for procedural

reasons, “despite the difficult issue of the exclusion of testimony that might have cast doubt on the credibility of Lucio’s confession.”

Three jurors and one alternate in Lucio’s trial have signed affidavits expressing doubts about her conviction.

“She was not evil. She was just struggling. ... If we had heard passionately from the defense defending her in some way, we might have reached a different decision,” juror Johnny Galvan wrote in an affidavit.

In a letter last month to the Board of Pardons and Paroles and to Abbott, 83 Texas House members said executing Lucio would be “a miscarriage of justice.”

“As a conservative Republican myself, who has long been a supporter of the death penalty in the most heinous cases ... I have never seen a more troubling case than the case of Melissa Lucio,” said state Rep. Jeff Leach, who signed the letter.

Abbott can grant a one-time, 30-day reprieve. He can grant clemency if a majority of the paroles board recommends it.

The board plans to vote on Lucio’s clemency petition two days before the scheduled execution, Rachel Alderete, the board’s director of support operations, said in an email. A spokeswoman for Abbott’s office did not return an email seeking comment.

Abbott has granted clemency to only one death row inmate, Thomas Whitaker, since taking office in 2015. Whitaker was convicted of masterminding the fatal shootings of his mother and brother. His father, who survived, led the effort to save Whitaker, saying he would be victimized again if his son was executed.

Lucio’s supporters have said her clemency request is similar in that her family would be retraumatized if she’s executed.

“Please allow us to reconcile with Mariah’s death and remember her without fresh pain, anguish and grief. Please spare the life of our mother,” Lucio’s children wrote in a letter to Abbott and the board.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

4 Men Accused In Harris County Law Enforcement Deaths Expected In Court

By Nicole Hensley
Houston Chronicle

The four men accused in the deaths of two Harris County law enforcement officials during unrelated incidents — one a Precinct 7 constable’s deputy killed in a car wreck and the other a sheriff’s deputy killed while confronting suspected catalytic converter thieves — are expected Monday to appear in court on their respective charges.

Three of those defendants — Joshua Stewart, 23, Fredarius Clark, 19, and Frederick Tardy, 17 — will go before a judge in the 177th District Court in connection to the shooting death Thursday of Deputy Darren Alméndarez. Bail will be decided then.

Clark purportedly acted as a lookout as defendants Stewart and Tardy crawled under Alméndarez's vehicle in a grocery store parking lot with tools, prosecutors said. The deputy, off-duty at the time, confronted the three amid their alleged attempt to steal his vehicle's catalytic converter.

Clark opened fire on Alméndarez, who attempted to wrangle the weapon out of his hands, prosecutors continued. The gunfire continued and Alméndarez retreated to the front of the vehicle. The deputy was shot as Clark and the two others drove away.

He died at a hospital. Alméndarez is survived by his wife, Flor Zarzoza, and a teenage daughter.

A fourth man, Adolfo Serrano, 36, was arrested Saturday following a drunken wreck involving a Precinct 7 deputy with the Harris County Constable's Office.

Deputy Jennifer Chavis died when Serrano, who may have been fleeing an earlier crash, slammed into the back of her patrol vehicle — which then erupted into flames. Chavis, who was poised to pull Serrano over, never emerged from the vehicle, officials said. Chavis, an Army veteran, and her husband were raising a 4-year-old son and 11-year-old nephew together.

Serrano has been charged with intoxication manslaughter and is also expected to appear Monday in the 177th District Court.

Prosecutors have filed motions to deny bail for all four defendants.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

National News

-

Elon Musk Takes 9.2% Stake In Twitter After Hinting At Shake-Up

By Giles Turner and Craig Trudell

San Antonio Express News

Elon Musk has taken a 9.2% stake in Twitter Inc. to become the platform's biggest shareholder, a week after hinting he might shake up the social media industry.

Twitter shares surged about 26% in premarket trading after Musk's purchase was revealed Monday in a regulatory filing. The stake is worth about \$2.89 billion, based on Friday's market close.

Musk, 50, polled his more than 80 million followers on Twitter last month, asking them whether the company adheres to the principles of free speech. After more than 70% said no, he asked whether a new platform was needed and said he was giving serious thought to starting his own.

Musk has been one of the biggest personalities on Twitter and has regularly run into trouble on the platform. The Tesla Inc. chief executive officer is currently seeking to exit a 2018 deal with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission that put controls in place related to his tweeting about the electric-car maker.

The announcement will be yet another major test for new Twitter CEO Parag Agrawal, who replaced Jack Dorsey after he unexpectedly resigned in November. Agrawal vowed to increase accountability, make decisions faster and to improve product execution. The company set ambitious goals for growth including increasing annual revenue to \$7.5 billion and getting to 315 million daily users by the end of 2023.

Musk posted a cryptic meme in December after Twitter announced that Agrawal was taking over from Dorsey as Twitter's CEO. It depicted Agrawal as Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin and Dorsey as Soviet secret police head Nikolai Yezhov being shoved into water.

"It looks like Elon has his eyes laser set on Twitter," said Wedbush analyst Dan Ives in a research note, adding that the stake could lead to a "more aggressive ownership role."

Twitter is particularly vulnerable to outside pressure because unlike Google, Facebook, Amazon and Snap, the company's founders don't have special voting control over its future. The company has just recovered from activist pressure by Elliot Management that started in 2020 which led Dorsey, who was serving his second stint as CEO of Twitter, to set a succession plan.

It's unclear what Musk is planning with his stake. The filing with the SEC shows that the date of the event that triggered the disclosure was March 14. The type of form used often indicates the investor isn't seeking to acquire control of a company, or to influence who controls it.

Musk, already the world's richest person according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index, has made about \$1.1 billion on his holding since mid March, based on the pop in Twitter's shares in early trading Monday.

Twitter is under pressure to move faster in building new products. The company has set ambitious revenue and user growth goals to convince skeptical investors that it was serious about expanding its business. While Twitter has grown steadily for years, its stock gains have lagged behind industry peers.

Musk has lambasted Twitter's recent development of profile pictures linked to non-fungible tokens, saying the social media company has the wrong priorities.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Opinion/Editorial

American Reboot: Will Hurd's Call For A 'Return To Normal' As He Considers A Presidential Run

By Robert Rivard
San Antonio Report

Is Will Hurd, the former congressman and CIA operative, laying the groundwork to run for the

Republican presidential nomination in 2024? All signs indicate the answer is yes.

I base that on two recent experiences: serving as a conversation moderator with Hurd at a recent World Affairs Council of San Antonio dinner and reading “The Revenge of the Normal Republicans” in Atlantic magazine.

I’ve also read Hurd’s new book, *American Reboot: An Idealist’s Guide to Getting Big Things Done* (Simon & Schuster, New York, 2022). It’s a clarion call for a major political pivot by the Republican Party and the extreme left in the Democratic Party, with both needing to commit to a “return to normal.” For Hurd, that means abandoning the divisive social and political issues paralyzing the national and state political conversation, such as criminalizing immigrants on the right and calls to “defund the police” on the left.

When the former Republican congressional representative decided in 2019 to not seek reelection in one of the nation’s most bipartisan districts, which stretches from San Antonio to El Paso along the Texas-Mexico border, he largely disappeared from public view. Since then, he has become a trustee of the German Marshall Fund, a board member of OpenAI and managing director of Allen & Co., the famously private New York investment bank that doesn’t even have a website.

American Reboot puts Hurd back on the political stage.

I had the opportunity to put the question of his political aspirations directly to Hurd on Friday.

“If I have an opportunity to serve my country again, I will evaluate it, and the best way for me to serve my country now is to put forward some ideas of how we get away from the moment we are caught in now,” Hurd replied.

Issues that have dominated the political agenda of Republican elected leaders in Texas and other red states in recent years — passing voter suppression legislation, blocking legal abortion, demonizing immigrants and refugees, placing politics in front of sensible public health practices in the COVID-19 pandemic, targeting pro-LGBTQ initiatives and supporting former President Donald Trump’s manufactured claims of a stolen presidential election — have served to further divide the nation and distract from more urgent realities at home and abroad.

Yet Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz and Texas Gov. Greg Abbott — to name three Republican officeholders with 2024 aspirations — have been veering to the hard right and governing on the very issues that divide rather than unite people.

Hurd’s advice to political extremists in his own party is summed up in an eight-page chapter in his book provocatively titled “Don’t be an Asshole, Racist, Misogynist, or Homophobe.”

Moderate voters have increasingly found themselves gerrymandered out of the conversation. Could Hurd attract enough mainstream Republicans, moderate newcomers to the party and independent voters to back him in early primaries?

Most would rate his common sense appeal and “getting things done” agenda a long shot, but Hurd is a risk-taker. He’s not going to miss his shot.

Hurd's book is a field guide for moderate-leaning voters from center-left to center-right. I've known Hurd for more than a decade and I was not surprised to read his articulate and informed takes on global affairs and U.S. foreign policy.

Hurd is especially strong on the threat from China, the slow and inadequate U.S. response under Democratic and Republican administrations to Russian President Vladimir Putin and the opportunities if the U.S. government better understood the threats and promises that ever-advancing technologies present.

I heard a frustrated Hurd speak a decade ago about the inevitable reality of cyberthreats and how senior political leaders in Congress were failing to grasp that reality, operating much like Grandpa with his first smartphone.

As president, Hurd would act very differently toward the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and when I say differently, I mean differently than Trump's undisguised admiration for Putin and his territorial aggressions and President Joe Biden's measured response of economic sanctions and military aid. Hurd called for a no-fly zone over Ukraine during our World Affairs Council conversation, knowing full well that would mean NATO pilots (read U.S. pilots) in the most advanced U.S. fighter aircraft directly challenging Russian MiG pilots.

Would a badly miscalculating Putin be stymied by such a challenge in an air war that NATO undoubtedly would dominate? Or would such an outcome escalate into a Russian-NATO ground war or even a nuclear confrontation? The stakes are high at this moment in time and history, higher perhaps than most people realize. Long before the next presidential primary, the world could very well find itself on a more dangerous precipice.

"I believe that still," Hurd told me Friday when I asked about his views on a no-fly zone. "My answer to critics is this: If you think we are going to influence Vladimir Putin [on] whether he is going to escalate the war, you are misinformed. The question should be this: Are we doing everything in our power to prevent and stop the slaughter of innocent people? Trying to anticipate second-, third- and fourth-order effects is impossible."

What surprised me most about Hurd's book is how equally detailed he is on domestic issues, from the need to address climate change, immigration reform and care for seniors to increasing access to health care and addressing the overpolicing of citizens of color.

Hurd wants to restore America's place on the world stage by first restoring the founding ideals and values at home that made the nation a respected and influential superpower.

Will he decide to run? American Reboot, published March 29, suggests he is already lining up for the race.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

- Analysis: In Texas Elections In 2022, Economic Concerns Loom

By Ross Ramsey
Texas Tribune

Texas voters don't like the way things are going in the U.S. and most don't think their kids will have it better than they do, according to a Texas Lyceum poll framed around voters'

outlook for the rest of the decade.

Seven months before the next general election, Texans are grumpy, concerned about economic issues like inflation and housing, unhappy with the direction of the country, and somewhat happier with the direction of the state itself.

Many of their biggest concerns potentially set up an election that's more about economic matters than about the social and cultural issues that have dominated some of the primary and runoff election debates so far this year.

And the polling, aside from detailing what voters are cranky about, is also something of a roadmap for lawmakers looking to work on big stuff, like roads, housing, health care, border security, jobs and the economy.

Two in five Texans cited economic concerns as the most important issues facing the U.S. — concerns that include the economy in general, inflation and rising prices, and energy/gas prices. That's a top issue for about a quarter of the voters when asked about problems facing the state.

What's more, only 27% said they believe their children will be better off than they are, while 35% said the kids will be worse off.

A large group of voters said opportunities for homeownership are “poor” or “terrible” where they live. More than half said they spend too much of their income on housing.

Two-thirds said the national economy is worse off than it was a year ago; only half as many said the state economy was worse than a year ago.

People living in rural areas were more likely to say their local economy was either “poor” or “terrible” (39%) than voters in suburban (24%) and urban (25%) areas, according to the poll.

This political year has already shaped up as an obstacle course for Texas Democrats. The parties of incumbent presidents regularly suffer in midterm elections, and Joe Biden is particularly unpopular in Texas right now.

Republican legislative majorities drew new political maps for the Legislature and the congressional delegation that — surprise, surprise — favor Republicans.

And it's evident in the numbers that voters are less gloomy about the economy and outlook for the state than for the country. You can read that as the beginning of a political blame game that seats current problems in Washington rather than in Austin, and harder on the Democratic government there than on the Republican government in Texas.

But if anyone in politics is still interested, voters are telling them a lot about what needs to be addressed after November's elections. Only 31% of Texas voters say the reliability and cost of electricity is either “poor” or “terrible.” The majority — 54% — say it's “good” and 13% say it's “excellent.” On balance, that's good for incumbents, but the naysayers are numerous enough to push for change.

That's true, too, for transportation in Texas: 28% are “unsatisfied” with the quality of the

state's roads. Nearly half of the state's rural residents said their roads are either "poor" or "terrible."

Polling like that offers some ideas for the political class that's tangled in primary runoffs and, later this year, in a general election. Here's what's popular and with which voters, and here's what's not.

But it's also got some clues for the lawmakers those politicians hope to become. In the 2018 elections, it was clear that voters wanted some work done on education and how public schools are financed. They scared the ruling class, and 2019 saw some sweeping changes.

It's always possible for voters to change the tune.

- [\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Have College Credits But No Degree Or Credential? Here's How Texas Hopes To Help *Dallas Morning News*

About 4 million Texans have some college credit but no degree or other academic credential. That's a loss for the state and for those students who are caught on the wrong side of a job market that depends on skills and trained workers.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board created the Reskilling Support Fund Grant Program to put \$47 million of federal money in the hands of thousands of students who needed a financial boost to complete their education. But for various reasons — from poor communication to an overly complicated process — only a fraction of the 30,000 students that the program had hoped to get back in school matched up with the available dollars.

It is no secret that Texas can't prosper unless students earn a credential or degree that will help them obtain good jobs. The reskilling program required recipients to be within a year of finishing their program, out of school for more than six months, and previously enrolled in high-demand programs in order to receive up to \$2,500 toward their return to studies. So when enough eligible students couldn't be found, the state loosened the post-secondary credit requirement and opened the program to more applicants.

Texas will be hard-pressed to substantially reduce the shortage of skilled workers until it finds ways to prevent students from leaving a college or university without a degree or credential. In a new report called Building a Talent Strong Texas, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board recently announced plans to create a statewide repository with information on all credentials offered by Texas colleges and universities, and better link students with degree or credential programs.

Details are still being developed, but this is envisioned on the financial side as a strategic mix of state appropriations, tuition and fees, philanthropy, state and federal financial aid and other revenue to minimize student debt. The report also nods toward the need to streamline student pathways to degrees and credentials and to expand work-based opportunities with private industry. And broadly, this coordinating board is signaling that more must be done also to assist midcareer employees who can advance in their jobs and meet the changing demands of Texas employers.

This is a necessary evolution from higher education strategies that focused on expanding access. Without turning away from the need to build a diverse student body, Building a Talent Strong Texas recommends doubling down on providing the opportunities and resources for these students who are at make or break points to complete degrees or credential programs. And toward that, Texas will be the first state to “tie completion goals directly to the wage premiums associated with postsecondary credentials,” the report notes.

Texas has the world’s ninth-largest economy, and Texans have earned more degrees, certificates and credentials over the past decade than at any time in the state’s history. Texas has a goal of at least 60% of people 25-34 having a certificate or degree by 2030, and in recent days expanded that 60% goal to Texans 35-64. That’s a big lift since one-third of Texas high school graduates fail to earn an additional degree or credential within six years of graduation.

The Legislature, colleges, universities and employers must understand the urgency and act on it.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

From: [OOG News Alerts](#)
Subject: Morning News Clips 4.7.22
Date: Thursday, April 7, 2022 8:37:42 AM
Attachments: [Morning News Clips 4.7.22.pdf](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

Morning News Clips 4/7/2022

- [Texas Take](#)

- [Texas Tribune: The Brief](#)

- [Politico Playbook](#)

Greg Abbott News

Texas Tribune – James Barragan: [Gov. Greg Abbott's Plan To Bus Migrants To Washington, D.C., Will Be Voluntary \[Web\]](#)

CBS News – Matthew Tursi: [Abbott Says Texas Will Send Charter Buses With Migrants To Washington \[Web\]](#)

Administration News

Houston Chronicle – Taylor Goldenstein: [Nearly 25,000 Mail Ballots Were Rejected In Texas Primaries, Fueled By Confusion Over New Restrictions \[Web\]](#)

State News

Houston Chronicle – Dug Begley: [Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo Keeps Emergency Powers After Cagle Push To Strip Her Of Authority Fails \[Web\]](#)

Texas Tribune – Erin Douglas: [Rural Texas Was Meant To Get 10% Of State Bonds For Water Projects. A Report Shows It's Getting Less Than 1%. \[Web\]](#)

Austin American Statesman – Ryan Autullo: [Austin Considers Adding Park Fees To All New Commercial, Industrial And Office Projects \[Web\]](#)

Education

Dallas Morning News – Valeria Olivares: [What Biden's Extended Pause On College Loan](#)

[Repayments Means For Texas Students \[Web\]](#)

Business/Economy

-

Dallas Morning News – Shelbie Hamilton: [Frisco Tech Startup Aims To Match Black Professionals With Diversity-Conscious Companies \[Web\]](#)

Criminal Justice

-

Dallas Morning News – Kelli Smith: [Dallas PD Chief, City Leaders Call For Accountability After Shooting At Concert Killed 1, Wounded 16 \[Web\]](#)

Houston Chronicle – Alex Stuckey and Stephanie Lamm: [‘How Did This Happen To My Son?’ \[Web\]](#)

Houston Chronicle – Nicole Hensley: [Execution Looms For Man Convicted In 1992 Killing Of Four At Houston Home \[Web\]](#)

National News

-

Texas Tribune – Abby Livingston: [Texas Republicans Who Opposed Resolution Supporting NATO Criticize And Question Its Language \[Web\]](#)

KABC – Zachary Rogers: [L.A. Bans Official Travel To Florida And Texas Over Parents' Rights Bill, LGBTQ+ Policies \[Web\]](#)

Opinion/Editorial

-

Dallas Morning News – [Catalytic Converter Thefts Are Expensive — And Can Be Deadly \[Web\]](#)

Houston Chronicle – [Editorial: Trump Allies Want Abbott To Declare A Border ‘Invasion.’ Have They Heard Of Ukraine? \[Web\]](#)

Houston Chronicle – Sherry Sylvester and Andrew Brown: [Opinion: Texas Fails Victims Of Sex Trafficking. Overhaul Child Welfare Services Now. \[Web\]](#)

-

#

Greg Abbott News

Gov. Greg Abbott's Plan To Bus Migrants To Washington, D.C., Will Be Voluntary By
James Barragan
Texas Tribune

Responding to the recent announcement that the Biden administration will lift a pandemic-era immigration policy that allows authorities to turn away migrants, Gov. Greg Abbott promised drastic, "unprecedented" action to curb what is expected to be a significant influx of migrants coming to Texas.

At a press conference on Wednesday, Abbott unveiled a stunning plan that sent a shockwave through the immigration rights community: Texas would place state troopers in riot gear to meet migrants at the border and bus them straight to the steps of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., where he said the Biden administration "will be able to more immediately address the needs of the people that they are allowing to come across our border."

But soon after the press conference, Abbott's office released more details about the plan that struck a notably softer tone.

The governor's office clarified that the program is completely voluntary for migrants and would happen only after they had been processed and released by the Department of Homeland Security. And in addition to buses, Abbott also ordered the state to charter flights to transport migrants to the nation's capital. The migrants would have to show documentation that they had already been processed by DHS. Many immigration advocates have noted that providing transportation services for asylum-seekers to reach their final destination is something the state should invest in.

Abbott's announcement led to immediate criticism from both his left and his right. Immigration rights groups said his rhetoric was still dangerous.

"Any forcible busing of migrants across the country would be outrageous and blatantly unconstitutional," Kate Huddleston, a staff attorney at ACLU of Texas, said in a statement. "Given that Abbott cannot dictate where people are sent, he has already backpedaled on this heinous plan, announcing that it will be only voluntary."

Some conservatives called it out as empty posturing.

"It's a gimmick," said Rep. Matt Schaefer, R-Tyler, in a tweet.

His Democratic opponent for governor, Beto O'Rourke, said the announcement was just another example of Abbott placing bluster over substance.

"If Abbott focused on solutions instead of stunts, then Texas could have made some real progress on the issue over the last seven years," he said in a statement.

Abbott's busing program was only one in a series of actions he announced Wednesday to ramp up the state's response as the Biden administration moves to end a pandemic-era emergency health order known as Title 42 that allowed immigration authorities to turn away migrants at the border, even those seeking asylum. That order, which was put in place during former President Donald Trump's administration, has allowed immigration authorities to manage the sometimes overwhelming number of migrants trying to enter the country.

Without it, federal officials say, they expect to draw thousands more migrants to the southwestern border every day, in addition to the already large numbers of people trying to enter from Latin America and other places across the globe. Abbott said federal officials are planning for more than 18,000 migrant crossings per day on the southern border, which would amount to half a million crossings a month.

Abbott also said Wednesday the Department of Public Safety will immediately begin enhanced safety inspections of commercial vehicles coming through the Mexico border into Texas because human smugglers are known to use commercial trucks to transport people into the country. Abbott acknowledged that the move will "dramatically slow" traffic at the Texas border. Mexico is one of state's largest trading partners and does hundreds of billions of dollars in trade with Texas every year.

Abbott also said the state will create boat blockades on the Rio Grande to deter migrants and install concertina wire, a type of barbed or razor wire, in low-river crossings on the river that are high-traffic areas.

The Republican governor, who is seeking a third term in November, said the projected number of migrants at the Texas-Mexico border is unprecedented and dangerous and blamed the Biden administration's immigration policies for those numbers. Abbott said the state will announce more policies next week to curb migrant crossings into the state because border officials are urgently asking the state for action.

"They know that it's the Biden administration that caused this open border problem, and they expect the Biden administration to step up and respond and to fix the open border problem that they caused," he said.

A spokesperson for the White House did not respond to a request for comment.

State Rep. Mary González, D-El Paso, vice chair of the Mexican American Legislative Caucus denounced Abbott's announcement as a political stunt.

"Instead of using our tax dollars to drive economic growth and build infrastructure, Governor Abbott is funding political stunts at the expense of Texas families and our troops."

Denise Gilman, the co-director of the Immigration Clinic at the University of Texas School of Law, said the program could still raise concerns about coercive conduct by the state given how it was announced.

"It seems very important to the state to take migrants to D.C. There's a strong interest in getting migrants on those buses," she said. "They had to say it's voluntarily but everything about the program suggests it would be coercive and therefore of questionable legality. If it's truly voluntarily, why is it only going to D.C.?"

"There's nothing about what was said the first time around that makes any sense from a policy or legal perspective so now they're trying to see if there's any legal veneer they can put on this," she said. "But you can't put lipstick on a pig. They were pretty clear about what they were trying to achieve."

Gilman also said Abbott could be making the job of some migrants easier if their destination was outside of Texas and they voluntarily got on the buses.

"There's a huge Salvadoran population in D.C., so yeah, free bus ride to get to where you were going anyway," she said.

Gov. Greg Abbott speaks at a press conference discussing the state response to Title 42 being lifted in Weslaco on Wednesday...

Gov. Greg Abbott discussed Texas' response to the lifting of Title 42 at a press conference Wednesday in Weslaco. Credit: Michael Gonzalez for The Texas Tribune

In the midst of a reelection push, Abbott, a Republican, has made border security a top priority. Last March, he announced he was sending National Guard troops and DPS troopers to the border to curb illegal immigration into the state in an effort dubbed Operation Lone Star.

Earlier this week, Texas Military Department officials told state lawmakers that they were running out of money to pay for the mission which now has a price tag of \$2 billion a year even though the state allocated only \$412 million to the agency. In January, state lawmakers transferred \$480 million to the department but TMD officials said Tuesday they would need \$531 million in additional funds to keep the mission operating beyond May.

Abbott said the plans he announced Wednesday do not require any additional funds, but he noted the high costs to the state of his border mission.

"That's the reality," he said. "Securing the border does not come cheap. Securing the border would cost Texas nothing if the federal government was doing its job. But because Joe Biden is not securing the border, the state of Texas is having to step up and spend taxpayer money doing the federal government's job."

Abbott has deployed nearly 10,000 troops on the mission, many of whom have been sent involuntarily. His office has repeatedly boasted that the mission has disrupted drug and human smuggling networks. But those claims of success have been based on shifting metrics that have included crimes with no connection to the border and work conducted before the operation.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Abbott Says Texas Will Send Charter Buses With Migrants To Washington

By Matthew Tursi

CBS News

Texas Governor Greg Abbott said Wednesday his state is taking "unprecedented actions" to address an anticipated surge of migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border, including sending charter buses of migrants to Washington, D.C.

Other announced actions include "enhanced safety inspections of vehicles" crossing Texas points of entry, boat blockades in the Rio Grande River, razor wire deployed at "lower-water crossings and high-traffic areas" and the National Guard beginning "mass-migration rehearsals."

Abbott, a Republican, also directed the Texas Division of Emergency Management to begin the process of coordinating charter buses to take migrants to D.C.

"The Biden administration will be able to more immediately address the needs of the people that they are allowing to come across our border," Abbott said during a news conference, flanked by Texas Department of Public Safety and other officials.

Abbott later said the buses' first destination "will be the steps of the United States Capitol."

The moves come in response to the late-May ending of Title 42, a pandemic-era order issued under the Trump administration that allows U.S. immigration authorities to quickly expel migrants and asylum-seekers.

"The federal government is planning for up to 18,000 illegal immigrants crossing per day," Abbott said. "We have potentially more people who will be crossing our border illegally by the end of this year than live in Los Angeles."

Texas Republican Senator Ted Cruz tweeted his support for Abbott's plans, calling them "excellent ideas" and suggesting additional sites to which charter buses of migrants should be sent, including places in states like Massachusetts, California and New York.

Beto O'Rourke, a former Texas congressman and Democratic presidential candidate who's now running for governor in this year's race against Abbott, accused the Republican incumbent of choosing "stunts over solutions."

Abbott said during Wednesday's news conference that other actions from his state "will be announced next week."

Citing directives by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. immigration officials have carried out over 1.7 million expulsions of migrants under Title 42 in the past two years - 70% of them under President Biden, who retained the policy despite reversing other Trump border initiatives.

After two defeats in federal court in March and intensifying pressure from top Democrats in Congress, the Biden administration announced on April 1 it would wind down Title 42 by late May.

On Wednesday, when asked by "CBS Evening News" anchor and managing editor Norah O'Donnell if the end of Title 42 would lead to a surge in migration, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said, "It's very difficult to predict what the migration will be, but we are planning for different scenarios."

"What distinguishes us from the past is the fact that we will not implement policies of cruelty that disregard our asylum laws," he added. "We are rebuilding a system that was entirely dismantled."

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Administration News

Nearly 25,000 Mail Ballots Were Rejected In Texas Primaries, Fueled By Confusion Over New Restrictions

By Taylor Goldenstein
Houston Chronicle

Northwest Houston resident Donna Hackemack Bryant thought she had done her due diligence when she voted by mail in last month's Democratic primary election. She even checked her status on the Harris Votes website, which said the ballot had been received.

But Bryant, who is 70 and the president of the Cy-Fair Area Democrats, received a letter last week notifying her that her vote never counted. She'd forgotten to include an ID number, a new Republican-backed requirement that tripped up many Texas voters and led to unusually high rejection rates statewide.

Bryant was one of nearly 25,000 voters whose ballots were rejected during the March 2022 primary, new data shows.

"I was highly incensed, and that's putting it without expletives," Bryant said. "A lot of the candidates I voted for didn't make it. I'm wondering: How many of those rejected ballots did it mean would have voted for those same people like I did?"

The overall rejection rate was 12.4 percent statewide, with a slightly more pronounced rate in Democratic primaries, at 12.9 percent compared to 11.8 percent of Republican ballots, according to figures released Wednesday by the Texas Secretary of State. More than 3 million ballots were cast in this year's primary — about 2 million on the Republican side and 1 million on the Democratic side.

Texas' largest counties by rejection rate

According to data from the secretary of state's office, these are the state's 10 largest counties ranked by their rejection rates of mail ballots submitted for the March 1 primary election.

Bexar County: 22%

Harris County: 19%

Hidalgo County: 19%

El Paso County: 17%

Denton County: 15%

Collin County: 13%

Fort Bend County: 12%

Tarrant County: 8%

Dallas County: 7%

Travis County: 8%

By comparison, Texas rejected just under 1 percent of mail ballots in the November 2020 election in which more than 11 million people voted, according to federal data. Sam Taylor, a spokesman for the secretary of state, said the 2020 data is based on self-reporting from Texas counties, and the office hasn't verified its accuracy.

The data released Wednesday did not specify how many Texas voters ended up voting in person after receiving notice a mail-ballot had been rejected.

Local election officials say the problem stems from the new requirement that absentee voters include either a driver's license number or the last four digits of the voter's Social Security number on the ballot. The number submitted by voters often did not match what the county had on file or they forgot to provide a number altogether, requiring them to hustle to correct their applications in time for their ballots to be counted.

Texas Democrats and voting rights advocates on Wednesday denounced the unusually high rejection rate as unacceptable.

"A 12-factor jump in the number of votes by mail rejected from 2020 is absolutely disastrous, and this new ID requirement was totally unnecessary," said James Slattery, a senior state attorney at the Texas Civil Rights Project. "It does nothing to make our elections more secure and now we know the primary effect on Texas elections was just to disenfranchise voters on a massive scale."

State Rep. Jessica González, vice-chair of the House elections committee, said the figures released Wednesday confirmed her fears prior to the bill's passage.

"Democrats warned in committee and on the House Floor that new SB1 requirements would disenfranchise voters," González said in a tweet. "Now we are seeing it in action."

Republican lawmakers who supported the legislation have said voters' troubles are part of a normal learning curve that will eventually improve over time with education.

Sen. Paul Bettencourt, a Houston Republican who helped craft the voting bill, said his office is checking in with county election offices to figure out why some fared better than others. He is also looking to get more data on how many people were still able to vote, either by canceling

their mail ballot and voting in person, or by voting provisionally in person.

“What I know for sure is we’ve got an application rejection rate of 3.35 percent (statewide), and now we’ve got this 12 percent number,” Bettencourt said. “So I’m spending my time understanding why is there a difference between the two of that magnitude.

Harris and Bexar counties’ rejection rates were among the highest of large counties. In San Antonio’s Bexar County, about 22 percent of more than 18,000 mail ballots were rejected.

The nearly 7,000 ballots rejected in Harris County far exceeded the 135 mail ballots rejected during the 2018 primary.

Of more than 7,700 mail ballots flagged there due to confusion over new ID requirements,” less than 11 percent of voters resubmitted ID information and got their ballots corrected, officials said. This came despite efforts by Harris County that included sending letters instructing them how to correct their ballots and doubling the number of staff assigned to help handle voter questions.

Slattery said the effects of a rejection should not be underestimated.

“I think we underappreciate how damaging the message is to voters when they have their ballot or application rejected wrongly,” he said. “For many voters who go through this, the clear message is the government doesn’t want to hear your voice, and it’s not interested in helping you participate in the democratic process.”

The secretary of state’s office says it plans to make the ID field stand out more by putting bold red lines around it on ballots going forward. The office launched its “VoteReady” education campaign on Feb. 7 with radio, digital, billboards and grassroots advertising and plans to continue that through the runoff to the general election in November.

Taylor said the office received \$500,000 less this year from the Legislature to educate voters about voter ID requirements.

Bryant, who suffers from back, hip and knee pain and has voted by mail the last three years, said she won’t go back to absentee voting again in the next election.

“I will drag myself to the nearest polling place rather than risk the mail ballot process again,” she said. “I don’t want to do this again. I don’t think I trust the process.”

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

State News

-

Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo Keeps Emergency Powers After Cagle Push To Strip Her Of Authority Fails

By Dug Begley

Houston Chronicle

Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo still has emergency powers to handle COVID, after a

proposal to end her authority failed at commissioners' court this week.

The proposal, by Precinct Four Commissioner Jack Cagle, failed on a 3-2 vote Tuesday, with the three Democratic members voting against.

Cagle sought to end the emergency powers granted to Hidalgo, citing the major improvement in pandemic realities and the court's ability to frequently and quickly convene.

Precinct 1 Commissioner Rodney Ellis called the idea "ridiculous."

"The mayor will still have emergency powers, the county judges around us would still have emergency powers," Ellis said.

Ellis was joined by County Judge Lina Hidalgo and Precinct 2 Commissioner Adrian Garcia in maintaining the status quo.

Since March 2020, Hidalgo and every county judge in Texas — along with mayors — have had extraordinary ability because of the public health risks of the pandemic to close and open public places, approve contracts and establish emergency shelters, testing sites and vaccine distribution locations. When a disaster is declared by the state — in this case across all 254 counties — county judges are considered the top health official and assume emergency powers similar to those of the governor.

The difference, Cagle argued, is the governor needs them because it would take weeks to reconvene the legislature. Commissioners court can call a meeting in 72 hours.

Precinct 3 Commissioner Tom Ramsey, who supported Cagle's motion, said ending the emergency powers also would send a message that Harris County is moving beyond the disaster phase of the pandemic.

"It shows maybe we can move forward to the next stage," he said.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Rural Texas Was Meant To Get 10% Of State Bonds For Water Projects. A Report Shows It's Getting Less Than 1%.

By Erin Douglas
Texas Tribune

Rural areas of Texas receive only a fraction of a percent of bonds for state water plan projects, far less than what lawmakers intended nearly a decade ago when the program was conceived, a state report shows.

The Texas Water Development Board is entrusted with billions of state dollars to issue bonds, provide loans and disburse grants for water supply, wastewater treatment, flood control and conservation projects. One of its programs, the State Water Implementation Fund for Texas, or SWIFT, issues bonds to provide low-cost loans to finance water supply projects.

But while that program has committed \$9 billion to help finance projects in the state water plan since 2015, the agency has failed to meet its legislative target to provide 10% of those

funds to rural communities and agricultural water conservation, according to a report by the staff of the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission, which evaluates the performance of state agencies.

Instead, only 0.17% went to rural communities between 2016 and 2020.

The report said the agency needs to bolster outreach efforts in rural and economically disadvantaged areas of the state and better track all of its programs to understand the barriers small communities face to apply.

Rural areas with small populations struggle to apply for loans, Texas water finance experts and water managers in rural communities said, because they lack the technical expertise to submit an application. Some don't even know the programs exist. Plus, such communities often don't have the population base, political support or local matching funds required to take on large amounts of debt, even with low interest rates or favorable terms.

Becky Brewster ran for mayor of Van Horn, population 1,941, in part on a promise to fix infrastructure — water lines broke frequently and the city had to issue a boil water notice to residents each time.

"I was getting frustrated with us not getting anywhere," she said. "It was just seeming to get worse."

But to replace the lines required money. Grants were difficult to qualify for, while the loans were difficult to apply for, she said.

"It's kind of like sending your kid to college," Brewster said. "You don't have enough money to pay it outright, but you don't qualify for any grants. So [rural] communities are in that kind of situation a lot of times. You're just kind of stuck."

In a 2020 report to state lawmakers, TWDB said that all rural, irrigation, reuse and conservation projects that submitted full SWIFT applications have been funded.

TWDB communications manager Kaci Woodrome said in a statement that the agency receives far fewer SWIFT applications from rural communities than from large cities. Other programs are better suited to rural areas, she wrote, which can lead to less demand for the SWIFT program from small entities.

"The TWDB works with communities to evaluate these financial considerations and attempts to offer the best options available to meet the community's needs," Woodrome wrote.

But leaders in rural communities said the barriers span many of the agency's programs. After Brewster took office, Van Horn hired an engineering firm to assess its water infrastructure needs and calculate an estimated cost — which totaled several times what the city could possibly take on as debt.

Rather than apply through SWIFT, Van Horn applied for a different loan program at the TWDB for drinking water projects that offers loan forgiveness. Even that, Brewster said, was a difficult undertaking and couldn't have been done without a contractor provided by the Rio Grande Council of Governments.

“We don’t have a staff that has the time nor ability to do this,” Brewster said.

Fund fails to meet legislative target

The SWIFT fund has also struggled to provide assistance for water reuse and conservation projects, which lawmakers had hoped would account for a fifth of the fund’s loans. The fund also has missed those targets: Only 4% of loans were for reuse, and 3% for conservation projects.

“TWDB has been aware that the targets were not met despite significant outreach efforts,” Woodrome, the TWDB spokesperson, wrote.

She said the agency holds online and in-person workshops, meets directly with communities and works with other agencies to try to reach the communities with the greatest need.

Water experts said the agency has done a good job pushing money out the door, but rural projects need more attention. At the same time, the agency is limited by its own processes, said Carlos Rubinstein, a former Texas Water Development Board chair who is now a principal consultant for RSAH2O, an environmental regulatory and compliance consulting firm.

“[The board] expects projects to be fairly conceptually developed, including how you’re going to service the debt,” Rubinstein said. “And if [communities] fail to be able to carry the application through the process, there’s not much the board can do.”

Small communities need more assistance — whether from nonprofits, private foundations or others — to do what he calls the pre-development work. Otherwise, he said, those communities will continue patching one thing at a time when something breaks in their water infrastructure and never address systemwide problems.

“We need to avoid Band-Aid fixes,” Rubinstein said.

Jennifer Walker, the deputy director of the Texas Coast and Water Program at the National Wildlife Foundation, has worked on Texas water supply problems for several years and said she agrees with the Sunset Commission’s staff recommendation to require that TWDB develop an outreach plan to reach communities that don’t apply for financial assistance.

“We know big cities with specialized staff and consultants on retainer are applying, and that’s great, but are we really reaching all parts of the state?” Walker said. “I think everybody knows that this is a question that needs to be answered. But it’s really time for [the agency] to do that.”

Rural communities miss out

In Presidio County, home to Marfa in West Texas, the local groundwater district is charged with ensuring there will be enough water in the West Texas Bolsons and Igneous aquifers to support development well into the future, but currently it has little information on how much water each individual landowner is using, in part because so many locals have their own water wells.

The district is supposed to monitor water quality and aquifer levels, but in reality, it doesn’t

have the money to do so effectively, said Trey Gerfers, chair of the Presidio County Underground Water Conservation District.

Local officials recently applied to the TWDB for money to build groundwater monitoring wells to help them do so, which Gerfers said would allow the district to approve well permits based on accurate data, rather than what he says is happening now: “[We’re] promising the moon and hoping everything goes OK.”

But the TWDB application process is very technical. Small rural areas like Presidio County don’t have the same level of expertise to compete with large cities, he added.

“In a place like Houston, which has a room full of people who can apply for these kinds of things, they’re getting hundreds of millions [of dollars] from the state,” Gerfers said.

Without outside help from nonprofit groups, they wouldn’t have been able to submit an application for funds, he said.

Rural Texas communities also often rely almost exclusively on aquifers, and Vanessa Puig-Williams, the director of Texas Water Program for the Environmental Defense Fund, said the TWDB’s programs don’t provide specific funding for aquifer management.

“That’s an important piece of this conversation that’s missing in rural areas of Texas, because aquifers are infrastructure in rural Texas,” Puig-Williams said.

More than 70% of Texas is currently experiencing a severe drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor, which has already contributed to wildfires across the state. Droughts tend to put pressure on groundwater resources: During the severe 2011 drought, groundwater supplied almost two-thirds of the state’s increase in water consumption.

Gerfers said he worries that aquifers serving rural communities will only be more stressed in the future as climate change continues to bring higher average temperatures and intensifies droughts.

“With population growth in Texas, with the prospect of longer, hotter, drier summers, more intense droughts, I mean, we’re just kidding ourselves if we don’t get a handle on this now while we have the chance,” Gerfers said.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Austin Considers Adding Park Fees To All New Commercial, Industrial And Office Projects

By Ryan Autullo

Austin American Statesman

Saying they think many businesses benefit unfairly from Austin's parks and trails because they highlight them to job candidates but don't pay their share to help develop them, some Austin City Council members are prepared to expand a fee from the 1980s that would make the developers pay more when they build in Austin.

Austin already requires new residential developments, hotels and motels to devote a certain area of their land as public park space, or alternatively to pay a fee the city can then use to buy

and create park space elsewhere. Some residential developments are required to do both.

The 74-acre Slaughter Creek Greenbelt was purchased with residential developer funds, as was the 100-acre Walnut Creek Greenbelt. Developers who chose the build-your-own option are responsible for a number of neighborhood and pocket parks.

Established in 1985, the fee has never applied to other businesses.

On Thursday, council members are expected to expand the parkland fee to commercial, industrial and office developments. The proposal from Council Member Alison Alter has generated support publicly from three other council members, including Mayor Steve Adler, so it would need two more votes to move forward on the 11-member council.

If the proposal is approved, the city manager's office would be tasked with developing further details after providing a chance for community members to weigh in. Once that's done, the council would have to take another vote to formally approve the fee for next year's budget.

Alter, who represents Northwest Austin in District 10, joined the council in 2017 following a campaign in which she stressed the importance of parks and open spaces. Before then, she served on the city's parks and recreation board.

Alter said it's time for new businesses to share in the burden of Austin's growth by helping to fund the parks their employees enjoy on their down time.

"No one can argue we don't need more parkland and we don't need more funding for parkland," Alter told the American-Statesman. "All you have to do is spend time in our parks and see how much they're loved and that they are bursting at the seams. ... We know that companies are coming here and advertising access to our parks as amenities for their workers."

The specific fee for developers is still be worked out. For comparison, residential developers pay anywhere from \$3,438 per unit to \$5,663 per unit, the higher number for lower-density construction. Hotel and motel developers pay \$1,478 per unit.

The Texas Supreme Court ruled in 1984 that parkland dedication fees should be "roughly proportional" to the increased demands a development brings to a city's parks system.

The new fee generally would not apply to existing businesses, but to businesses that submit a site plan for new development or an expansion.

Amber Gunst, head of the Austin Technology Council, stopped short of opposing the plan but did suggest the fee could turn away businesses interested in opening an office in Austin.

"Maintaining greenspace is important in Austin, but we must also be cognizant of the overall costs the city imposes that impact new development projects and how these fees could affect economic development that is critical to the continued prosperity of our community," she said.

In the last fiscal year, the city collected \$14.3 million in developer fees for parkland. The three previous years, the city collected \$13.4 million, \$6.9 million and \$4.1 million.

In 2020, Austin acquired more than 75 acres of parkland over 17 new parks using parkland

fees, onsite parkland dedication and voter approved bonds. That same year, the city completed 20 park development projects, including playground improvements.

The moves aim to comply with a resolution, approved by the council in 2009, to provide parks within walking distance of all residents. That's defined as one-fourth of a mile in the urban core and one-half of a mile outside of the urban core.

Despite such efforts, Austin's parks system is viewed as just so-so on a national scale. Each year, the Trust for Public Land ranks parks systems in America's 100 largest cities based on five qualities: access, acreage, amenities, funding to create new parks and to maintain existing ones, and equity.

In 2021, Austin landed in the middle of the pack at No. 45, dropping eight spots from 2020.

"We are not ranked where we would like to be," Alter said.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Education

-

What Biden's Extended Pause On College Loan Repayments Means For Texas Students

By Valeria Olivares

Dallas Morning News

Students and recent graduates have more time to repay college loans as they juggle debt, an unstable economy and uncertainty about the future during the ongoing pandemic.

A pause on college loan repayment, interest and collections is being extended further into the year to help students, many of whom were displaced out of jobs during COVID-19.

President Joe Biden announced Wednesday that he wants a "responsible phase-down of pandemic relief" as the country continues to respond to its economic consequences, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

"This additional extension will allow borrowers to gain more financial security as the economy continues to improve and as the nation continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic," U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona said in the announcement.

Here's what Texans need to know about the extension.

When will students have to start repaying their loans again?

The extension runs through the end of August.

That gives more time for borrowers to plan for the payments and receive a "fresh start," which department officials said can potentially reduce the risk of delinquency and defaults, the failure to repay a loan.

Why is the government extending the pause?

Cardona said the Department of Education wants to ensure that students who have taken out loans can have a “smooth transition back to repayment.”

Supporting students and their families is a “top priority” for the Biden administration, he added, “especially those disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.”

The economic relief move started more than two years ago under the Trump administration. The pause now has been extended seven times since as businesses closed, wages became unstable and people lost their jobs. In order to pay their wage through college, many students work in the service industry — which took a massive hit due to government-ordered lockdowns, operational challenges and a decline in demand.

Student loan repayment was previously scheduled to start less than a month from now.

What loan relief programs are available?

Students can apply for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

The program forgives the remaining balance on loans — received through the department. Students must have made at least 120 monthly payments under a repayment plan while working full-time for a qualifying employer, which is generally a government organization, the military or not-for-profit organizations. Serving as a full-time AmeriCorps or Peace Corps volunteer also counts.

Borrowers who are working in such public service areas should apply for the program by Oct. 31 at its website.

The department said that its Federal Student Aid office is working on new partnerships to make it easier for students working in public service to be automatically credited with progress toward loan forgiveness, eliminating the process of them having to go through complicated paperwork.

Where can I find more information?

Students can find more information about the pause and other support at [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov).

What else has the government done to help student borrowers?

In just over one year, the U.S. Department of Education has provided more than \$17 billion in loan relief to about 700,000 borrowers.

After revamping the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program in October, for example, the department identified more than 100,000 borrowers eligible for \$6.4 billion in loan relief.

Relief was also provided to borrowers with disabilities, those who qualified for borrower defense — which frees students from some or all of their federal loan debt if they were misled about their school’s educational program or loan — and small business owners with student loans.

-
[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Business/Economy

Frisco Tech Startup Aims To Match Black Professionals With Diversity-Conscious Companies

By Shelbie Hamilton

Dallas Morning News

Buzzwords like equity, diversity and inclusion have been bolded in mission statements and tossed around the conference rooms of corporate America since long before the pandemic.

Christabel Agbonkonkon's new hiring platform, BlackUp, is eager to find out just how ready companies are to commit to those values.

The Frisco resident's tech startup, which officially launched its online platform March 31, bills itself as a one-stop-shop for Black professionals. The platform plans to improve on tools found on established job search sites like Indeed and Glassdoor, while also serving Black professionals looking to work with diversity-conscious companies.

"We were able to come up with the kinds of technology that we need, the kinds of products we need to offer, and the kind of tracking that we need to do to be able to help companies not only hire, but sustain the hiring," Agbonkonkon said.

Agbonkonkon, who works with her development team remotely, was inspired to create the platform after the murder of George Floyd in 2020. Floyd's death at the hands of Minneapolis police officers set off a wave of racial justice marches and rallies across the country, including in Dallas.

"This was my way to be able to contribute, to say 'okay, what is broken? And how can we fix that?'," she said. "I just saw this whole idea of helping Black people become more self-reliant through this process as a way to solve the larger problems."

Originally from Nigeria, Agbonkonkon grew up learning from her mother's entrepreneurial spirit. A government worker, her mother often sold clothes to colleagues, and encouraged Agbonkonkon to find her own path as an entrepreneur.

Agbonkonkon later raised the money to complete her bachelor's degree by selling organic honey, a business that became increasingly more lucrative throughout her college years.

"I don't see it as selling, I just love to talk to people ... just doing business as an extension of that. You get to meet people and you get to talk to them," she said.

After living in both Pennsylvania and California, her family made its way to Frisco in 2018 in search of better schools. She has spent the last 20 years after receiving her master's degree from Brigham Young University in public administration working as a stay-at-home mother, raising her five kids, and volunteering at both her children's schools and her church.

When she looked for resources to create what would become BlackUp, she contacted her alma mater. She found a few BYU professors willing to help her find a starting point.

So was Brigitte Madrian, the first female dean of the Marriott School of Business at BYU, who viewed the endeavor as being deeply connected to her own goals of diversity and inclusion, Agbonkonkon said.

The business school offered development support to Agbonkonkon and footed the \$50,000 bill to give BlackUp nine student interns for eight weeks last summer, Agbonkonkon said.

“I had all these fuzzy ideas of what I wanted to do, but I was able to crystallize that as I started to work with the team at BYU,” Agbonkonkon said.

After months of student-collaborative research, Agbonkonkon had enough data to begin building her platform. Her background is in public administration so she brought on BYU professors Greg Anderson and Mark Keith, who assisted in her research, to be co-founders and lead the platform development.

Through their research, they collected an email list of 10,000 Black professionals who’ve shown interest in joining the platform. Her goal is to reach one million users “sooner rather than later.”

“We feel like the success of this is [to] have more people on the platform. I think it’s better for the companies,” she said. “I hope ... a lot of black professionals will jump on and sign up, because the success of this is dependent on the numbers.”

Other than the paid interns BYU provided, the initial development has been bootstrapped by Agbonkonkon and her co-founders. She and her team are looking for investors, with a goal of raising \$500,000 and bringing on a full-time engineer.

“If something happens, there’s nobody that I could say ‘hey, can you go get it done right now’ because Greg and Mark may be teaching a class when that happens... it’s kind of a little bit difficult that way,” she said.

BlackUp’s focus is filling the equity gap that Black professionals face in the job market. How is it going to do that? By harnessing the power of unbiased coding, artificial intelligence and machine learning technology, Agbonkonkon said.

“It’s not just a job that the company is hiring simply because they’re trying to fill a quota or something, but rather intentionally matching candidates to companies using A.I. and machine learning,” she said. “We believe that when people are better matched to the jobs that they have qualified for, it will help them to stay in their jobs.”

In her research, Agbonkonkon said she found that coding written by primarily white men often had bias that worked against non-white users. One study from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology says commonly used supervised learning algorithms can improve hiring rates at the cost of “eliminating Black and Hispanic representation.”

“We needed to have better algorithms, and that’s what BlackUp is designed to do. To provide that better matching algorithm and better screening process for both companies and for

employees,” Agbonkonkon said.

The features, available to users for free, begin with job searching.

Agbonkonkon said one of her goals is to create company-applicant matches that withstand the test of time. Users can also take advantage of opportunities to network, or leave a review about their experience with a company. The platform is available online, with plans to roll out an app version.

The company also places a heavy focus on tracking and rating a company’s diversity and inclusion record, creating its own metrics that give partner companies an accurate reflection of their staff and hiring patterns.

“When you come as a company and you work with us, it’s not just the hiring alone, we also help to optimize the Black employee experiences. ... We provide Black employees an opportunity to rate and review your company. We take all of those ratings and reviews, and we send you reports,” she said. “Companies will get to see in real time how they’re doing.”

In lieu of traditional advertising methods, BlackUp is relying primarily on partnerships with influencers and companies to attract users to the platform.

“This is also putting money back into the hands of Black people. We decided to work [with] people who already have access to these people,” she said.

BlackUp intends to be the bridge between companies looking to hire Black professionals and the hiring pool, making the platform’s company partnership model more desirable. Partner companies pay in a subscription model, either monthly or yearly, to post jobs, reach candidates, and receive customized diversity reports.

“We’re just here to help companies. It’s something that I feel deeply about, I care so much about, and I feel like it’s so needed, but I also see the struggles that companies are facing. They don’t have to continue to struggle, because we have the solution.”

This subscription-style service will account for the majority of revenue, Agbonkonkon said. She has big goals for BlackUp’s potential and scalability.

“This is a \$5 billion total addressable market just focused on the U.S.,” Agbonkonkon said. “If we’re able to get even 20% of that, it’ll be a massive amount of money.”

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Criminal Justice

-

Dallas PD Chief, City Leaders Call For Accountability After Shooting At Concert Killed 1, Wounded 16

By Kelli Smith

Dallas Morning News

Dallas police Chief Eddie García joined city leaders and community organizers Wednesday to

denounce violence and advocate for more unity and accountability after a shooting at an outdoor concert in southeast Oak Cliff this weekend that killed one person and wounded 16 others.

Speaking at a news conference, the chief repeated calls to crack down on people who promote events that don't have a permit, saying "we need to ensure we do not have fly-by-night promoters ... interested in simply making money and getting out of town while they leave a wake of violence."

He did not reveal new details Wednesday about the investigation into Saturday's bloodshed at the unpermitted event in the 5000 block of Cleveland Road. The shooting killed Kealon Gilmore, 26, and wounded 16 others who ranged in age from 13 to 29. No arrests have been made, and officials have not provided information about potential suspects.

The burst of gunfire came after a string of violence over the last month, including a shooting two weeks ago in which one teen was killed and nine other people were wounded at a spring break party at The Space Dallas, a South Dallas party venue. The chief has said that event also didn't have a permit.

Police and city leaders have advocated for more accountability for landowners and event promoters, but it remained unclear Wednesday whether police intend to file charges against those involved in organizing the spring break party or the outdoor concert. Police spokeswoman Kristin Lowman said that it was "part of the ongoing investigation."

The Space Dallas event venue and the St. John Missionary Baptist Church — a church on Marsalis Avenue that owns the property where this weekend's shooting happened — have not responded to requests for comment.

As police search for suspects, questions remain about whether the violence could've been prevented. Seven off-duty Dallas police officers were working security at this weekend's event but left about 30 minutes before the gunfire. Police said their shifts ended.

The chief implemented new policies this week which state that off-duty officers were no longer allowed to work events that require a permit and are not issued one. He said Wednesday that police continue to work on internal policies, but the department "can only do so much" when the responsibility lies with people committing the crimes.

"We're not perfect," García said. "There's not a police department in America that's perfect — I wish we were. To the extent that we can increase communication we have amongst each other is what we're going to do to do our best to avoid this from happening."

The Dallas Police Department's official tally of murders has ticked up in recent weeks — even as overall violence remained down — and is slightly higher than it was at the same point last year. Other recent violence has included the fatal shooting of a 3-year-old boy, gunfire in Uptown that injured two people and the slaying of a teen at a Raising Cane's drive-through in Red Bird.

Community leaders joined the chief and city members to champion togetherness and violence intervention, saying that neighborhoods need to work together to prevent crime.

Victor Alvelais of Dallas CRED — an extension of the national nonprofit Youth Advocate Programs — said he’s among a team of 10 working in areas across the city with the highest rates of violence to effect positive change and show people compassion. The team of violence interrupters works to resolve conflicts and discourage violent crime by providing “people prone to acts of violence” with resources and fostering positivity in their lives.

“We are part of the solution to eradicate violence across the city of Dallas,” Alvelais said. “Because we know that we feel a void that is missing — not only in the community but in the lives of residents within those communities.”

Council member Carolyn King Arnold, whose district includes parts of Oak Cliff but not the area where the concert shooting occurred, said she set up the Wednesday news conference ahead of summer, which she called “the season of celebratory events.”

Arnold said the community needs to make an assessment now. She said city officials need to look into ensuring that there’s a better understanding of how the permitting process works, as well as better background checks into event promoters to establish accountability.

“We can’t sit another four months with stats like this and be happy about it,” Arnold said, referencing crime in her district. “We have to understand the seriousness of now.”

Dallas’ public safety committee is planning to discuss the recent shootings and possible policy changes in more depth during a meeting Monday.

City Manager T.C. Broadnax also released a statement Wednesday saying that he asked police to work with the City Attorney’s Office to investigate “creating an ordinance to ensure promoter, vendor, and site accountability; adequate public safety/security at events; and permit oversight and enforcement for violation of these standards.”

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

‘How Did This Happen To My Son?’

By Alex Stuckey and Stephanie Lamm
Houston Chronicle

Dallas Garcia was sure the phone call about her teenage son was a prank.

Holding a hand to her unoccupied ear to drown out cheers at her 7-year-old son Jagger’s football game in Alvin, Dallas climbed beneath the bleachers.

She asked the woman to repeat herself.

“Your son, Fred, was in an incident,” a woman said. “You need to come now.”

An incident? But her son was in jail.

What could possibly have happened?

Fred, who was 19 and had an IQ of 62, had been struggling for years with depression and

anxiety, unable to cope with the sudden nastiness of his peers and not enough mental health resources in high school. He started threatening suicide. He started running away. He started living on the streets.

So when Fred was arrested three weeks before Halloween last year, Dallas thought jail was a godsend — a place where his deteriorating mental illness would finally be addressed, a place where he wouldn't hurt himself or be hurt by others.

Instead, a fellow inmate at Harris County Jail beat Fred so severely that he was brain dead by the time she arrived at Ben Taub Hospital 40 minutes later. Sitting at his bedside saying her goodbyes, Dallas shook with anger. Her sweet, outgoing son — who never met a stranger and had garnered the nickname “Fearless Fred” — was gone.

His death on Oct 31, 2021, is a devastating reminder of how mentally ill kids can fall through the cracks: They end up in crisis, on the streets or thrust into the adult mental health system where psychiatric beds are so scarce jail is often the only option.

A Houston Chronicle investigation found that every school district in Texas — including Fred's — failed to have the adequate number of all four recommended mental health professionals (nurses, psychologists, counselors and social workers) between 2013 and 2020.

About the series

SECOND IN A THREE-PART SERIES

A Houston Chronicle investigation has found that millions of Texas children have gone without the appropriate level of mental health care in school for years.

MARCH 31: Texas schools don't have enough mental health providers

APRIL 7: A 19-year-old with mental illness needed help but instead was killed in Harris County Jail

APRIL 11: A small school district in North Texas takes in kids facing big mental health challenges

To read previous installments in this series go to houstonchronicle.com/incrisis.

USC FELLOWSHIP

Stephanie Lamm and Alex Stuckey reported this investigation while participating in the USC Annenberg Center for Health Journalism's 2021 Data Fellowship, which provided training, mentoring and funding to support this project. To learn more about the program, visit www.centerforhealthjournalism.org.

A NOTE ON SOURCING

To reconstruct what happened to Fred Harris before he was killed in the Harris County Jail, the Houston Chronicle's Alex Stuckey and Stephanie Lamm spent several months reviewing court documents, police reports and medical records obtained from the family and through open records requests. They watched hours of recordings of court hearings. They scoured social media platforms for people who might have known Fred and tracked down witnesses to the incident that landed him in jail.

They interviewed Fred's family members, friends and witnesses to his arrest, whenever possible, they verified accounts with witnesses and documents. Direct quotations used in the story came from contemporaneous recordings, police documents, records of court hearings or the recollections of participants who consented to interviews; in each case, those quotes have been verified by the people to whom they are attributed or a family member. Italics were used when people recalled their own thoughts.

For Dallas, that was just the first breakdown as Fred struggled to cope with getting older.

He didn't receive mental health services as he transitioned into adulthood.

She struggled to get guardianship of her special needs son.

A competency evaluation wasn't ordered for Fred until more than two weeks after he was arrested.

As the sound of Fred flatlining filled the tiny hospital room, Dallas began to wail.

How did this happen to my son?

August 2002

Galveston

Fred had been alive for just a few days when Dallas' healthy, 8-pound boy started rapidly losing weight. Doctors at The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston stuck him full of tubes and wires, hoping to get him back on track.

They weren't sure what happened. But as weeks turned into months, it was clear something was wrong with Fred.

Normal tasks will be hard for him, they told her.

He may never be able to tie his shoes.

He may never be able to read.

We're sorry.

That wasn't an acceptable answer. Dallas was a single mom and going to nursing school. Even with a 1-year-old son at home, she fought to get Fred resources.

She transported him back and forth to doctors appointments, where they worked on fine motor skills like picking and pinching.

She got him into therapy and made sure his day care programs were small enough that he received the appropriate level of attention.

She put him in sports and activities that kept his mind and body busy.

He always wanted to do more.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Bonham Elementary

Houston

2008-2013

Fred leaned over the cluttered dining room table, pressing his pencil so hard into the workbook the lead tip kept breaking.

It was the weekend. Fred's family was gathered at his grandmother's house playing games and eating hourslong meals.

But Fred's schoolwork was more important to Asa Garcia, Fred's older sister. She sat patiently with him, readjusting his fingers around the No. 2 pencil, correcting his spelling and math.

"Repeat after me, Fred: A, B, C, D, E, F, G."

Fred scrunched up his face in concentration.

"G, A, D, F, C."

Asa, 13, sighed. Helping Fred could be so frustrating. At 8, Fred still didn't know the alphabet. He still couldn't read or write.

When Asa and Dylan, Fred's older brother, played hide-and-seek, Fred didn't understand where they went or what he was supposed to do.

They tried to teach him board games, from Trouble to Monopoly, but he couldn't process the rules. Even Uno was confusing for him — he repeatedly put down cards that didn't match the color or number, gleefully screaming "UNO!" even when he had more cards in his hand.

At Bonham Elementary, he had a dedicated aide who helped him navigate school — he'd had an Individualized Education Plan, or IEP, since kindergarten. If kids teased him for being different, he had a counselor who was able to intervene.

Outside of school, Asa did the intervening. When kids refused to play basketball with him because of his size, she would use herself as a bargaining chip — offering to join Fred's team even though she was at least five years older than most of the kids playing.

Fred trailed behind his brother, Dylan, as the two marched through the neighborhood in search of bored kids looking to play football.

The two were only a year apart, but no one would know by looking at them. Dylan towered over Fred — a good head taller even at just 11 years old. Dylan didn't care.

Other boys teased Fred and said he was too small to play. Dylan never made him sit on the sidelines. Fred was an active participant in all their games.

Dylan had heard his mom talk about how Fred was different: That he might not be able to do everything Dylan did, that he might need protecting.

“Go easy on him,” she repeatedly told him. “He might not understand as much as we do.”

But Dylan didn’t really get it. He was always just Fred, the slightly annoying little brother who copied everything his older brother did.

As the group of scabby-kneed boys assembled in the street, Dylan smirked at his brother.

Even if he never caught it, Dylan would always throw Fred the ball.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Houston and Stafford

2013-2016

“KIAI!” Fred screamed as he kicked at his invisible opponent during martial arts practice, his shoes squeaking on the mat.

Fred loved karate. He loved basketball and dance. He loved T-ball and soccer. He loved sports.

Almost every day after school, Fred raced to the gym for hours of activities run by school personnel. Fred was doing well. He had aides helping him and counselors at his disposal.

He had friends and came home from school happy most days. On the rare occasion that kids picked on him, counselors were there to address the situation. Dallas barely had to get involved.

Thinking back to the years of hardship she faced when he was young — all the doctors who said Fred wouldn’t amount to anything — she couldn’t help but smile.

They were all wrong about her little boy.

A group of kids surrounded Fred, pelting him with pinecones and laughing. Fred kept yelling at them to stop, trying in vain to dodge the scaly projectiles.

Dylan was on the other side of the park, playing basketball. He heard the commotion and sprinted to help.

“Stop it, y’all! Stop!”

They didn’t.

Dylan had been protecting his younger brother for years. He stood up for Fred in the classroom when he struggled to spell and in the hallways when he macked on a girl who already had a guy and caused a scene. The park was no different.

“I live with him so I understand he can get frustrating,” his explanations would always start. “But you’re picking on a special-needs kid.”

Sometimes, words were enough. Sometimes, like today, Dylan would have to use his fists.

“I could have taken them, man!” Fred said when the group dispersed.

Fred believed it. Dylan knew better.

The January air was crisp in 2014 as Dallas walked Fred and Dylan across the threshold of their new home in the Fort Bend County suburb of Stafford, a moving box on her hip and another child in her belly.

After years of living in a townhouse in Houston, Dallas and her kids would finally have space — and a lot of it.

She thought it would be better for Fred. He’d have a pool. He’d have a yard. She planned for him to go to Dulles High School, where she had heard the special education services were stellar.

But Fred’s fresh start in Stafford turned out to be less than promising. The neighborhood, albeit safe, had less kids for Fred to play with. The pool didn’t get as much use as she hoped.

Their new home wasn’t zoned for Dulles, sitting roughly a street outside the school’s attendance boundary. Dylan and Fred ended up at Stafford High School.

Suddenly, her son — who, at 13, could barely write his name and struggled to read — was wandering halls bustling with 1,000 students. Neither of them were prepared for how difficult it would be.

HIGH SCHOOL

Freshman Year

Stafford

2016-2017

Fred came home from school and went straight to his room, blasting music to drown out the negative thoughts swirling in his head. Dallas knocked on his bedroom door.

“Fred, what happened?” she shouted over the music.

“They called me retarded.”

Dallas put her head in her hands. More and more, Fred was coming home in tears. Kids made fun of him for dancing in the hallways even though they cajoled him into doing it.

They made fun of him for being little; for being different.

Mean messages from his classmates pinged his phone during dinner, his bedtime routine or their weekly game nights.

Dallas’ bubbly, outgoing son was drawing inward. And it was breaking her heart.

Dallas had taught her son to turn to a counselor or aide when he got upset at school.

But his freshman year, Stafford Municipal School District had about six counselors and two psychologists to serve its 3,500 students.

That meant there was just one counselor per 567 students and one psychologist per 1,770 students. National advocates say schools should have one counselor per 250 students and one psychologist per 500 students.

There weren't enough counselors to help him. Without those adults around to diffuse the situation, Fred came home with pent-up anger.

In the past, he had used sports as an outlet. He used to make all the teams at the YMCA. But now, he was too small. He didn't make any rosters.

"Let's talk about it, Fred," she said. "Please let me in."

But Fred didn't want to talk. He wanted to wallow.

Dallas had been through the teenage phase with Dylan. That was hard enough. She knew Fred's would be even more fraught with land mines.

Sophomore Year

Stafford

2017-2018

Fred was more excited than he had been in months — he was talking so fast and inserting so many dance moves into his story that Dallas struggled to understand him.

"I've got new friends, and they think I'm cool!" he told his mom, beaming.

More than anything, Fred wanted a group of friends. But something about this crew gave Dallas an uneasy feeling. She asked to meet them — it was, after all, standard protocol.

Fred said no.

Then, while cleaning Fred's room, Dallas noticed her son's cologne collection was missing.

"Fred, where are your things?" she asked.

"You're just going to be mad at me," he said.

Fred's new friends were taking his things. As more belongings disappeared around the house, Dallas installed security cameras.

Watching the recordings back one night during a work shift, Dallas saw Fred letting his friends into her house. They asked Fred to show them where his mom kept her jewelry. They took his clothes, his Christmas presents, his birthday money.

With a toddler at home, Dallas feared for her family's safety. She told Fred he couldn't hang out with these kids.

That angered Fred.

Every creak of her 21-year-old house, every footstep on the landing brought Dallas racing to the front door looking for Fred.

Fred hadn't come home from school that April day. For hours, she'd waited for him to walk through the door, fists full of apologies:

I stayed late at school to work on a project.

I was hanging out with friends and lost track of time.

But she'd called. She'd texted. He hadn't responded. And now it was dark. Now she was scared. She called the police at 10:08 p.m.

"My son hasn't come home from school. It's been hours."

They told her to remain calm. That they would look at his usual haunts.

"Don't panic yet."

Dallas couldn't help it. Fred had been having more and more trouble at school — the only crowd willing to accept him the wrong one.

She paced back and forth between her living room and kitchen, watching the clock and holding her breath.

At 11:30 p.m. Stafford police officers showed up at her doorstep. There was Fred, holding a greasy paper bag from Sonic.

Dallas took a deep breath. He was safe.

An officer walked Fred up stairs to his bedroom.

"You didn't grow up like this," the officer said. "What's the problem?"

"She doesn't let me hang out with my friends. She doesn't let me have my freedom," Fred said.

Dallas had run away from home when she was 14 and spent all night laying on a bench on the beach staring up at the stars. She was terrified that a meteor would fall out of the sky and kill her.

There was no way Fred would run away again — her sweet little kid had to have been scared the entire time, just like she was all those years ago.

Fred ran away three more times that year.

Fred had been gone for two days when Asa's phone pinged with a Twitter notification. Someone had seen Fred at an apartment pool about a mile from Dallas' house in Stafford.

Asa felt her body unclench for the first time in days. Dallas, Asa and Dylan had been looking for Fred nonstop, the July heat bearing down on them as they searched gas station parking lots, neighboring streets and the grounds of Stafford High School.

There'd been no sign of him. Asa put out a call for help on Twitter. It had paid off. Asa called her mom, and the two of them raced to the apartment complex.

Fred was happy to see them, acting like it was no big deal that he'd been gone two days without a word.

"I'm hanging out with my friends," he said of the group of kids Dallas was concerned about. "I'm just swimming."

Fred didn't want to come home. Eventually, they convinced him.

Junior Year
Stafford
2018-2019

Fred slammed his thumb down on the Playstation joystick, taking his frustration out on the tiny men with guns on the screen.

"Mom is being so hard!" Fred shouted at Dylan through his Playstation headset. "She won't let me do anything!"

Dylan had moved in with his uncle in Texas City, but he always made sure to connect with Fred via Facetime or, more often, over a video game.

Usually, Fred would cry. Tonight was no exception.

Fred had repeatedly run away from home over the past year — sometimes leaving in a huff just to show up at school, unshowered and hungry.

And every time, Dallas called Dylan in tears, hoping he could talk sense into his little brother.

"What are you trying to gain from this, Fred?"

Fred never answered, simply repeating the mantra that their mother was controlling — that she was ruining his life.

But Dylan knew better. His mom wasn't asking Fred to do much. She was just trying to protect him.

"Just do what she asks," Dylan said through his headset.

But it was December and Dallas had had enough. She thought back to a recommendation made by an officer earlier that year — that Fred might do well in a psychiatric facility with an

inpatient program for teens. The past year of outbursts, running away and police knocking at her door weighed on Dallas.

She committed him.

Fred and his family had spent the morning bowling, stuffing themselves with pizza and soda to the unmistakable sound of pins crashing at the end of the lane.

It was Good Friday. Dallas' kids didn't have school. They were sitting down to play a board game when Fred wandered upstairs to take a shower.

Dallas thought nothing of it. The family played board games every Friday, and Fred was known to drift away when he'd had enough. She kept chatting with her friends.

Then: A knock at the door.

Who could that be?

The crisp uniforms and shiny badges of Stafford Police greeted her. They were there to conduct a welfare check.

"What are you talking about?" she asked.

They told her Fred threatened suicide on Instagram. They needed to see her son to make sure he was safe.

This must be a misunderstanding.

Fred had never mentioned suicide before.

Did he even know what that word meant? Hadn't they just had a fun morning?

The officers went up to his room, where Fred was sitting on his bed, playing on his phone.

She thought he was mimicking behavior he saw on social media. Still, she knew she needed to have a serious talk with her son.

"Did we not have a good day?"

Fred looked so little sitting on his queen-sized bed.

"Y'all were doing your own thing and you didn't include me."

It was a cry for attention. Dallas was relieved.

But Fred's behavior was alarming. He started saying he planned to starve himself to death. She again put him in a Houston mental health hospital.

She didn't know if it would do any good.

Senior Year
Stafford
2019-2020

Fred beamed for the camera, a plastic purple lei around his neck and his little brother, Jagger, by his side.

Dallas couldn't help but tear up: Despite all the ups and downs — the outbursts and the running away — her son had graduated high school.

He even had a job lined up. It's what they'd both dreamed of for years. But it was also terrifying. Fred was about to turn 18. And she was about to lose control.

If he ran away from home, the cops couldn't do anything — he would be an adult.

If he got sick, she couldn't talk to the doctors about his treatment — he would be an adult.

She had started the process of getting guardianship, but it was more complicated than she could have ever imagined.

Because he presented as high functioning, Adult Protective Service officials often struggled to gauge his actual presence of mind. Dallas felt absolutely helpless.

He won't stop being special needs at 18. Why doesn't the system allow me to protect him?

May 2020
SUN Behavioral
Houston

Dallas could hear the nurse from Sun Behavioral on the other end of line, but the words seemed incomprehensible.

Fred had a mild alcohol and cannabis use disorder. Had she considered a drug rehab program?

Drug rehab? What are they talking about?

Dallas had admitted Fred to the hospital, an inpatient psychiatric facility near the Texas Medical Center in Houston, when he tried to slit his wrists a week after graduation.

By this point, Fred had been diagnosed with major depressive disorder. It was reoccurring. And it was severe.

She knew Fred needed inpatient care. But she had been growing increasingly nervous about Fred's time at Sun Behavioral.

If she were being honest with herself, it seemed like the psychiatric facility was doing more harm than good.

Many of the kids he was interacting with had mental issues much more severe than Fred's. They had more significant behavioral problems, and even more problematic family lives.

But Dallas had no other choice — there was nowhere else for him to go, and it wasn't safe for him to be at home.

She hadn't known Fred to have drug issues in the past.

Rehab wasn't what her son needed. But the program was 90 days. It was a far cry from the two-week stints he was doing at local psychiatric facilities whenever he was in crisis.

The hospital referred him to a program in Pasadena. A COVID outbreak sent him home early.

August 2020

Houston

Dylan answered his mom's phone call, expecting another half hour spent bragging about his little brother.

She'd been calling a lot to gush about Fred — how he had graduated, how he had gotten a job, how he finally had his life on track.

But this call was different.

"He's gone again," Dallas said dejectedly. "He's at your aunt's house."

Fred had gone to Missouri City after running away, hitching a ride with anyone who would take him.

His aunt had found him roaming around a grocery store and brought him home.

This was the best case scenario. Fred was with someone who loved him and would take care of him.

But over the next few months, Fred ran away from his aunt's house multiple times.

He went to his uncle's next, where they offered him as much freedom as possible — treated him as much like an adult as they could.

Within days, he'd left there, too.

November 2020

Alvin

Savannah Hypes' phone started chiming nonstop, the familiar sound of her SnapChat notification drawing her away from her favorite TV show.

The messages were all from friends she made in rehab earlier that year. And they were all about Fred.

In various states of panic, her friends implored everyone to look for the smiling, happy kid who could never stop dancing. He had gone missing. He should not be alone.

Savannah sucked in a breath. She had just talked to Fred a few months ago.

Where could he have gone?

It was just one of many times Fred had run away from his aunt's in the past months.

Savannah was 16 when she met Fred in rehab. Though boys and girls at the facility weren't supposed to talk, they found their ways — meeting in shaded corners outside and leaving messages taped to desks or scrawled across bathroom walls.

She was immediately drawn to Fred because he was so different from everyone at the facility. Instead of despair, he had hope. Instead of being angry, he could never stop smiling.

Savannah closed SnapChat and opened Instagram, shakily typing in Fred's handle. No recent posts.

She typed out a message.

“If you need anything, let me know.”

April 2021

Webster

Fred's shirt was damp with sweat as he skated around the roller rink at FunCity Sk8, Asa on his heels as the neon lights pulsed around them.

The more laps they took, the more giggles Fred elicited.

For a brief moment, it was like old times, when Asa would take her little brother on dates every few weeks.

But when Asa and Fred sat down for ice cream at Baskin Robbins, they were rocked back to reality.

“Fred, you have to stop running away when you're mad about something,” Asa said.

For the past eight months, Fred had been living on and off with his aunt in Texas City. He would be there for a few weeks, get mad about something silly and leave, just to come back a week later.

Fred kept digging into his scoop of chocolate.

“I understand you get frustrated,” she said. “Just come to my house. I'm not going to have a bedtime for you. I want you to just come here to decompress.”

She urged him to call her whenever he needed.

He said he would.

August 2021

West Oaks Hospital
Houston

Racial and homophobic slurs echoed through the halls of the 160-bed psychiatric facility in Houston — the majority directed at staff.

Amber Bush, 35, took it all in, flinching at every offensive word that fell out of the imposing patient's mouth.

It was her first day at West Oaks. She had back surgery and had taken too many pills. She was not in a good place.

What have I gotten myself into?

Then, a small voice piped up — a voice nearly as small as the teenager it came from.

“Don't say that!”

The slurs were then lobbed at him, a verbal assault that nearly escalated to violence before staff was able to sedate the offending patient.

By the time it was over, the teen was crying. Amber couldn't help but think of her 19-year-old son — how scared he would be in a place like this.

“Hey buddy. It's OK. What's your name?”

“Fred,” he choked out.

Over the next four days, the two became inseparable, Fred showing Amber the ropes and Amber protecting him.

Fred was always smiling, always laughing — so much so that she started calling him Smiley.

But behind the happy facade, Fred was suffering. He told her his family didn't want him — that he had no choice but to live in a homeless shelter.

Sometimes, he slept in the park. Sometimes, he had to eat food out of a dumpster.

He didn't know what he would do once discharged: Individuals at the homeless shelter were threatening to kill him.

When Amber was released for another back surgery, the two vowed to keep in touch.

“Go back home, Fred. Your family loves you.”

September 2021

Hockley

Amber was laying in bed, recovering from two failed back surgeries and a lumbar fusion, when her phone pinged. Grimacing, she reached for it, a smile coming to her face when she saw it was Fred.

The two had remained in contact since their short time at West Oaks — they'd even gotten lunch once.

But the photo that popped up on her phone made her gasp. Fred — her sweet, silly Fred — was holding a knife to this throat.

“Wish I wasn’t here,” he wrote in the text.

“You’re better than this, Fred.”

Fred never responded.

Later that month in Stafford, Dallas answered an unknown number. The voice on the other end almost made her weep.

“Mom, it’s me.”

Months had passed since Dallas last heard from Fred. A friend told her that he had again checked himself into a local psychiatric hospital, likely using Medicaid. She couldn’t help but be proud.

This was evidence that she had raised him right. He knew he needed help and he had sought it out.

“Do you want help?” she said into the phone, holding back tears.

“I’m still trying to figure that out mom.”

She understood. She was ready to bring him home if he was ready to follow some ground rules.

She readjusted her 1 year old daughter, Saturn, in the crook of her arm.

“There’s another baby here,” she said. “You can’t steal. You can’t have people in the house — it’s not fair to everyone else.”

“I’m going to be scared,” she added.

Fred waited a beat before responding.

“I don’t want to make you scared mom,” Fred said. “I’m tired of disappointing you.”

Oct. 10. 2021: 4:14PM

Multiple witnesses call 911 reporting a Black man walking in the middle of Westheimer Road in Montrose holding a four-inch steak knife.

“1201 Westheimer. Black pants with neon green stripes standing in the middle of the street. Possibly has mental issues,” police call over the radio.

That man was Fred.

Fred, 19, was arrested and charged with aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, a second

degree felony.

Oct. 11, 2021

A Harris County hearing officer orders that Fred be interviewed to determine if he has a mental illness or is a person with an intellectual disability.

Oct. 12, 2021: 4:56AM

A probable cause hearing is held. Fred was being held in the mental health unit and wasn't present.

The state asks for a \$75,000 bond. The court disagreed.

"I read this carefully: There's no injuries, no stabbing," the court hearing officer said. "The closest he got was 20 feet? The deadly weapon is a knife but ..."

The court, instead, set bond at \$20,000.

Fred remained in jail.

Oct. 27, 2021

Dallas talks to Fred's court appointed attorney and hears her son on the other end of the phone.

"Mom, this is a scary place," he said softly. "It feels like I'm in a bad dream."

A music lover, Fred scratches out his feelings about being in jail in a song.

Michael Paul Ownby, a 25-year-old Houston man with a history of violence had just been convicted of continuous violence against the family.

While being escorted into a cell at the Harris County Jail, the 6-foot 2-inch 240-pound man struck a detention officer. He was charged with assault of a public servant.

Oct. 28, 2021

The Harris County jail receives an order from the court to evaluate Fred's competency.

Oct. 10, 2021

1201 Westheimer Road, across from Slick Willie's in Montrose

4:14 p.m.

Cars dodged past Fred as he wandered down the middle of Westheimer Road, shirtless and clenching a 4-inch steak knife.

A Houston man, who wished to remain anonymous for fear of retaliation, was standing outside a nearby business where he works and chatting with friends. When he saw Fred, he did a double take.

What is he doing with that knife?

He'd seen Fred in the area for the past four or five months — just another lost kid, he thought, trying to find his way.

It was clear to the witness that Fred was mentally ill, but he seemed like a nice enough kid. They'd even chatted once before.

But the Fred he saw today was not the same teenager.

He had a vacant look in his eyes, like he was having a mental episode.

Though he didn't appear threatening, the witness' mind flashed through news story after news story about mentally ill people assaulting others without knowing what they were doing.

He ran into the building and locked the door.

Fred walked up to the glass door of the business and stared in at the witness and the other employees. Hand still clasping the knife, Fred meandered away.

The witness dialed 9-1-1.

"9-1-1 what's your emergency?"

"There's a man wandering around with a knife. I think he's mentally ill."

Over the police radio, a dispatcher told officers what to look for.

"Black pants with neon green stripes standing in the middle of the street."

"Possibly has mental issues."

They arrested Fred and charge him with aggravated assault with a deadly weapon.

Oct. 12, 2021

Harris County Courthouse

4:56 a.m.

The sun hadn't even risen by the time Magistrate Diana Olvera, hearing officer for Harris County Criminal Courts, called Fred's name.

His probable cause hearing, where an officer determines if it is reasonably believable that a crime has been committed, was supposed to happen at 10 p.m. the night before. He'd been pushed to 4 a.m. this morning.

But Fred's slight frame and closely shorn hair could not be found amongst the six sleepy individuals sitting in the courtroom.

He was in the jail's mental health unit. He wouldn't be present today, Olvera said.

Two days earlier, Fred had been arrested in Montrose after multiple people called 9-1-1, reporting a man with a knife.

Dallas was relieved — it felt like she'd opened a Wonka chocolate bar and found a golden ticket.

In all the years she'd been trying to get Fred help, she'd been told over and over again that the best way to do that was for him to go to jail — a place where he would be evaluated for mental illness and officially labeled incompetent.

And the court had already ordered that Fred be interviewed to determine if he had a mental illness or developmental disability.

That morning, the state asked for a \$75,000 bond, saying he presented a “current threat of physical violence.” Olvera was incredulous.

“I read this carefully: There's no injuries, no stabbing,” she said. “The closest he got was 20 feet? The deadly weapon is a knife but ...”

Noting his lack of criminal history, Olvera set Fred's bond at \$20,000 and moved on. The court appointed him an attorney, Kirk Oncken, later that day.

Fred remained in jail.

Oct. 27, 2021

Stafford

Dallas could hear Fred's muffled voice in the background of a strategy call with his attorney. She knew her son well enough to catch the subtle notes of panic bubbling up at the end of his sentences.

“Mom, this is a scary place,” he said softly. “It feels like I'm in a bad dream.”

Dallas' heart broke. Her baby boy — whom she had grown, whom she had nurtured, whom she had tried to keep safe — was terrified.

But she also knew this was the wake up call he probably needed.

Weeks earlier, she had called the jail to tell them he shouldn't be in the general population because of his IQ. She dropped off his IEP paperwork from school. She thought steps had been taken to protect him.

Sitting in Harris County Jail, Fred put pencil to paper and began to scratch out his feeling in song:

“I swere Im in this b*** for nothing these n***s always starting something i feel like god dont f*** love me I gess thats why he always judge me when I was locked up in da pin my n***s didnt send me shit I swere I wanted to f*** cry god oh god why did you put me on this earth ben going through hell since birth/i/swere im depressed as f*** that's why I shoot that sh** up”

Michael Paul Ownby, a 25-year-old Houston man with a history of violence, had just been convicted of continuous violence against the family.

While being escorted into a cell at the Harris County Jail, the 6-foot 2-inch 240-pound man struck a detention officer. He was charged with assault of a public servant.

The following day, the court ordered a psychiatric examination to determine Fred's level of competency.

Among the belongings of her son, Fred Harris, that were returned to her from the Harris County Jail, Dallas Garcia found books, including a bible, and a rap that Harris had begun to compose before he was killed by another inmate.

Oct. 29, 2021
Harris County Jail
10:40 p.m.

Fred and Ownby were in their shared cell at the Harris County Jail, having a late night chat.

What happened 36 minutes later was laid out by the district attorney's office in a hearing.

Video surveillance shows Ownby walk over and begin wailing on Fred — first with his fist and, then, a shiv fashioned from a sharpened utensil.

Ownby had half a foot and 140 pounds on the 5-foot 8-inch, 98-pound Fred. Ownby struck Fred over and over in the face and neck. After the first few hits, Fred crumpled to the concrete floor of their cell.

Ownby threw the shiv across the room, grabbing Fred by the neck and, later, the shirt. He slammed Fred's head into the concrete floor 10 times.

Blood pooled beneath Fred. He wasn't moving.

But that didn't stop Ownby, who started stomping Fred's head with his left foot. He then picked Fred up and threw him at the cell door like a rag doll.

The 25-year-old alternated between slamming Fred's head into the concrete, and stomping on his head over and over again.

When detention officers finally arrived and detained Ownby, Fred was unresponsive. They transported him to Ben Taub Hospital in Houston.

It was too late.

Epilogue

Jagger lay prone on the floor of Fred's room sobbing, his brother's size 9 flip flops tucked under the bed as if Fred had just returned home from school and climbed under the covers.

"Can Fred come home now?" he begged Dallas, his little voice cracking.

Tears sprang to Dallas' eyes. She scooped Jagger up and carried him out of the room.

"I wish, baby. I would give anything."

Fred's room hasn't changed since his death: The framed bible verse remains on his bedside

table. The plant hanging in front of his window is still alive.

If Dallas closes her eyes, she can still picture him sitting there, playing video games and talking trash with Dylan through his headset.

The absence of her fearless, cheerful boy — the boy who danced in the kitchen; who never missed a family game night; who knew every Coldplay album by heart — is palpable.

She's hired an attorney, hoping to get justice for her son. The lawsuit hasn't been filed.

In a statement, the Harris County Sheriff's Office said that Fred's death is still under investigation by its Internal Affairs Division, its Office of Inspector General and the Texas Department of Safety's Ranger Division. The findings of the internal review will be turned over to the office's Administrative Disciplinary Committee for any policy or procedure infractions.

"These disciplinary measures could include, suspension and or termination of that employee (or employees)," the statement said.

The results of the Rangers' investigation will be given to the Harris County District Attorney's Office.

The last time Asa spoke to her brother before his death was their date night in April.

She still talks about Fred in the present tense, as if his voice was just one phone call away.

She can't believe she'll never again get to take him out for ice cream or sing at the top of their lungs while dancing their hearts out.

After Fred's death, Dylan stopped eating. He couldn't stop crying. He thinks back to all the times he didn't drop everything and pick Fred up when he was roaming the streets in crisis.

Could I have saved him?

Dylan is currently planning his wedding. Fred was always supposed to be his best man — to hype the party up and get everyone dancing.

It will be a tough day, not having him there. But more than anything, Dylan is upset Fred will never have his own wedding. Never have his own kids. Never grow old with someone he loves.

Amber Bush was watching the nightly news in November when she saw Fred's photo flash across the screen.

"Dallas Garcia is grieving the loss of her 19-year-old son, Fred Harris," the news reporter said. "Authorities say he died after a fight on Friday ..."

Amber started to shake. The rest of the report was a blur as she hopped on Facebook to confirm the news.

She thought back to the countless times Fred told her he feared being killed by others living in the homeless shelter. She imagined that's why he was carrying a knife on the day he was arrested.

Could I have prevented this? Should I have taken him more seriously?

The witness who called the cops when he saw Fred wandering around with a knife was at home scrolling through Reddit when he saw a headline about Fred's death. He burst into tears.

What would have happened if I hadn't called the cops that day?

Stafford High School is a campus within Stafford Municipal School District. Gracie Martinez, a spokeswoman for the district, said staff and students were "deeply saddened" by Fred's death.

"In order to reach his academic goals, the district was able to provide him with both internal and external services, and this was done in partnership with the family," she said in a statement. "Every child is different, and our staff works collaboratively with each student, their family and the community to provide services and supports that meets each child's academic, behavioral, and social/emotional needs."

Dallas said it wasn't enough.

Experts recommend that districts have specific student to mental health professional ratios in order to serve students best. Those ratios are one per 250 students for both counselors and social workers, one psychologist per 500 students and one nurse per 750.

Stafford failed to meet those ratios every year that Fred attended high school.

Martinez said that the "district implements a staffing formula that is board-approved and commensurate with our student population."

Harris County has a jail diversion center, where mentally ill individuals can be transferred instead of being jailed.

If police encounter someone with a mental health issue, they can call the District Attorney's Office Intake Line. An official with the DA's office — in collaboration with the officer involved — can determine that jail diversion is a good fit or decide to file charges.

The program typically is reserved for individuals accused of low-level, non-violent offenses. Fred was charged with a felony.

A Harris County hearing officer ordered that Fred be interviewed to determine if he had a mental illness or an intellectual disability the day after he was arrested. But a competency evaluation wasn't ordered until the day before he was beaten, more than two weeks later.

Kirk Oncken, Fred's appointed attorney, did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

All local mental health authorities and local behavioral health authorities — which contract with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission to provide mental health care

statewide — offer transition-age youth services for kids who need support as they enter adulthood. Discussions about these services are recommended to begin around age 14, for those with “serious emotional disturbance.”

Between 2017 and 2021, 1,053 individuals participated in the program, which provides employment assistance and housing, for example.

Dallas had never heard of these services, she said.

Martinez said the Stafford school district provides all students age 13 and older with transition information.

Michael Paul Ownby has been charged with murder in Fred’s death. At his probable cause hearing in November, it took the state two-and-a-half minutes to describe the brutal attack on Fred.

Tributes to Dallas’ kids adorn her body: The planet Saturn etched into her finger for her baby daughter; ‘Jagger’ in red letters running down her right arm.

Fred and Dylan’s names are on her right shoulder. She placed Fred’s name on her left forearm, nestled into a music note-turned infinity sign.

She tries to stay strong for her youngest kids, but her life is now a string of reminders.

A stocking on the mantle that Fred will never again tear off the hook on Christmas morning.

A stack of books never cracked.

A pair of glasses gathering dust on a bookshelf.

Sometimes she can’t help but think:

How can I possibly survive this?

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Execution Looms For Man Convicted In 1992 Killing Of Four At Houston Home

By Nicole Hensley

Houston Chronicle

A man convicted in a deadly drug rip that left several members of a southwest Houston family dead is a step closer to an execution date.

A judge in the 351th District Court is expected to sign a death warrant for 51-year-old Arthur Brown Jr. — convicted of capital murder in 1993 for killing Jose Tovar, 32; Jessica Quinones, 19, who was seven months pregnant; Frank Farias, 17, and their 21-year-old neighbor, Audrey Brown. The four were tied up with linen at a home in the 4600 block of Brownstone Lane and shot execution-style.

Police linked the June 1992 shooting to drugs but only small amounts of marijuana were

found.

Rachel Tovar and a sixth person were shot in the attack but survived. Tovar sat in the courtroom as Harris County District's Office prosecutors on Wednesday read the names of her slain husband, son, daughter-in-law and neighbor to the judge.

Brown fled Texas with the help of relatives and was caught months later in Alabama.

"When his sister voiced concern about helping him do that, he joked with her that he had killed six Mexicans and that's why he needed to escape," prosecutor Joseph Sanchez said in court.

A jury convicted him in 1993. Tovar said she was stunned that after three decades, Brown was still alive.

"It's been 30 years," she said. "When they took my family's life — they took it right then and there. He's still alive, he's still here. He still gets to survive all these years. My children and my husband didn't."

She visits her son and daughter-in-law's grave but is unable to do the same for her husband, who was buried in Mexico.

"I haven't ever gone back," Tovar continued.

Quinones' niece and sister also appeared in the courtroom.

"She was an innocent party in all of this," said Monica Morales, who was a toddler when Quinones was killed. "I feel it's my duty to be her advocate."

Brown, among more than 70 defendants with Harris County cases on death row, has exhausted all appeals in the capital murder case. Prosecutors have since asked Judge Natalia Cornelio whether she wants Brown to be brought from the Polunsky Unit on May 20 to sign the death warrant in his presence.

"My preference is that he be here for this," Cornelio said.

Brown is expected to appear either by Zoom or to be brought to the court. If the judge signs the execution order by the end of May, the execution by lethal injection would happen in August.

Brown's lawyer, Paul Manser, could not be reached for comment.

Brown had two co-defendants in the capital murder case — one of whom has already been executed. Authorities put Marion Butler Dudley Jr. to death in 2006, according to TDCJ records.

Antonia Dunson, who is serving a life sentence in Huntsville, is eligible for parole in 2027.

The state's oldest death row inmate, a Harris County defendant, is slated for execution later this month.

Carl Wayne Buntion, convicted of killing a Houston police officer during a 1990 traffic stop, will be put to death April 21 at a Texas Department of Criminal Justice facility in Huntsville.

The state last executed death row prisoner Rick Rhoades — also a Harris County case — in September 2021. There are nearly 200 people on death row in the state, records show.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

National News

-

Texas Republicans Who Opposed Resolution Supporting NATO Criticize And Question Its Language

By Abby Livingston

Texas Tribune

WASHINGTON — With Russia waging a brutal war against Ukraine, the U.S. House of Representatives overwhelmingly voted this week to reaffirm “its unequivocal support” of NATO, the defense alliance created more than 70 years ago to counter Russian aggression in Europe.

But a noteworthy bloc of 11 Texas Republicans voted against the nonbinding measure that passed with bipartisan support. Two Texas representatives say their opposition was rooted in a measure calling for a Center for Democratic Resilience.

That institution would be at NATO headquarters in Belgium and would “serve as a resource and a clearinghouse of best practices and cross-fertilisation on democratic benchmarks available to member, partner, and aspirant states,” according to NATO’s website.

U.S. Rep. Kay Granger of Fort Worth said the resolution’s language about such a center was vague and she criticized Democratic leadership for rushing the vote before members could understand it better.

“Some of the things they’re asking us to vote on now seemed to be hurried up so much that there seemed to be very little presentation and very little time to really analyze it and know how important those things are,” she said. “I could’ve made a mistake on that one. It was a call.”

U.S. Rep. Chip Roy of Austin in a statement described the center as a “distraction to NATO’s mission.” He argued the “center will be weaponized against member countries — such as the United States — who enact policies contrary to the leftist orthodoxy that now unfortunately permeates most of Western Europe.”

Roy didn’t elaborate on how he thought the center would be used in such a way. He said in his statement that “it is imperative for the United States to stand side by side with our NATO allies” rather than “passing toothless resolutions.”

“NATO should be focused on military strength — not on empowering international organizations to target the internal activities of sovereign nations under the vague guise of

illiberalism or human rights,” he said.

The resolution was a show of moral support and did not include any funding mechanisms or measures that would have sent aid to NATO or Ukraine.

The nine other Texas Republicans voting against the resolution were U.S. Reps. Brian Babin of Woodville, Michael Burgess of Lewisville, John Carter of Round Rock, Michael Cloud of Victoria, Lance Gooden of Terrell, Louie Gohmert of Tyler, Troy Nehls of Richmond, Pete Sessions of Waco and Randy Weber of Friendswood.

None of those nine representatives responded to requests for comment late Wednesday..

NATO, which is an acronym for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, is a defense alliance that came together after World War II among western European countries and the United States to push back against the Soviet Union’s aggression in the eastern part of the continent.

The resolution’s text called for the U.S. government to uphold NATO’s “founding democratic principles” and the establishment of the Center for Democratic Resilience within its headquarters.

Granger is one of the Texas representatives most steeped in foreign policy, by way of her subcommittee assignments on the House Appropriations Committee. She said she and a handful of fellow GOP members debated whether to vote for the resolution despite what they considered vague language.

“We went back and forth about it,” she said. “We were for it and against it.”

She said her decision to oppose the resolution stemmed from not having time to fully vet it.

“In some of these things, they’re very, very serious, and we’re not taking the time ... to have it ahead of time, to be able to discuss these things and see the alternatives,” Granger said.

U.S. Rep. Mike Turner is an Ohio Republican who helped conceive of the Center for Democratic Resilience and spoke about it on the House floor Tuesday.

“This center would monitor challenges and threats to democracy, natural rights and the rule of law among member nations,” he said. “Partnering with democracy-promotion organizations, the center will assist member states and aspiring member states to preserve and foster democracy among their ranks.”

For decades, many American conservatives grouched about NATO — most notable among them was former President Donald Trump. The goal for each NATO country is to spend 2% of its GDP on its national defense by 2024.

That alliance is having a renaissance in Europe, as the United States and its allies are trying to prevent the Russian invasion from spilling into NATO countries. Most mainstream foreign policy experts credit NATO’s efficacy for containing the Russian aggression to Ukraine.

Republican U.S. Rep. Michael McCaul of Austin is the top House Republican on foreign affairs and voted to support NATO. On Wednesday, he sported a blue-and-gold Ukrainian

ribbon on his suit jacket at the Capitol.

He told The Texas Tribune that NATO countries are “stepping up” in ways some countries had lagged before. A frequent conservative critique of NATO is that many European countries fall short of the expected standard that all member countries spend at least 2% of their GDP on defense.

“NATO is more unified than it’s ever been. Germany now is putting in 2% of their GDP. And they are sending weapons and they are training,” he said.

NATO bonds further frayed in recent years, as Trump regularly railed against the alliance. But his criticism did lead to several NATO countries deciding to increase their defense spending.

Everything changed six weeks ago when Russian President Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine, a country on the Eastern European frontier that long aspired to join the organization. Several NATO countries located near Ukraine, like Poland, are most impacted by the refugee exodus from Ukraine.

At the heart of NATO is an agreement among all 30 countries known as Article 5, which states an attack on one NATO member country is an attack on all NATO allies. The 9/11 attacks on the United States are the single time in the alliance’s existence that Article 5 has been invoked.

Former NATO Ambassador Kay Bailey Hutchison addressed the vote in an interview with the Tribune on Wednesday.

Hutchison carefully noted she had not read the language in the House resolution but insisted the political establishment is behind NATO.

“I know we have bipartisan support for NATO — I know that,” she told Tribune CEO Evan Smith, pointing to her former colleagues in the U.S. Senate.

“We have that bipartisan support,” she later added. “I’ve seen it.”

U.S. Rep. Colin Allred, a Dallas Democrat who serves on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, seemed mystified that so many Texans voted against a resolution supporting NATO, noting that the last two Republican presidents prior to Trump — George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush — were NATO boosters.

“I really don’t know what to make of it,” he said. “We’ve seen how important it is, and I find it really hard to understand.”

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

L.A. Bans Official Travel To Florida And Texas Over Parents' Rights Bill, LGBTQ+ Policies

By Zachary Rogers
KABC

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously on Tuesday to suspend all official travel to both Florida and Texas.

The travel ban was proposed and passed in response to legislation enacted in Florida and Texas. Critics, including the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, claim those bills target LGBTQ+ youth and families.

The board reportedly voted in support of the ban in order to support "affirming care and inclusion for LGBTQ+ youth and their families."

LA County Board Supervisors Sheila Kuehl and Hilda Solis submitted the travel ban motion for Florida and Texas "for the conduct of county business, that is what we pay for, with taxpayer money" unless "failure to authorize the travel would seriously harm the county's interests." according to reporting from NY Daily News.

Considering the rampant rise of hate crimes and some pretty egregious conduct by jurisdictions across the country against LGBTQ+ youth and their families, this is not the time to be enacting more legislation designed to encourage more harassment and suffering," Kuehl reportedly said.

The offending legislation in Florida is the recently passed Parental Rights in Education Act, which prohibits discussion in classrooms "about sexual orientation or gender identity in primary grade levels or in a manner that is not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students."

Critics have labeled the legislation the "Don't Say Gay" bill, claiming it is too vague and will possibly lead to harm for LGBTQ+ students. A watchdog group dismissed those claims, calling them "dishonest and egregiously inaccurate."

Kuehl and Solis say Florida's law will "perpetuate a culture of bullying, secrecy, shame and fear," according to KTTV News.

Schools should be spaces that foster open discussion, critical thinking, meaningful engagement and the safe exploration of ideas," they reportedly wrote. "The implementation of this bill would create an atmosphere that stifles such a culture and stifles learning itself.

Following the passing of the Florida bill, Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick told supporters in a letter he would prioritize passing a similar bill in Texas. Again, critics dubbed the proposal "Don't Say Gay" legislation, and are now fighting against it.

The Texas order "flies in the face of all that we know about best practices when it comes to supporting children and young adults to discover who they are and feel secure in their sense of self," Kuehl and Solis reportedly say.

Caregivers who support youth with affirming care should in no way be labeled as abusive," their motion reads in regards to Texas's proposed bill, according to KTTV News. "This order is discriminatory, harmful and just plain cruel.

The travel ban reportedly does not make immediately clear what is "official" travel and what is not.

Republicans in Ohio have also introduced a bill that mirrors Florida's parents' rights bill.

-
[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Opinion/Editorial

Catalytic Converter Thefts Are Expensive — And Can Be Deadly

Dallas Morning News

If you think that catalytic converter theft is a faceless property crime, you're wrong. Harris County Sheriff's Deputy Darren Almendarez last week lost his life over a catalytic converter.

Almendarez was fatally shot when he exchanged gunfire with several men he spotted attempting to steal a catalytic converter from his vehicle while he and his wife were at a grocery store.

Just weeks before Almendarez's slaying, three men accused of stealing catalytic converters led Harris County sheriff deputies on a high-speed chase. And in yet another incident in March, two Texas men were arrested in connection with a rash of catalytic converter thefts at the University of Central Florida in Orlando.

These incidents are just the tip of an increasingly brazen national crime spree that tells you just how out of control and dangerous catalytic converter thefts have become. Legislative action so far has not been enough.

Last year, lawmakers in Texas, one of the top five states for catalytic converter thefts, passed a law to increase criminal penalties for knowingly purchasing stolen catalytic converters and toughened reporting requirements for metal recyclers who buy catalytic converters. But the crime is so flagrant that Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick last week made catalytic converter theft an interim legislative charge to lawmakers.

Thieves usually target catalytic converters on sport utility and hybrid vehicles with enough ground clearance to allow a person to quickly crawl under the chassis to remove the converter. But any vehicle owner can be victimized, and these thefts are costing us all in higher insurance costs, expensive repairs and frustration.

The National Insurance Crime Bureau estimates that roughly 25,000 catalytic converters were stolen across the nation between 2008 through 2016. Since then, catalytic converter thefts nationwide soared to over several thousand a month. So far this year, Dallas police have reported 639 thefts, up from 547 from the same period in 2021.

And there is no end in sight since recycling facilities typically pay \$50 to \$500 for stolen catalytic converters, which contain rhodium, palladium and platinum used to filter environmentally hazardous exhaust emissions. These precious metals command prices ranging from \$1,000 per ounce for platinum to \$19,000 per ounce for rhodium.

Scrap recyclers are a key link in this criminal supply chain. It may be time for Washington to step in as it did previously with federal legislation to more easily track stolen vehicle parts through national databases.

Many states have stiffened criminal penalties or enacted laws requiring scrap recyclers to keep detailed records about those selling catalytic converters. However, catalytic converters don't have identifiable serial numbers that would allow law enforcement to more easily track stolen converters. The real value is in the equally hard to trace precious metals.

Police urge vehicle owners to install a catalytic converter anti-theft device, etch a partial vehicle identification number on their converter and park their vehicles in well lit, secured areas to minimize this crime of opportunity. Law enforcement, auto parts makers, lawmakers, insurance companies, recyclers and others have to do more to disrupt this criminal enterprise.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Editorial: Trump Allies Want Abbott To Declare A Border 'Invasion.' Have They Heard Of Ukraine?

Houston Chronicle

You've seen it in every newspaper and cable TV channel for weeks — the dazed eyes of a pregnant woman carried on a stretcher from a bombed-out maternity hospital. The sagging scaffolding of buildings dusted the ashen color of apocalypse. The crime scene of bloated bodies — faces down in the dirt, hands bound — strewn throughout a town called Bucha, giving little doubt that an enemy intent on stealing its neighbor's sovereignty has now resorted to murderous war crimes to achieve its goal.

-

That, dear reader, is what an invasion looks like.

-

It is bloody and violent and, in the case of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, executed by a military at the whim of a tyrannical autocrat.

-

It is not a scattered stream of desperate men and women, including moms and dads, sometimes with children in tow, risking life and limb on journeys of hundreds of miles for a distant shot at freedom, opportunity and mere survival. These people are called migrants. Or immigrants. Or asylum-seekers. Not invaders.

-

Yes, there have been crises at the Texas-Mexico border. No, not every border-crosser meets the qualifications for asylum — and that certainly includes the occasional criminal and drug-trafficker in the mix. Yes, the Biden administration needs to step up, especially now as he plans to end a Trump-era rule barring entrance, and provide the resources to shelter and process the claims of new arrivals, who, for better or worse, still see America as a shining refuge from violence, war and persecution.

-

But we strain to convey our disgust at the idea being perpetuated by former Trump administration officials that Gov. Greg Abbott should combat the humanitarian challenges at the border by declaring an "invasion," an act intended to broaden the governor's power to take war-like actions against migrants.

-

Tom Homan, the former acting director for Immigration and Customs Enforcement under Trump, floated this idea at a border security conference in San Antonio last week. Homan's plan involves a novel interpretation of an obscure clause of the U.S. Constitution that would allow the National Guard or state police to forcibly send migrants to Mexico, without regard to immigration laws and law enforcement procedures.

- Ken Cuccinelli, a former Homeland Security official under Trump, endorsed this idea, arguing that states are entitled to defend themselves from immediate danger under the constitution's "states self-defense clause," which says states cannot engage in warlike actions or foreign policy unless invaded.

- Basically, in Homan and Cuccinelli's war games fantasy, Abbott would play Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the heroic Ukrainian president, defending the Lone Star State from a Putin-esque foreign enemy intent on burgling American sovereignty.

- But who would they have play Vladimir Putin? A gaggle of unarmed migrant families from nations throughout the Caribbean and Central and South America whose primary offense is seeking a better way of life?

- Alas, this is no Hollywood war epic, but a real-life policy prescription that may have legs. Homan has reportedly been in Abbott's ear pushing this preposterous notion as a response to the Biden administration's announcement that it would stop turning away asylum seekers at the border under a Trump-era public health order, known as Title 42. The Trump administration issued the controversial health order in 2020, arguing it was necessary to combat the spread of COVID-19. It remained a key tool in Biden's efforts to handle record numbers of border crossings during his term, used to expel migrants 1.2 million times since he took office.

- Ending Title 42 is the right thing to do. Even if its prompt processing and ejection protocols deterred some people from coming, the policy has had dire consequences, with organizations such as Human Rights Watch tracking thousands of kidnappings, rapes and violent assaults against asylum seekers expelled to or blocked at the U.S.-Mexico border since Biden took office.

- Tens of thousands more asylum seekers have waited months or years to exercise their legal right to seek protection. Federal data show the policy actually led to more border encounters, not less, since single adults who are expelled don't suffer financial consequences and many simply return to try and cross again.

- Yet it's also true that ending the policy will have consequences for our already over-taxed immigration system. Border Patrol officials are bracing for as many as 18,000 arrivals daily once Title 42 expires in May. Last week, about 7,100 migrants per day were coming to the southern U.S. border.

- We're encouraged to see the Biden administration thinking proactively, establishing a "Southwest Border Coordination Center" in February and transferring hundreds of agents from northern and coastal borders to support its operations. The administration will also implement long-delayed plans to provide COVID-19 vaccines to migrants taken into custody.

- In our own fantasy, nobody declares war on migrants or yells "invasion" but instead, Abbott worked with Biden and together they'd find a way to humanely process the expected influx of migrants.

- Now that the Republican primary has passed, we hope Abbott can resist the seduction and perhaps even arm-twisting by immigration hard-liners such as Homan and Cuccinelli. So far,

according to Homan, Abbott has been non-committal. That's good news for migrants and also Texas taxpayers, since weaponizing this rarely used constitutional clause will almost certainly lead to costly litigation.

- Abbott only has himself to thank for the uncomfortable position these extreme border hawks have put him in. The governor spent months beating his chest about the thousands of National Guard and Department of Public Safety troopers on the border carrying out Operation Lone Star, who jailed migrants on state trespassing charges and erected border fencing on privately owned land. Only after his border mission was exposed as a \$2 billion boondoggle has he started to rein in his rhetoric.

- Color us surprised and hopeful that Abbott seems lately to be acknowledging what this editorial board and seemingly every immigration expert has been saying for years: immigration is the federal government's responsibility.

- Actually, now he may be hammering home that point a little too zealously with his announcement Wednesday to literally bus migrants to Washington D.C., presumably a symbolic and very real effort to hand off responsibility for the immigrants to the feds.

- Abbott's unsavory theatrics as the tough-talking border governor are no substitute for federal action, including comprehensive immigration reform, more judges and resources for backlogged immigration courts and increased diplomatic efforts on the ground in troubled home countries.

- If Abbott has really seen the error of his ways he should outright reject the absurd "invasion" suggestions from Homan and Cuccinelli. He should send the National Guard troops back to their families and lead an effort to work with the Biden administration to develop a sensible border and immigration policy and brace for the expected post-Title 42 surge in migrants. They are not foreign invaders threatening our sovereignty and our lives; they are the huddled masses drawn to this land by America's storied promise of liberty and refuge.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

- **Opinion: Texas Fails Victims Of Sex Trafficking. Overhaul Child Welfare Services Now.**
By Sherry Sylvester and Andrew Brown
Houston Chronicle

Texans were horrified to learn of the Department of Family and Protective Services' mishandling of allegations that children in its care were sexually exploited at a shelter intended to protect victims of sex trafficking. In the weeks since the story made it clear that DFPS has broken its promise to children to take them to a place that is safer than the place where they were in, the Texas House and Senate convened emergency hearings to get to the bottom of what happened, as did the judge overseeing the decade-old federal lawsuit against the state's foster care system.

This outrage is just the latest in a long line of heartbreaking, avoidable incidents that are rooted in organizational dysfunction and a toxic internal culture. Private providers, foster parents and even its own employees have described the department's approach to internal management and external oversight as "punitive," "crisis-driven," fear-based, and lacking a unifying vision and clear guiding principles.

This toxicity permeates the organization, rendering it utterly incapable of protecting the children in its care. And it's resistant to change. Efforts at reforming the department have either been ignored, delayed or poorly implemented.

The problems plaguing DFPS have been well-known for at least a decade. In 2011, Texas was sued in federal court on behalf of children in its permanent care. The lawsuit alleged that conditions in the state-run foster care system were so bad that they violated the constitutional rights of the children. In 2015, U.S. District Court Judge Janis Graham Jack ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, finding that children in the custody of the department routinely leave more damaged than when they entered. As part of her ruling, Jack required the state to comply with a series of remedial orders intended to fix the problems with the system.

Following Judge Jack's ruling, the Texas Legislature got to work enacting reforms to give the department the tools needed to turn things around. In 2017, the Texas Senate passed Senate Bill 11, which laid out a blueprint for reform, including standards that should have prevented anything like this from ever happening. For example, the legislation sought to increase accountability for DFPS and providers on delivering optimal outcomes for children, establish a quality assurance framework, strengthen standards for child protective services investigations into allegations of abuse and neglect, and improve monitoring of DFPS contractors.

SB 11 represented a fundamental transformation of the Texas child welfare system designed to make it safer and more responsive to the unique needs of children, while increasing the role of local communities in caring for their most vulnerable.

Yet, nearly five years after the bill was signed into law, it has yet to be fully implemented.

In response to DFPS all but completely ignoring the Legislature, Sen. Lois Kolkhorst passed Senate Bill 1896 to address continuing safety problems within the foster care system and spur the full implementation of past reforms. Again, the Legislature has been ignored.

Gov. Abbott made foster care an emergency item during the 85th Legislature, including it on the call for multiple special sessions, convening workgroups and directly ordering the commissioners of both DFPS and the Health and Human Services Commission to comply with the remedial orders. Yet DFPS remains entrenched in the same cycles of failure.

More funding is routinely touted as the solution to the problems plaguing the Texas foster care system but the data show substantially increasing funding for DFPS has not been a path to positive outcomes for foster children.

The Legislature has increased the department's budget by more than \$800 million since 2015 and has authorized hundreds of millions of dollars in additional emergency appropriations during that same period. The problems have only gotten worse.

A major focus of this infusion of cash has been increasing caseworker salaries to reduce turnover and maintain manageable caseloads. In late 2016, the Legislature approved an emergency request by DFPS for \$150 million to immediately raise caseworker annual salaries by \$12,000 and hire an additional 829 employees. After the investment, staff turnover dramatically decreased in 2017 and caseloads began coming down. However, these gains

proved short-lived. Staff turnover began increasing again in 2018 and spiked to its highest rate in a decade by 2021. While it's likely the pandemic played some role in that spike, it doesn't explain why in 2020, at the height of the pandemic, the percentage of staff turnover was about the same as the turnover percentage in 2019. Clearly, infusing more money into a broken system isn't the answer.

There is one promising solution that has been recommended for years but hasn't been attempted yet. It calls for a complete reorganization of DFPS, with a focus on transforming the agency's management and culture. This recommendation has been repeated by numerous outside experts hired by the state to provide guidance on ending the crisis.

In 2014, for example, the Stephen Group noted that "the missing key ingredient" was a "unifying vision that clearly defines success and demonstrates how to get there." A 2016 progress report on the implementation of the Stephen Group's recommendations found that while some progress was being made, the department was struggling to embed changes into practice and had yet to develop a positive culture of transformation and excellence. Earlier this year, an expert panel report published in connection with the ongoing federal lawsuit stated the need for leadership to "immediately adopt and apply a set of shared values and principles" and work to rebuild relationships between the department and service providers.

The latest scandal sparked immediate action from legislative leaders. Within 24 hours of the story breaking, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick established the Senate Special Committee on Child Protective Services. The special committee is tasked with investigating the department's continual failures and putting all options on the table to transform the agency.

That's a good start. If it follows through with this directive, the special committee has the opportunity to bring long-overdue change to DFPS and enable Texas to once again keep its promise to the state's most vulnerable children.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

From: [OOG News Alerts](#)
Subject: Morning News Clips 4.13.22
Date: Wednesday, April 13, 2022 8:57:46 AM
Attachments: [Morning News Clips 4.13.22.pdf](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

Morning News Clips 4/13/2022

- [Texas Take](#)

- [Texas Tribune: The Brief](#)

- [Politico Playbook](#)

Greg Abbott News

New York Post – MaryAnn Martinez: [Texas Border Bridge Comes To ‘Halt’ As Mexican Truckers Protest Greg Abbott’s Border Inspections \[Web\]](#)

Washington Post – Laura Reiley: [New Texas Truck Inspection Policy Prompts Protests, Delays \[Web\]](#)

The Hill – Chloe Folmar: [Trade Halted At Border Over Protests Against Texas Governor’s Inspections \[Web\]](#)

KIII – Josh Maxwell: [Texas Congressman Calls On Gov. Abbott To Rescind Order To Increase Vehicle Inspections At Southern Border \[Web\]](#)

Austin American Statesman – John C. Moritz: [Beto O'Rourke Seizes The Offensive As Greg Abbott's Policy Causes Massive Backups At The Border \[Web\]](#)

State News

Texas Tribune – Timia Cobb: [Food Banks Struggle To Help Texans As Grocery Prices Increase \[Web\]](#)

Energy

- *The Texan* – Brad Johnson: [Texas Oil And Gas Companies Adopt Environmental Policies As State Combats Fossil Fuel Divestment Practices \[Web\]](#)

-

Immigration/Border Security

- *Austin American Statesman* – Paul J. Weber: [‘It’s Going To Affect All Of Us’: Frustration Grows As Trucks Block Texas-Mexico Border \[Web\]](#)

- *The New York Post* – Aaron Nelsen, J. David Goodman, and Edgar Sandoval: [As Texas Snarls Traffic At Border, Mexican Truckers Form Blockade \[Web\]](#)

- *The Wall Street Journal* – Elizabeth Findell: [Traffic Snarled At Texas-Mexico Border By New Security Measures, Protests \[Web\]](#)

Dallas Morning News – Alfredo Corchado, Dianne Solis, and Allie Morris: [Five Things To Know Today About The Supply Chain Crisis At The U.S.-Mexico Border \[Web\]](#)

Texas Tribune – Mitchell Ferman and Uriel Garcia: [Delays, Closures And Chaos Mount At Texas-Mexico Border Crossings From New State Inspections \[Web\]](#)

Criminal Justice

- *Houston Chronicle* – Edward McKinley and Rebecca Hennes: [Texas DA Stuns Lawmakers As He Refuses To Stop Lucio Execution, Says He Might Do It Later \[Web\]](#)

Opinion/Editorial

- *Austin American Statesman* – Bridget Grumet: [Grumet: See You In Court? For Abortion, Yes. Voting Rights, Maybe Not. \[Web\]](#)

San Antonio Express News – Michael Taylor: [Taylor: Low-Tax Texas? That’s A Tall Tale, And State’s Tax Structure Leads To Fiscal Distortions \[Web\]](#)

Texas Tribune – Ross Ramsey: [Analysis: Texas Schools Need Support From Politically Distracted State Leaders \[Web\]](#)

-

#

Greg Abbott News

Texas Border Bridge Comes To ‘Halt’ As Mexican Truckers Protest Greg Abbott’s Border Inspections

By MaryAnn Martinez
New York Post

An international bridge at the US-Mexico border near McAllen, Texas has come to a “halt” as Mexican truck drivers protest border inspections, business owners said Tuesday.

Joe Arevelo, owner of a freight and shipping company on the Texas border in Pharr, Texas, said the blockade on the Mexican side of the Pharr International Bridge and inspections have created a supply chain headache for businesses.

“It’s come to a halt. We are living through a nightmare,” Arevelo said at a press conference at his facility organized by Democrat Beto O’Rourke.

The protests come in response to Texas Gov. Greg Abbott ordering secondary inspections of cargo trucks that had already been reviewed by US Customs and Border Protection.

Arevelo said the current conditions on the border have the potential to “devastate” an already delicate supply chain in the US and lead to an avocado and tomato shortage.

Standing in an empty refrigerated warehouse that would normally be filled with fruits, vegetables and other products from Mexico headed to US stores, Arevelo explained that his clients are forced to look for ways to get around the Texas border inspections, by going through ports of entry in other states.

He said the supply chain issues are costing him and many other Texas businesses millions of dollars.

“If I had to say anything to Greg Abbott, ‘Please stop. You’re destroying our businesses,” said Arevelo.

Polo Chow, another Texas trucking and shipping businessman there aren’t enough Texas troopers to inspect every truck waiting to come into Texas, creating a cue of up to 20 hours and leaving truck drivers without any food or restrooms.

“As of yesterday, zero trucks crossed (the border.) Typically, you have 3,000 trucks crossing per day here,” Chow said.

Those bottlenecks have also deterred American businesses who sell goods to Mexico, he said.

“Some of the product is pork and beef. The United States is a huge, huge exporter of pork and beef. All that is just sitting here in the warehouse. It’s not crossing into Mexico,” Chow said.

The governor’s office did not respond to The Post’s request for comment.

Last week, Abbott announced beefed up security measures to deal with a surge of immigrants on the border. Abbott has argued that the extra inspections are needed since cargo trucks are often used to smuggle drugs and humans into the country.

Abbott’s political rival, O’Rourke, blasted the additional inspections.

“Because of a stunt that Greg Abbott has pulled, these DPS inspections cannot look inside of the cargo. They can only look at the tire pressure or the engine. It’s hurting our economy. It’s killing jobs,” the Democrat said.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

New Texas Truck Inspection Policy Prompts Protests, Delays

By Laura Reiley
Washington Post

A new Texas policy to have state officials inspect every truck entering from Mexico has prompted a massive protest among drivers, backing up cargo for miles and leaving loads of fruit, vegetables and other material sitting idle for days.

Freight operators are panicking about the ramifications of the delays, as much of the United States’ produce this time of year is imported from Mexico. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) last week said the “enhanced safety inspections” of all commercial vehicles were necessary because he alleged federal officials were not stopping drugs and criminals from entering the United States. Now, trucking officials say, little is entering the country at all.

“This isn’t a regional issue, or that the city of Laredo is not getting their produce at grocery stores,” said John Esparza, president of the Texas Trucking Association. “We are seeing delays that will be felt across the country. There are a half a dozen divisions of trucking [affected]. There’s the refrigerated segment of trucking, there’s household goods, forestry, fuel tankers, commodities for trade goods — this is about General Motors, Ford and everything coming out of Mexico, our trade partner.”

Texas will bus migrants to the nation's capital, Abbott says

Strawberries, asparagus, avocados, tomatoes and other spring favorites are sitting in lines of refrigerated trucks many miles long as growers and shippers scramble to reroute and grocers hustle to find products from elsewhere to avoid empty shelves.

Abbott last week moved to impose new border restrictions, alleging that the Biden

administration had “open-border policies” that “paved the way for dangerous cartels and deadly drugs to pour into the United States.”

He said Texas “will immediately begin taking unprecedented action to do what no state has done in American history to secure our border,” which means each truck will be inspected by the Texas Department of Public Safety for human trafficking, weapons, drugs and other contraband.

The governor’s plan to have state officials scrutinize each truck means that up to 80 percent of perishable fruits and vegetables have been unable to cross since Friday, said Lance Jungmeyer, president of the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas.

This is causing losses of millions of dollars a day for employers and employees who have been idled, he said, with customers unable to load product from their Texas suppliers. It also means transportation shortages are increasing as available trucks are stuck waiting in line to cross the border, all of which will continue to drive up the price of produce at American grocery stores.

Biden accuses Abbott of ‘government overreach’ for investigating parents of children transitioning genders

“These trucks are already inspected by Customs and Border Protection — scanned and X-rayed and drug-dog sniffed,” Jungmeyer said. “These new inspections are redundant. At numerous ports of entry, Laredo, Pharr, Eagle Pass and others, Mexican drivers are starting to protest.”

Abbott’s office did not respond to requests for comment on Tuesday.

The line for trucks to cross at the Pharr bridge has been reported at up to 7 or 8 miles long, said Rod Sbragia, vice chair of the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas and director of sales and marketing for Tricar Sales, a grower and shipper of Mexican produce. He said somewhere between 2,000 and 3,000 trucks stand nose to tail waiting for entry. Refrigerated trucks, he said, have about six or seven days of fuel to run their refrigeration units. After that, spoilage is certain.

Sbragia said that nothing has crossed the border into Texas for the past three days and that trucks are packed so tight there’s no way of getting out of line so they can reroute. He says many workers in Texas are not being paid right now because there is no product to work with and no trucks to load and unload.

“We have about \$200,000 to \$300,000 of produce waiting in line right now,” he said. “And we’re just one shipper. There are hundreds like me. Millions of dollars’ worth of product sitting on trucks that may end up being spoiled.”

The situation is fluid, said Laura Garza, a logistics specialist for K&K International Logistics, customs brokers in charge of traffic operations for Texas. But for now, she said, Mexican truckers have, in protest, blocked traffic going northbound or southbound on the Pharr Bridge, the No. 1 bridge for imports of produce in the U.S., leading to and from Reynosa, Mexico, which usually sees around 2,000 truck crossings per day. Nor is traffic moving in the northbound direction of the Free Trade Bridge at Los Indios, an international border crossing located eight miles south of Harlingen and San Benito.

The ban on avocados from Mexico could be bruising, the longer it goes on

“The transport companies are saying, ‘If this lasts 30 days, we can last 30 days in protest, as well.’ You’re going to lose contracts and crops. Why affect trade this way? It doesn’t make any sense. Border communities depend on trade,” she said.

Matt Mandel is the vice president of finance for his family’s company, which grows and ships Mexican fruits and vegetables. He heard about the new inspections on Friday. Heading out of town, he hoped it would blow over by the end of the weekend.

“But the issues have gotten worse, and the consequences have compounded,” he said. “And I don’t see an easy solution to alleviate the logjam we find ourselves in.”

His company sells 60 percent of its produce in Boston, New York, Philadelphia and elsewhere in the Northeast. The rest goes to Canada. He had three trucks that were supposed to go out Friday and it is unclear, he said, when they might reach their final destination.

“We won’t know if we have losses until this product makes it all the way through the supply chain. When I have my name on an eggplant and it ends up looking and tasting like crap, that’s what people remember,” he said. “Ultimately there will be spoilage and higher costs for everyone involved. It’s literally just partisan politics.”

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Trade Halted At Border Over Protests Against Texas Governor’s Inspections

By Chloe Folmar

The Hill

Traffic at a crossing point on the Texas-Mexico border has come to a standstill due to protests by Mexican truckers over Texas Gov. Greg Abbott’s (R) new rule that allows state troopers to inspect commercial vehicles crossing into the U.S.

Both sides of the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge, the most trafficked trade crossing in the Rio Grande Valley, were blocked by the truckers Tuesday for the sixth day in a row, according to multiple news sources.

The U.S. side of the bridge is closed without reopening in sight, The Wall Street Journal reported, as 500 truckers block border entrances from the U.S. to Mexico.

Abbott ordered the Texas Department of Public Safety Wednesday to tighten inspections of trucks crossing the border in an effort to reduce illegal immigration and drug trafficking.

The state inspections are in addition to federal inspections and have not regularly been ordered.

Abbott’s order came shortly after the Biden administration said it would end Title 42 restrictions on immigration.

DPS officials are checking nearly every commercial truck, according to reporting from the

Texas Tribune, and each inspection takes close to an hour.

“We are supporters of Governor Abbott, but unfortunately we weren’t taken into consideration,” Texas Trucking Association Charmain Ernesto Gaytan told Reuters.

The Pharr-Reynosa bridge is vital to the transport of produce such as avocados, peppers, strawberries and tomatoes.

“Those refrigerated units are powered by diesel,” sales manager Modesto Guerra from Sterling Fresh Inc., a broccoli importation company, told the Tribune. “These trucks are in line and when the diesel runs out they have no way of refueling.”

Democrats rebel against leadership super PAC in expensive Oregon primary
Major outage forces Puerto Rico to shutter schools, offices
Guerra said that customers had already canceled their shipments due to the holdups beyond his control.

Traffic on nearby bridges has also stalled due to protests in Eagle Pass, El Paso and Laredo, Texas as well as the Rio Grande Valley.

The traffic is effecting the transport of various types of electronic, vehicle and medical equipment.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Texas Congressman Calls On Gov. Abbott To Rescind Order To Increase Vehicle Inspections At Southern Border

By Josh Maxwell

KIII

Texas Congressman Vicente Gonzalez is urging Gov. Greg Abbott to rescind his recent order to enhance vehicle inspections at the entry along the southern border.

RELATED: White House responds to Gov. Abbott's plans to bus migrants to U.S. Capitol

The order is part of Abbott's Operation Lonestar, which looks to address the issue of migrants illegally crossing into the U.S.

Last week, 3News spoke to State Senator Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa about how Abbott's new safety checks at international border crossings have traffic backed up for seven-to-eight miles.

"I checked with DPS, I verified with customs officials, I've had a conversation with congressman Henry Cuellar," Hinojosa said. "So we have a real bottleneck and a real serious problem on the border."

According to a press release from Gonzalez's office, Abbott's order has halted trade and traffic and created 10 to 20-hour delays at ports of entry along the U.S.-Mexico Border.

Truckers recently blocked the international bridge to protest Abbott's new order and trade was effectively shut down between the two nations.

Gonzalez added that the inspections are not making sure that "Texas' economy thrives".

"Increasing inspections will only exacerbate our supply chain crisis and raise prices for Texas families," Gonzalez said. "This action is nothing more than a political stunt at the detriment of my constituents and does nothing to secure our border. If Gov. Abbott is serious about finding solutions, then I invite him to work with my colleagues and me to find ways to safely, and humanely, protect our border."

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Beto O'Rourke Seizes The Offensive As Greg Abbott's Policy Causes Massive Backups At The Border

By John C. Moritz

Austin American Statesman

Democrat Beto O'Rourke pounced on reports that Gov. Greg Abbott's inspection policy for all commercial trucks entering Texas from Mexico is causing massive trade backlogs and said Tuesday that the two-term Republican "is killing businesses and the Texas economy."

"It's going to be very bad for the Texas economy. It's going to be very bad for the national economy," O'Rourke said during a news conference inside an empty cold-storage warehouse in the border community of Pharr.

The former congressman from El Paso who will face Abbott in the November election was joined by two South Texans who said their livelihoods have been upended as trucks seeking to bring produce and manufactured goods into Texas are waiting in the rigs for up to 16 hours while each truck awaits a 45-minute inspection.

A blockade by Mexican truckers at the Zaragoza International Bridge between El Paso and Juárez was implemented Tuesday, April 12, 2022, as a protest of the crossing delays after Texas Gov. Greg Abbott ordered the Department of Public Safety to check every truck coming into the U.S.

Abbott last week ordered the inspections, saying they are needed to help control the influx of migrants and illicit drugs into Texas. But the inspections being carried out by troopers from the Texas Department of Public Safety focus chiefly on the vehicles' roadworthiness and not on their cargo. It is up to federal agents to examine trucks' content, which typically takes place at checkpoints miles from the Rio Grande.

Abbott said at a South Texas news conference of his own last week that his recent actions are needed because of what he described as the failure of President Joe Biden's administration to control the southern border.

But Joe Arevalo, a customs broker who owns the warehouse where O'Rourke staged his event, said Abbott's order has created "a domino effect of angry drivers" who are unable to efficiently bring goods to U.S. markets that are still struggling with supply chain issues related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Democratic gubernatorial candidate Beto O'Rourke with trucking company owner Polo Chow,

left, and Joe Arevalo, a customs broker, talk about Gov. Greg Abbott's latest border initiatives in Pharr, Texas, April 12, 2022.

"We are living through a nightmare," Arevalo said.

Polo Chow, whose trucking company brings parts to the Toyota Motor Manufacturing plant in San Antonio, said the safety inspections play no role in border security.

"It's not improving safety, it's not improving (the effort to control) illegal immigrants," Chow said. "It's not improving the war on drugs."

Meanwhile, Republican Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller sent a letter to Abbott urging him to scuttle the policy "on behalf of the people of Texas and the United States."

In an interview with the USA TODAY Network afterward, Miller was more direct.

"I'll just say it, this is just political theater," he said. "There's 20,000 trucks a day coming through Laredo (before the policy). Now, we're going to get about 700 a day. This has really backfired on him. It's really compounded the problem."

O'Rourke, who since even before officially entering the 2022 governor's race has been targeted by Abbott's campaign as being in favor of "open borders," used the delays caused by the inspections as a means to seize the offensive on a pivotal issue.

The former three-term congressman sought to link the backups to the rising prices and limited supplies shoppers are seeing at retail stores across Texas.

"When you see those trucks lined up miles deep all the way into Mexico, what you're seeing is inflation, what you're seeing is higher prices at the grocery store, and what you're seeing are more supply chain problems," O'Rourke said. "We are calling on Greg Abbott to end this policy today."

In a statement, Abbott campaign spokesman Mark Miner did not address the criticism from O'Rourke, border business leaders and labor groups about the economic ripple effect of the long delays caused by the inspections.

Instead, Miner sought to pin the blame on Biden, a Democrat who has pulled back from the hardline approach to immigration during the Republican Trump administration.

""Beto O'Rourke is completely out of touch with the border crisis that his friend President Biden created," Miner said. "The safety inspections are keeping dangerous vehicles and drivers off Texas roads and preventing cartels from continuing to distribute deadly drugs like fentanyl into Texas communities."

But the leader of a trade group association that trucks agriculture products into Texas from Mexico said the inspections are strangling cross-border commerce and that will likely lead to empty shelves at grocery stores.

"Last night, commercial trucks crossing the Pharr International Bridges were in a miles-long line that took until nearly 2 a.m. this morning to clear the bridge," Dante L. Galeazzi, president of the Texas International Produce Association, said in a letter to Abbott on Monday. "Today,

the line is at a stand-still as trucks are crawling out of the import lot. Many carriers and brokers are reporting hours of non-movement.

"Border security is an important element of this region," he added, "but so is the trade that keeps millions of Texans employed."

Clyde Barrow, the chairman of the political science department of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, said Abbott's new policy could backfire with a constituency the Republican governor is seeking to wrench away from the Democrats.

"This is having a negative impact on the local economy, because, as you know, the Valley economy is very dependent on cross-border traffic," Barrow said.

He said that while many of Abbott's get-tough border initiatives tend to play well in communities well north of the Rio Grande, South Texas voters are often mixed on the issue.

"For me, the paradox has always been that the further you get from the border, the more this stuff seems to play in a positive light," Barrow said. "It's like the less people know about what's actually going on at the border, the more they support these policies. But down here, generally speaking, they're not viewed in great favor."

"People are interested to see how the Republican Party is going to do down here because it's clearly surging to a certain degree."

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

State News

-

Food Banks Struggle To Help Texans As Grocery Prices Increase

By Timia Cobb

Texas Tribune

Ever since Juan Escalante was let go from his job at a distribution center, he and his wife, Emily, have done everything they can think of to provide for their family of five. They cobble together what they can from odd jobs and construction work while she drives for Uber when time allows.

To keep meals on the table, they've turned to food stamps and a government assistance program for women, infants and young children. But as inflation continues pushing up the cost of food, they've found themselves trying to shore up an ever-growing budgetary gap.

"What would be \$100 in groceries is not roughly what was \$100 maybe a few months ago," Juan Escalante said.

To round out what's in the pantry, the Escalantes also rely on their local food bank, where Juan Escalante heads twice a week. But as food prices rise for consumers, food banks are also dealing with their own financial squeeze caused by inflation and a decline in donations as they wait for the disbursement of already approved federal aid. That's often leaving food banks with whatever food they can get their hands on to assist a growing number of people who need their help.

“There’s some items that are kind of odd,” Juan Escalante said. “Sometimes we’re like, ‘Well, we have never used this, maybe we can look up some recipes and stuff like that.’”

Feeding Texas, a statewide nonprofit and the largest anti-hunger organization in Texas, served an average of 60,000 Central Texans across 21 counties each week before the pandemic, said Vindhya Ganhewa, volunteer ambassador and warehouse leader for the group. The number of people seeking help each week has since gone up by about 25%.

“We’re now serving an average of 75,000 people a week. So it’s definitely increased because of the pandemic and because of food scarcity issues in general,” Ganhewa said.

The share of Texas households experiencing food insecurity — homes with limited access to consistent meals and groceries — increased from 13% in December 2018 to 22% in June 2021, according to the Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project.

Overall inflation has recently risen at the fastest rate in decades. The consumer price index in March was up 8.5% compared with the year prior, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. That has ripple effects throughout the food supply chain. The cost of food consumed at home rose even faster — 10% — over the past 12 months. That’s the largest one-year increase since March 1981, according to the BLS.

“Consumers are seeing inflation but also producers as well with all the input prices that they’re having to pay for, whether it be fertilizer, fuel or just parts for their equipment, to make sure they can get the crop to harvest and get it to market,” said Brant Wilbourn, Texas Farm Bureau associate director of commodity and regulatory activities.

In recent days, truck drivers’ protests over Gov. Greg Abbott’s directive that state troopers increase commercial vehicle inspections at the Texas-Mexico border have spurred fears that food costs could quickly skyrocket even more.

Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller asked Monday for a halt to the inspections, which were slowing traffic before protests made matters worse.

“This policy will hurt Texas and American consumers by driving up already skyrocketing food prices, worsening ongoing supply chain disruptions, causing massive produce shortages, and saddling Texas and American companies with untold losses,” Miller said in a press release.

Higher prices in production, labor and gas work their way to the shelves of grocery stores, increasing the cost of staples like eggs and peanut butter.

“It finally gets to the store, and in that case, the jar of peanut butter may cost 6% or 7% more than it did last year,” said Gary Huddleston, the Texas Retailers Association grocery industry consultant.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that Texas cities such as Houston, Dallas and Fort Worth saw grocery prices increase between 5% and 6% last year. The U.S. Department of Agriculture predicts more increases this year.

Feeding Texas' 21 food bank partners receive most of their food and money to operate from two sources: the USDA and donations. Feeding Texas CEO Celia Cole said USDA assistance doesn't always provide enough money to cover the cost of getting food to people.

Texas lawmakers allocated \$95 million last year from Texas' \$16 billion share of the federal American Rescue Plan Act to food banks. But food banks have waited months for the money to arrive. On March 31, Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller said in a press release that the grants were being awarded and acknowledged the need for help since the start of the pandemic.

"Multiple crises continue to strain the ability of food banks to meet increased demand, particularly in rural and other underserved communities," Miller said in a statement. "This investment in our food bank infrastructure and distribution networks will ensure our ability to continue responding to the needs of Texans."

The federal grant will give food banks the financial ability to store and transport food they receive — or help renovate their facilities if needed. Cole said the funding will largely go to five primary causes: facility expansion, equipment, transportation, technology for tracking inventory and giving grants to partner agencies.

To combat financial shortfalls in the meantime, food banks have tried to increase donations. But Feeding Texas saw a drop in donations at the beginning of the pandemic and is now expecting to see another decrease.

"I definitely think inflation and kind of general economic concerns and what's going on in Ukraine, you know, it has people worried," Cole said. "So people tend to ... be more cautious about how much they donate when they're concerned about sort of what the future holds for them economically."

Making do with what they can

Not all Texans who seek help at food drives or food banks are homeless or living in food deserts. According to Ganhewa, about two-thirds of the households using Feeding Texas' services have at least one working adult at home and have turned to grocery assistance due to grocery affordability or lacking funds to buy other necessities.

"About 80% of our clients have reported having to choose between paying for food or paying for medicine or medical care," Ganhewa said. "About two-thirds of our clients have to choose between food and housing. So definitely when the prices are inflated when inflation in general rises, that definitely exacerbates the need that they experienced in terms of just not being able to feed themselves and their family."

Juan Escalante lost his job after he didn't renew his residency card on time. He's still considered a permanent resident, but letting a residency card lapse can complicate — or prevent — someone's ability to work until it is renewed. As he works to get the card renewed, he's been able to find some construction work to help pay the bills. Emily Escalante works her ride-share job when she's not caring for their three children.

The family's income fluctuates related to the jobs they can take and the amount of time she can dedicate to driving for Uber each week. They estimate they currently bring in about \$1,300 a month. Government-funded food programs help, but not completely.

“That only covers a certain amount, and with three growing little girls they, you know, they have a growing appetite with their growing body, and the money we get is not cutting enough to kind of feed all five of us at the moment,” Juan Escalante said.

He says his food bank helps round things out.

“We’re just pretty thankful for that, that they have that type of distribution going on throughout the week,” he said.

Meanwhile, food banks say they’re trying to provide as much as they can without knowing how long demand will remain elevated as their operating costs also rise and donations dip.

“It’s unclear how long the gas prices will be this high and how long we’ll be seeing inflation,” said Cole, the Feeding Texas CEO. “Obviously, you have different opinions from different economists, but I think [food banks] are all concerned because it’s caused a significant increase in their transportation costs, and that’s affecting their overall sort of operating budget. So they’re all sort of on the lookout for what this is going to mean in the long run.”

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Energy

-

Texas Oil And Gas Companies Adopt Environmental Policies As State Combats Fossil Fuel Divestment Practices

By Brad Johnson

The Texan

Environmental, Social, and Governance criteria — truncated as ESG — is a doctrine sweeping through America’s corporations, and statements at a gathering of fossil fuel executives show it’s reached Texas’ vaunted oil and gas industry, too.

ESG is a type of investment grading system on which corporations are evaluated for their adherence to certain values — essentially a social credit score. Those values mirror many progressive bailiwicks like reaching net-zero emissions; promoting LGBT and minority-focused social issues, often described by the umbrella term “equity”; and unionization.

There is currently no centralized scoring system, and it can vary based on who is scoring. For example, BlackRock, the world’s largest portfolio manager, has its own scoring system.

Travis Stice — CEO of Diamondback Energy, a Midland-based Fortune 1,000 company worth \$13 billion — defended the application of ESG practices in his company at the annual Texas Independent Producers and Royalty Owners (TIPRO) Association gathering. He said that the shareholders have demanded it and “It’s the right thing to do.”

Later in the day, two attendees remarked on Stice’s comments. “I was surprised hearing the Diamondback [CEO] talking as much ESG as he did,” one attendee said to another. “Five years ago, that would’ve been unthinkable.”

The other responded with, “It’s the public companies, man.”

Ed Longanecker, president of TIPRO, told The Texan, “[ESG] an important topic because many financial institutions are requiring these actions as part of their investment criteria.”

Among TIPRO’s members, Longanecker said the view of ESG varies. “Some see it as another attempt to burden domestic producers, while others have fully embraced it as part of their long-term strategy.”

ESG is in vogue right now, not least because of the weight thrown behind it within the boardrooms of the world’s largest companies.

The strategy — similarly constructed to the “Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions” strategy against Israel — is aimed at the purse strings of companies, not just oil and gas producers, who are tied to fossil fuels.

Because they have shareholders, public companies of all stripes are responsive to public opinion and market trends.

But the chase for ESG is also occurring from within. Through investments, ESG proponents can take hold of boardroom positions and push their priorities.

Similar to Elon Musk’s recent plurality purchase of Twitter stock and subsequent flirtation with joining the company’s board, an environmental activist hedge fund purchased \$50 million in ExxonMobil stock and put two climate change-focused members on the board. Another was added shortly after.

This is referred to as “shareholder activism,” a strategy spurred by those who actually own stock in companies.

Another function exercised through shareholder activism is proxy voting. Third-party portfolio managers, like BlackRock or Institutional Shareholder Services, exercise proxy voting capabilities on behalf of their clientele, the actual shareholders of the respective company. This proxy voting power feeds the above-mentioned corporate board room effort as board members are elected by shareholders.

But rather than the individual pensioner who owns a relatively small tranche of stock voting on board members, these middlemen vote on behalf of their clients.

The election of those Exxon board members was aided by the support of BlackRock, State Street, and Vanguard — three large portfolio managers who voted by proxy on behalf of the actual shareholders they represent.

Another factor applying the financial pressure is the underwriter — the banks.

Banks across Europe cut fossil fuel company financing by nearly 30 percent last year. Pressure to do the same is increasing within the board rooms of the six largest U.S. banks — aimed at reducing current investments and spurning new financing deals for fossil fuel companies.

Reuters reported last year that the U.S. Federal Reserve would prioritize ESG-type metrics in their lending.

Climate activists are encouraging banks to require potential lenders to sign “sustainability statements” committing to ESG metrics.

While BlackRock and its competitor portfolio managers may control sizable portions of a company’s capital, for private companies seeking business loans, banks control 100 percent of the capital.

The flip side of that is “stakeholder activism,” a strategy aimed at the same objective, but spearheaded by public pressure campaigns. This is similar to what’s been occurring on university campuses across the nation for years — student groups, usually aided by outside activists, apply pressure to the university board of governance to remove any of its portfolio investments from entities unfavorable with the activist crowd. It’s played out with divestment from Israel and from fossil fuels.

Entities such as Harvard and Boston University have taken steps to divest from fossil fuel companies, but it hasn’t picked up similar steam in Texas schools.

Public pressure campaigns have not only been aimed at corporations but it’s also been something they’ve willingly joined.

Over 60 of the world’s largest corporations joined the Human Rights Campaign in publicly objecting to Governor Greg Abbott’s directive to the Department of Family and Protective Services to begin investigating puberty blockers on minors as child abuse. Stakeholder activism has tended to be sweeping, touching as many political and social issues as possible.

Of the companies that signed the Human Rights Campaign’s letter criticizing Governor Greg Abbott for directing the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services to prosecute gender transition procedures as child abuse, only a handful do not have ESG webpages on their sites.

Each also has Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) pages, another item on the multi-pronged activism pitchfork rushing into corporate boardrooms.

Texas responded to this growing trend by passing Senate Bill (SB) 13, with only 30 Democrats between both chambers voting against it. The bill requires the comptroller to evaluate the state’s investment portfolio for companies that hold fossil fuel divestment policies, and if found to remove that state money from those entities.

Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar is currently eyeing 19 financial companies for violations of SB 13’s provisions, chief among them is the world’s largest investment company BlackRock. At the TIPRO conference, BlackRock President Rob Kapito swiftly denied the accusations against his company. He also defended ESG as a concept to the gathering of oil and gas executives.

“Let’s be serious folks. We need to protect our environment. So why can’t we figure out how to do both things and get better? ESG is just a framework. It’s not a demand.”

Kapito contended that they are only filling a desire from its clientele, echoing Stice’s comments about the groundswell of support from shareholders and other miscellaneous investors. Last year, investments into ESG-focused channels totaled \$120 billion in the U.S.,

up 130 percent from 2020. Globally, it's an even bigger trend, totaling \$2.7 trillion last year.

But BlackRock CEO Larry Fink has insisted the company is actively pushing for behavioral change rather than passively following the direction of their clients. "You have to force behaviors [to change in companies.] At BlackRock, we are forcing behaviors," Fink said at a 2017 New York Times forum on stakeholder capitalism and pushing DEI policies.

"If you don't force behaviors, whether it's gender or race ... you're going to be impacted [financially]."

It's a "get with the program or else" push.

DEI and ESG are sister endeavors aimed at forcing changes in how companies operate, and fund managers like BlackRock are admittedly pushing them.

Longanecker stated that "ESG is here to stay."

"As discussed during my session with Travis Stice," he added, "even if those criteria went away tomorrow, most operators would still continue with these initiatives as part of their normal business practices."

And that, Longanecker indicates, is the hand Texas' oil and gas producers find themselves dealt: how to deal with the trend in front of them.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Immigration/Border Security

-

'It's Going To Affect All Of Us': Frustration Grows As Trucks Block Texas-Mexico Border

By Paul J. Weber

Austin American Statesman

One of the busiest trade ports on the U.S.-Mexico border remained closed Tuesday as frustration and protests mounted over new orders by Gov. Greg Abbott requiring extra inspections of commercial trucks as part of the Republican's sprawling border security operation.

Since Monday, Mexican truckers have blocked the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge in protest of Abbott directing Texas Department of Public Safety troopers last week to pull over and inspect trucks coming into Texas from Mexico. The bridge is the largest land port for produce entering the U.S.

Unusually long backups — some lasting 12 hours or longer — have also been reported elsewhere along Texas' roughly 1,200-mile border in the early rollout of an initiative that Abbott says is needed to curb human trafficking and the flow of drugs. But critics question how the inspections are meeting that objective, while business owners and experts say the impact is already being felt and warned that U.S. grocery shoppers could notice shortages as soon as later this week.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's border inspection policy dubbed 'crisis'
Frustration is also spreading to members of Abbott's own party: Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller, a Republican, called the inspections a “catastrophic policy” that is forcing some trucks to reroute hundreds of miles to Arizona.

An estimated 3,000 trucks would cross the Pharr border bridge on a normal day, according to the National Freight Transportation Chamber.

“I do describe it as a crisis, because this is not the normal way of doing business,” said Hidalgo County Judge Richard Cortez, whose county includes the bridge in Pharr. “You’re talking about billions of dollars. When you stop that process, I mean, there are many, many, many, many people that are affected.”

The shutdowns and slowdowns have set off some of the widest backlash to date of Abbott’s multibillion-dollar border operation, which the two-term governor has made the cornerstone of his administration. Texas already has thousands of state troopers and National Guard members on the border and has converted prisons into jails for migrants arrested on state trespassing charges.

Abbott warned last week that inspections would “dramatically slow” border traffic, but he hasn’t addressed the backups or port shutdowns since then. His office didn’t reply to a message seeking comment left Tuesday.

Beto O’Rourke calls out Gov. Abbott on border inspection policy
The disruptions at some of the world’s busiest international trade ports could pose economic and political threats to Abbott, who is seeking a third term in November. Democrat Beto O’Rourke, the former presidential candidate who is running against Abbott for governor, said during a stop in Pharr on Tuesday that the inspections were doing nothing to halt the flow of migrants and were worsening supply chain issues.

He was joined by Joe Arevalo, owner of Keystone Cold, a cold-storage warehouse on the border. “We’re living through a nightmare, and we’re already suffering through a very delicate supply chain from the pandemic and to try to regrow the business,” Arevalo said.

The additional inspections are conducted by the DPS, which said that as of Monday, it had inspected more than 3,400 commercial vehicles and placed more than 800 “out of service” for violations that included defective brakes, tires and lighting. It made no mention of whether the truck inspections had turned up migrants or drugs.

Mexican trucking companies accused Abbott of collapsing cross-border trade through his order, and Mexico’s assistant secretary of commerce wrote a letter to Abbott requesting a solution.

The order’s impact is spreading beyond Texas: U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials confirmed Tuesday that there was another blockade at the Mexican customs facility at the Santa Teresa port of entry in southern New Mexico, not far from El Paso. Those protests are misguided since New Mexico has nothing to do with Texas’ inspection policies, said Jerry Pacheco, executive director of the International Business Accelerator in El Paso and president

of the Border Industrial Association.

He said the protests were costing businesses millions of dollars a day.

“Everybody down here is on a just-in-time inventory system,” Pacheco said. “It’s going to affect all of us, all of us in the United States. Your car parts are going to be delivered late, your computer — if you ordered a Dell or HP tablet, those are going to be disrupted.”

Ed Anderson, a professor at the University of Texas McCombs School of Business, compared the disruptions to those caused by February’s trucker blockade in Canada that forced auto plants on both sides of the border to shut down or scale back production. During that protest, trucks looking for other entries to cross into the U.S. wound up causing congesting at other bridges, a scenario that Anderson said might now be repeated on the southern border.

Anderson said consumers would likely begin noticing the effects by the end of this week, if not sooner.

“Either prices are going to spike or shelves are going to be low,” he said.

-
[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

As Texas Snarls Traffic At Border, Mexican Truckers Form Blockade

By Aaron Nelsen, J. David Goodman, and Edgar Sandoval

The New York Times

Trucks attempting to enter Texas loaded with goods from Mexico sat motionless for hours on Tuesday as lengthy vehicle inspections ordered by Gov. Greg Abbott in a clash with the Biden administration over immigration snarled traffic at major commercial crossings.

In the city of Pharr, a major international bridge over which about \$12 million in produce is shipped to the United States daily has been effectively shut down in both directions since Monday as scores of drivers in Mexico set up a blockade of their own in protest over the new inspections. A similar protest by truckers also blocked a bridge into El Paso.

Since last week, commercial vehicles entering Texas have faced not only the usual federal immigration and customs inspections, but new checkpoints set up by Texas police on the roadway immediately after a measure Mr. Abbott said he was ordering in response to the flow of illegal drugs and human trafficking across the border. With delays stretching up to 14 hours, some drivers have diverted to Arizona and New Mexico.

“It’s at crisis level now,” Dante Galeazzi, the president of the Texas International Produce Association, said. “The biggest challenge is that we just don’t know how long this is going to last.”

The problems for businesses had been anticipated by the governor when he ordered the inspections and a “zero tolerance” policy for safety violations on commercial vehicles. “This is going to dramatically slow traffic from Mexico into Texas,” Mr. Abbott said last week.

But Mr. Abbott said the safety checks were needed to increase oversight at the border, even if state police were not legally authorized to search for migrants or drugs at the checkpoints.

“We will use any and all lawful powers to curtail the flow of drugs, human traffickers, illegal immigrants, weapons and other contraband into Texas,” Mr. Abbott has said.

The arrival of migrants is expected to sharply increase next month with the Biden administration’s plan to end a Trump-era pandemic policy in which a majority of unauthorized migrants are turned away at the border under an emergency public health order known as Title 42.

Mr. Abbott, a two-term Republican up for re-election in November, has presented the inspections as a means of addressing the anticipated impacts of that termination, which is expected to lead to thousands of additional migrants seeking asylum across the border each day — the largest number of them in Texas.

Mr. Abbott strongly opposes some of the Biden administration’s moves to ease Trump-era restrictions on immigration. But because the federal government alone has authority over immigration matters, Mr. Abbott has sought novel strategies to insert the state into immigration enforcement, such as arresting migrants for misdemeanor trespassing. The vehicle inspections are part of that effort: a carefully constructed policy aimed at smugglers and migrants but carried out under powers available to the state, namely vehicle safety.

Mr. Abbott’s office did not respond to a request for comment on the growing delays in truck traffic at the border.

A Closed Door: More than 40,000 Afghan allies who didn’t get on a U.S. evacuation flight applied for emergency entry. Most have been denied.

In a news release, Customs and Border Protection said delays were being felt at major commercial crossings into Texas as a result of “additional and unnecessary inspections” by state police, leading to a drop in commercial traffic of up to 60 percent.

“This has national ramifications,” said John D. Esparza, the chief executive of the Texas Trucking Association. “This is trade going to Ford Motor Company. This is trade going to Minnesota. It’s not just about the city of Laredo trying to get stuff to their local H-E-B,” he said, referring to the Texas grocery chain.

The association endorsed Mr. Abbott for re-election in February, and Mr. Esparza said he immediately got in touch with the governor’s office after the order to express his concerns. “I haven’t had a response, quite frankly,” he said.

Mexico is the state’s largest trading partner, with more than \$100 billion in imports in 2019, according to a report from the Texas Department of Transportation. At one of the busiest crossings, in Laredo, 16,000 trucks ordinarily pass through on a given day, Mr. Esparza said.

In the past, state police have conducted safety checks on a small fraction of the commercial vehicles coming over from Mexico, without dedicated checkpoints. The backups at the border began after Mr. Abbott called for checks on every truck entering from Mexico at certain major crossings.

The blockade on the other side of the border in Pharr, affecting trucks going into and out of Mexico, led to a total halt in truck traffic across the border.

At other major crossings, Mexico-bound trucks have been able to get through, while those bound for the United States back up in a seemingly endless line, moving slowly or not at all. Private vehicle traffic has in most cases remained unaffected.

Beto O'Rourke, the Democratic candidate for governor, attacked Mr. Abbott during a news conference in Pharr on Tuesday, standing with affected business owners in a large and apparently empty cold-storage facility.

"Greg Abbott is killing businesses and the Texas economy with this stunt," Mr. O'Rourke said.

Calls for the governor to end the inspection policy came not just from Democrats. The state's conservative agriculture commissioner, Sid Miller, also urged Mr. Abbott to reverse course.

"You cannot solve a border crisis by creating another crisis at the border," Mr. Miller said in a statement.

Arnoldo Curiel, the general manager of Sunrise Produce in McAllen, said backups at the border had caused customers to cancel orders and left him wondering how much longer he could afford to keep a work force of 150 people. "We're either going to have to let guys go or it's going to cost us to keep paying them," he said.

Mr. Curiel said he had four trucks that should have crossed from Mexico on Friday or Saturday but still had not made it. "They're stuck, they can't cross in Pharr, and they can't go back to Mexico," he said.

The Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge sees about 3,000 commercial crossings a day. That number has dwindled to between 500 and 700 since the inspections began, according to estimates from the National Chamber of Freight Transport, widely known as CANACAR, which represents Mexican trucking companies.

Crossings into the United States are occasionally closed because of weather or clogged by traffic, industry experts said, but the scale of the current delays and the indefinite nature of Mr. Abbott's order left companies on both sides of the border frustrated.

The protest in Mexico began late Monday, when more than 100 drivers began blocking access to the Pharr-Reynosa bridge in protest of the Texas governor's inspection order, said Edgar Zamorano, a delegate with CANACAR.

Mr. Zamorano said he had heard reports of drivers enduring up to 14 hours in line, under an unforgiving sun and without access to bathrooms or food, as a result of the Texas inspections. Some arrived at the bridge before sunrise and did not make it to the U.S. side until 9:30 p.m.

"It is a peaceful protest, to shed light on the inhumane conditions drivers have been enduring," Mr. Zamorano said.

Truck drivers coming from Mexico already undergo rigorous inspections for drugs or people attempting to cross illegally by federal agents in the United States, examinations that can include X-rays and other screenings.

Since last week, Texas state patrol officers have conducted more than 3,400 additional inspections and taken more than 800 vehicles out of service for defective brakes, tires and lighting, according to the Texas Department of Public Safety. Asked if any of the checks turned up illicit drugs or migrants crossing illegally, the department did not provide any information.

On Tuesday, idling trucks bound for Mexico packed a Stripes gas station in Pharr as drivers waited for instructions from their bosses.

Gilberto Cruz, 54, made it across the bridge last Wednesday, offloading cilantro from Aguascalientes. By Monday morning, he should have been on his way back to Mexico, his truck filled with cotton. Instead, he was met with impossibly long lines on the U.S. side of the border because of the blockade protest in Mexico.

“If I don’t work, I don’t get paid,” Mr. Cruz said. He said some truckers were going to other Texas border cities, including Brownsville and Rio Grande City, “to see if they can cross.”

Another trucker from Mexico, Miguel Martinez, 53, said crossing elsewhere was not an option for him. “I would have to pay for the extra diesel, and redo all of the customs paperwork,” Mr. Martinez said. He said he earned about \$150 on each leg of the journey, and paid his expenses out of pocket.

Mr. Martinez said he did not have a problem with the inspections, though he wished that the Texas police would be more respectful of the long wait times truckers have been forced to endure without food, water or bathrooms.

“I heard one trucker went into spasms from the heat,” he said. “I think C.B.P. felt bad for us. They were handing out pizza and bottles of water.”

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Traffic Snarled At Texas-Mexico Border By New Security Measures, Protests

By Elizabeth Findell

The Wall Street Journal

Two major international bridges were effectively shut down after Mexican truckers blocked lanes in both directions to protest a new border security initiative from Texas Gov. Greg Abbott that forced them to wait hours or days to bring products into the U.S.

At the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge, which spans the Rio Grande, officials scrambled to react Monday morning as truckers obstructed all lanes on the Mexican side. Pharr police began turning away traffic, securing “Bridge Closed” barriers across all lanes. As of Tuesday afternoon, the bridge remained closed with no reopening in sight.

Some 700 miles away, in El Paso, a similar protest by truckers in Mexico forced the Ysleta Bridge to close late Monday afternoon. On Tuesday, it had not reopened.

The shutdown is the most dramatic fallout so far from Mr. Abbott’s newest border-security measure, which he says is needed to stop immigrants and illegal drugs from coming into the country.

Mr. Abbott had said last week he would dispatch Texas Department of Public Safety troopers to conduct safety inspections on commercial vehicles driving into Texas from Mexico, after they had already passed federal customs. State officials said they don't need warrants to inspect trucks for safety issues.

It was shut down after Mexican truckers blocked lanes in both directions.

"Cartels use vehicles, many of them dangerous commercial trucks, to smuggle immigrants, deadly fentanyl and other illegal cargo into Texas," Mr. Abbott said. "I know in advance this is going to dramatically slow traffic from Mexico into Texas."

The move—which has drawn pushback from the business community and threatens the \$440 billion in trade that passes over international bridges on the Texas-Mexico border each year—is part of Mr. Abbott's Operation Lone Star, which has sought to exert more state control over border security.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection, in a statement, called the state inspections unnecessary. "The longer than average wait times—and the subsequent supply chain disruptions—are unrelated to CBP screening activities and are due to additional and unnecessary inspections being conducted by the Texas Department of Public Safety at the order of the governor of Texas," the statement said.

Traffic had dropped as much as 60% as a result of the inspections, it said.

Monday, the Texas Department of Public Safety said troopers had inspected 2,685 trucks and removed 646 from service for violations including burned-out headlights or taillights, defective brakes or flawed tires. The department didn't report intercepting any drugs or immigrants. Neither Mr. Abbott's office nor the Department of Homeland Security responded to requests for comment.

The Mexican government said inspections by Texas officials were slowing down crossings at four border points and estimated that only a third of the usual commercial traffic is getting through.

In Laredo, the nation's largest inland port, passage over a bridge that typically takes less than an hour began taking as long as 10 hours, said Daniel Covarrubias, director of the Texas Center at Texas A&M International University, which analyzes the state's international trade.

On an average Friday, Laredo's Colombia Solidarity Bridge is crossed by about 2,500 trucks, but only some 800 crossed last Friday, Dr. Covarrubias said, a decline of about 70%. "It affects trade exponentially," he said, noting that much of Laredo's traffic includes parts destined for car manufacturing plants. "If you start adding time, all these costs get passed along to the consumer."

Since last summer, Mr. Abbott has had state police arrest migrants on misdemeanor trespassing charges, begun work on a state-funded border wall and dispatched thousands of National Guard troops to the border. In addition to the truck inspections announced Wednesday, he said Texas would begin offering free transportation for any migrants who want it to Washington or other cities outside of Texas.

The Mexican government said the inspections were slowing down crossings at four border points and estimated that only a third of the usual commercial traffic is getting through.

“The Ministry of Foreign Relations rejects this state measure that significantly harms trade flows between our two countries,” the foreign ministry said. “Merchants of Mexico and the U.S. are losing competitiveness and considerable income.”

It said the Mexican government has been in touch with the U.S. Embassy in Mexico, the U.S. departments of State and Homeland Security as well as the Texas governor’s office.

Pharr, a city in the Rio Grande Valley, is the primary location for trucks with fresh produce to come into the U.S. Inspections there by state troopers since Friday caused such a traffic backup that some truckers were waiting 36 hours or longer—much of that time stuck on the 3-mile-long bridge without access to bathrooms, food or water, industry representatives said.

Polo Chow, a Texas-based owner of U.S. and Mexican trucking carriers who also represents the Mexican National Chamber of Freight Transport, said small local truckers who cross the bridge daily started the strike. They considered days stranded on the bridge without bathrooms or water to be inhumane, he said, and would relent when state troopers agreed to reduce their inspections or make them faster.

Mr. Chow said some loads of fruits and vegetables were completely lost after sitting on the bridge in temperatures close to 100 degrees when trucks ran out of the diesel required to cool them.

Some trucks Monday were trying to find other routes, filling up roadways and forming long lines at smaller bridges, where state troopers weren’t doing safety inspections. Other truckers seeking to go south into Mexico were filling up parking lots near the Pharr bridge and trying to guess whether they’d be waiting a day or two or longer after scrolling through photos of blocked lanes sent by their counterparts in Mexico.

A. Jimmy Garza, operations director for produce importer Bebo Distributing, said the delays from the new inspections have him considering whether to route his trucks through Nogales, Ariz., instead of Texas. If he did that, the cost of transport would be more than double.

“It’s a huge difference that ultimately affects the consumer,” he said. “But today we woke up and said, ‘We can’t have our trucks sit in line three extra days, because of the deterioration of produce.’”

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Five Things To Know Today About The Supply Chain Crisis At The U.S.-Mexico Border

By Alfredo Corchado, Dianne Solis, and Allie Morris

Dallas Morning News

Gov. Gregg Abbott’s directive last week to step up commercial vehicle safety inspections, which set off reactionary protests by truck drivers, continues to snarl traffic at the border. Here’s the latest:

Raising Republican ire

Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller became the most prominent Republican to join a bipartisan chorus objection to the delays in supply chain deliveries that are costing businesses money. Miller on Tuesday called for Abbott end the new inspection policy saying it is “turning a crisis into a catastrophe” at the border.

“This is not solving the border problem, it is increasing the cost of food and adding to supply chain shortages,” said Miller, a two-term Republican who is up for reelection this year. “Such a misguided program is going to quickly lead to \$2 lemons, \$5 avocados and worse.”

Slow and slower

Reports on Tuesday varied widely about how long the delays are for commercial trucks waiting for stepped up inspections by Department of Public Safety troopers as they cross the border. In interviews, some truckers said they’d waited as long as two and three days to pass, while Miller said the average wait was 12 hours. U.S. Customs and Border Protection said the state inspections are “unnecessary” because federal officials already inspect commercial vehicles and added, “Trucks are facing lengthy delays along the Texas-Mexico border, with wait times at some border crossings exceeding five hours and commercial traffic dropping by as much as 60 percent.”

Abbott said his plan to increase the number of state inspections is in response to the Biden administration’s decision to end the pandemic-era Title 42 health order allowing for the rapid expulsion of migrants who cross the border. During the increased safety inspections, state workers could possibly discover more of the thousands of migrants who are crossing the border every day, many hoping to seek asylum in the U.S.

Beto joins in

At a news conference in Pharr in the Rio Grande Valley, Abbott’s opponent in his November bid for re-election joined in the criticism of the new inspections. Democrat Beto O’Rourke said Tuesday that the two-term Republican “is killing businesses and the Texas economy,” according to the Corpus Christi Caller-Times.

“It’s going to be very bad for the Texas economy. It’s going to be very bad for the national economy,” O’Rourke said from an empty cold-storage warehouse.

What’s the cost?

Dante Galeazzi, CEO and president of the Texas Independent Producers Association, said Tuesday that the snarled traffic means \$30 million in fresh produce was stalled. Miller said produce is rotting in idling trucks and ultimately, prices could spike for consumers.

Mexico is Texas’ No. 1 trading partner. Texas and Mexico share a 1,254-mile border that’s connected by more than 27 international crossing points. The two economies are in many ways integrated into one. In 2021, there was more than \$661 billion in trade between the U.S. and Mexico, according to U.S. Census data.

Protests and politics

Some truckers who are angry and frustrated by the long delays have launched protests, halting traffic themselves with blockades in Pharr, Texas, and even at the border crossing in Santa Teresa, New Mexico, which is not subject to Abbott’s policies. Others are more circumspect as they idle their time away, waiting.

Bonifacio Rodriguez sat in his big red rig in Pharr waiting for his chance to dash south across the border -- the protests are blocking his trip back after delivering a load of broccoli and mangoes.

“We are victims of politics,” the trucker said. “We are stuck.”

- [\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Delays, Closures And Chaos Mount At Texas-Mexico Border Crossings From New State Inspections

By Mitchell Ferman and Uriel Garcia

Texas Tribune

Joel Estebane’s commercial truck had already been inspected by U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers after crossing the bridge that connects Ciudad Juárez and El Paso on Tuesday afternoon — then he had to wait another hour in another line where Texas state troopers were questioning commercial drivers.

Estebane, who was on his way to pick up office and paper supplies from El Paso to haul to Juárez, said it took six hours to get his truck through El Paso’s port of entry. Troopers had set up a state inspection site next to a condominium complex and the local zoo where they stopped and questioned truck drivers about their cargo.

When it was Estebane’s turn, he said the troopers had already left, but the long line had added hours to his trip. He said it usually takes him between half an hour to an hour to get across the bridge.

“This disrupted my day,” Estebane said as he waited outside a warehouse while his truck was being loaded. “This is affecting firms on both Mexico and the U.S. side.”

Near the other end of Texas’ roughly 1,200-mile border with Mexico, in the Rio Grande Valley, no commercial vehicles crossed the busiest bridge in the region at all on Tuesday because for the second straight day, truckers on the Mexico side of the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge blocked all north- and southbound lanes in protest of Gov. Greg Abbott’s move to have state troopers inspect northbound commercial vehicles after they have already been searched by federal officers.

Normally, 3,000 commercial trucks cross the Pharr bridge each day, hauling about \$60 million to \$70 million worth of daily goods and services through the busiest land crossing for produce entering the U.S. from Mexico.

The ripple effects of Abbott’s decision last week to order the Texas Department of Public Safety to increase its inspections of commercial vehicles have been swift up and down the Texas-Mexico border. Abbott’s decision was a response to the Biden administration’s recent announcement that it plans to end Title 42 — a pandemic-era emergency health order that lets federal officials turn away migrants at the border without the chance to request asylum.

Increasing inspections of commercial vehicles, Abbott said, would disrupt drug cartels’ use of commercial trucks to smuggle humans and drugs into the U.S.

But six days into the new Texas initiative, it's unclear how thoroughly the DPS is inspecting commercial vehicles — and whether state troopers are even opening up trucks' cargo areas to look inside. It is also unclear whether the DPS has seized any drugs or encountered any undocumented migrants through the new program. The agency did not respond to requests for comment for this story.

Typically when a commercial truck crosses from Mexico into the U.S., Mexican authorities first clear the driver's paperwork before U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers inspect the vehicle on the other side of the international bridge — using an array of tools designed to spot hidden people and illegal drugs.

Gil Kerlikowske, former commissioner of CBP from 2014 to 2017, said the controlled areas where U.S. agents work at the bridges are “a Constitution-free zone, as the ACLU used to tell me. CBP has this complete right to completely search vehicles, including taking them apart.

“The number of K-9 [dogs] they have to look for drugs, the X-ray machines, they got really good at this — you'll see them be able to tap the sides of cars, panels of vehicles and locate whether there's a false panel or something's been concealed,” Kerlikowske added.

At the larger commercial ports of entry, there are usually other federal agencies on hand to do specialized inspections, such as the Department of Transportation or Food and Drug Administration to help make sure vehicles and products meet U.S. standards. Then, some trucks are stopped at a state-owned facility to make sure their vehicle is safe to drive in Texas — or an “audit,” as some people in the cross-border trade industry have called the DPS checks.

“Normally, DPS inspection has to do with safety of the trucks, making sure they have proper equipment, the right tires, following the rules here,” said Ernesto Gaytán, chair of the Texas Trucking Association.

But never before has DPS checked every commercial vehicle entering Texas from Mexico, according to interviews with veterans of the cross-border trade industry.

“In my 25 years in the trucking industry, DPS has never done audits of 100% of the trucks. That's unheard of,” said Leopoldo Chow, who owns trucking carriers in the U.S. and Mexico and is an adviser to CANACAR, Mexico's national trucking association. “If you were going to do the same audit of trucks between Austin and Dallas on I-35, you would have trucks sitting from Austin to Dallas. It's just not feasible.”

The delays at the bridges triggered by the DPS inspections have led to a 60% drop in commercial traffic at the Texas-Mexico border in just a matter of days since Abbott's initiative started, according to CBP.

“The longer than average wait times — and the subsequent supply chain disruptions — are unrelated to CBP screening activities and are due to additional and unnecessary inspections being conducted by the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) at the order of the Governor of Texas,” CBP said in a written statement.

Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller, who was sworn into office in 2019 at the Pharr bridge to help ring in that year's produce season, piled on criticism of Abbott's new policy.

Miller said Abbott should “cease his truck inspection project,” and that the “inspection program is turning a crisis into a catastrophe.”

Mexico’s Department of Foreign Affairs condemned Abbott’s order for additional inspections in a statement released Tuesday. The statement also said Mexican government officials have begun conversations with the U.S. government and Abbott’s office “to fully restore trade and identify alternatives that guarantee security on our shared border without harming binational trade.”

“The Department of Foreign Affairs rejects this state measure that significantly harms the flow of trade between our two countries,” the statement said. “As an inevitable consequence of this provision, businesses in Mexico and the United States are losing competitiveness and significant revenues.”

Truckers typically cross multiple truck loads per day, driving goods from Mexican border towns into U.S. border towns, where they can be picked up by a different truck that hauls the load to its final destination. The Mexican truckers then usually turn around and return to Mexico to pick up another load of goods.

In Ciudad Juárez, Antonio Ramos, who has transported gasoline across the border for two and half years, said Tuesday afternoon that he had been waiting to cross another El Paso-Juárez bridge for 36 hours. The average wait time at that port of entry is 23 minutes, according to CBP’s website.

Truckers blocking the Mexico side of the bridge in protest of Abbott’s new program have prevented Ramos and hundreds of other commercial vehicles from crossing.

Pedro Avendaño said he had been in the same long line since 2 p.m. Monday to cross into El Paso to pick up medical products and supplies. He said he understands the governor has to be on top of security issues, but the new inspections are affecting people’s livelihoods.

“They just need to let us [the truckers] work,” Avendaño said as he leaned against his 18-wheeler Tuesday afternoon in Juárez. “We have nothing to do with whatever the state is trying to do. And this is affecting not just our economy but their economy, too.”

Oscar Gutierrez, who got his 18-wheeler in line at 9 a.m. Tuesday to haul ladders to El Paso, said the truckers’ protest is inconvenient but it’s needed because Mexican truckers don’t get paid enough to go through additional inspections. The truckers need to send a message, he said.

“They need to stop being even stricter,” he said. “[CBP] were already doing inspections before all this and there were no issues.”

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Criminal Justice

-

Texas DA Stuns Lawmakers As He Refuses To Stop Lucio Execution, Says He Might Do

It Later

By Edward McKinley and Rebecca Hennes

Houston Chronicle

Cameron County District Attorney Luis Saenz, the only person besides the governor with the ability to immediately stop the scheduled April 27 execution of Melissa Lucio, refused to do so on Tuesday, although he said he does not believe the execution will go forward as scheduled.

During an afternoon hearing of the Texas House Criminal Justice Reform committee, led by Rep. Jeff Leach, a Dallas Republican, lawmakers pressed Saenz to intervene. More than half of the 150 members of the House signed onto a letter last month calling for a reprieve, as Lucio's application for clemency awaits a recommendation from the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles to Gov. Greg Abbott. Abbott could grant a 30-day stay of execution, but cannot issue a pardon or commute Lucio's death sentence to life without a recommendation from the board.

"I would just beg you, urge you on behalf of Melissa and her attorneys but also the Legislature and a sense of justice ... to push the pause button," Leach said at the hearing. "Make no mistake: Washing your hands of the ability to make this decision yourself is very, very shocking and disappointing."

Growing increasingly more agitated throughout his testimony, Saenz refused to pull back the execution warrant. At one point, he said it would be unfair to the hundreds of others on death row who "by the way, are also innocent," with a note of sarcasm that drew gasps from the crowd in the hearing room. He said there was "no reason" to delay Lucio's execution.

Then Saenz clarified: "I do not believe that this execution is going to go through on April 27," as he believes the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals will issue a stay. Pressed by members of the committee, Saenz finally said he would delay the execution date if a court does not do so. Lawmakers were speechless for a moment, and one asked him to repeat himself.

A jury sentenced Lucio, a resident of Harlingen, to death in 2008 for the murder of her 2-year-old daughter, Mariah. The evidence against her largely consisted of bruising on the girl's body and Lucio's tearful admission that "I guess I did it. I'm responsible," after hours of aggressive interrogation.

Lucio has since maintained her innocence, and experts have raised serious doubts about her statement to investigators, saying her history as a survivor of physical and sexual abuse put her at increased risk of making a false confession.

During her trial, Lucio's defense lawyers did not present evidence that would have supported their contention that Mariah had fallen down a flight of stairs two days earlier. Attorneys helping her challenge her conviction, as well as medical experts they have found to support them, say such a fall could have also caused her fatal injury and the bruising.

Five jurors from the original trial have since expressed regret for their decision to sentence Lucio to death. The original prosecutor was convicted on corruption charges in 2014.

One of the jurors testified at Tuesday's hearing: "The idea that my vote to take a person's life

was not based on complete and accurate information is horrifying ... I was wrong to sentence Melissa Lucio to death.”

Saenz, the DA, was unmoved.

“You keep saying you’re not going to relitigate it, but that’s what you’re doing ... I’m not going to get into it,” he said. “At this point, I’m telling you that even if I have that authority, I will not do that. Even if I have that authority, I don’t intend to do that.”

He added later that he would withdraw the execution if a court does not do so before April 27, as there are pending legal matters.

Back in Harlingen

Lucio's sister Sonya Valencia Alvarez watched with tears in her eyes as Saenz said he did not believe Lucio's execution would go forward as scheduled on April 27, despite declining to withdraw her death warrant amid pleas from Texas lawmakers.

Flanked by her mother, Hope, and Melissa's five-year-old grandson, Elijah, Alvarez watched the hearing over Zoom from their home in Harlingen. The family said they were disappointed Saenz refused to intervene, but are still hopeful.

"We were so scared, we are still scared, but we see God moving mountains for Melissa, for us, for her kids," Alvarez said. "It's just overwhelming because -- (her voice breaks) this is April. I believe she is coming home. I know that Melissa will be here soon."

Alvarez said overall, she was disappointed with the outcome of the hearing and that Saenz repeatedly stated he does not plan to make any unilateral moves in the case.

"He has the power to stop it now, but he refuses to," Alvarez said. "We are praying and hoping that he does the right thing...he is playing god (and) he is putting Melissa’s life in his hands."

"The DA was very much pressured, he felt a lot of pressure," another family member, Diane Cerda, said. "I think he is going to do the right thing. It might not have been today but I think that he will."

Landmark cases

The death penalty in Texas has taken on increased attention of late due to several landmark cases, including Lucio’s.

Lucio’s execution is scheduled for April 27, and Rodney Reed — a Black man convicted in Bastrop County of murdering a white woman by an all-white jury in 1996 — awaits a decision from the Texas Criminal Court of Appeals on his death sentence.

Reality TV star Kim Kardashian, who advocates against the death penalty, has called for clemency for both Reed and Lucio.

Since 1973, the modern era of the death penalty in the United States, there has been about one exoneration for a person on death row for every eight executions that have occurred, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. In addition, Texas has executed 10 people since 1989 despite “strong evidence of innocence,” the group estimates.

False confessions to the crime have led to 30 exonerations in death penalty cases over that time.

The group also identifies child deaths as a common source of wrongful convictions due to faulty medical evidence and emotional jurors.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Opinion/Editorial

-

Grumet: See You In Court? For Abortion, Yes. Voting Rights, Maybe Not.

By Bridget Grumet

Austin American Statesman

Funny. I thought our state leaders wanted regular Texans to help enforce the important stuff.

Like that time Gov. Greg Abbott urged “members of the general public” to call Child Protective Services to report any young person receiving gender-affirming medical care.

Or that time the Legislature deputized private citizens to become abortion bounty hunters, using the mere threat of costly civil lawsuits to upend access to reproductive services.

Or the new push — one of Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick’s top priorities for the next legislative session — for a bill to chill discussion of LGBTQ issues in classrooms by empowering people to sue school districts over lessons they dislike.

Yes, dear Texans, the courthouse doors are wide open to you when it is time to fight the culture wars. In fact, our state leaders are counting on your litigious spirit! But when it comes to the most fundamental issue in our civic space — our right to access fair elections, free of discriminatory policies or manipulated maps — well, those same Republican officials would rather slam the courthouse doors in your face.

In defending lawsuits over our state’s redistricting maps, plainly drawn to drown out the voices of Black and brown Texans who fueled much of our state’s population growth, the office of Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton has taken the stunning position that individuals have no standing to sue under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. Simply because they’re individuals.

As the Texas Tribune recently reported, Paxton is test-driving an argument that only the U.S. Department of Justice can challenge state or local election policies under a law that was designed to protect all voters. Not only does that ignore decades of precedent from private lawsuits filed under the Voting Rights Act, but it would leave enforcement solely in the hands of whichever party occupied the White House at any given moment.

I spoke to two legal experts about this, and they used the same word to describe the attorney general’s argument: Ridiculous.

“Congress has reenacted the Voting Rights Act many times, most recently in 2006, knowing

that private plaintiffs commonly sue,” Rick Hasen, a law professor at University of California, Irvine, told me. “If Congress believes this kind of lawsuit is improper, Congress could have written language declaring the absence of such a right in the act itself.”

Steve Vladeck, a University of Texas School of Law professor, was equally incredulous about Texas’ new argument over a federal law that has been in place for 57 years. Not surprisingly, the federal judges who’ve considered this argument so far have rejected it, but you can expect to see this issue raised on appeal.

What about the apparent double standard over who can sue and when? In fairness, I should note that the Voting Rights Act is federal law, while the Texas measure on abortion involves state legislation. The officials crafting any law get to spell out the enforcement mechanism, whether it’s up to the government or private citizens to seek redress.

Still, it takes a certain audacity for the Texas GOP leaders to argue residents have a valid legal interest in, say, suing someone who helped with a stranger’s abortion, but not a valid legal interest in suing over policies that hinder their participation in our democracy.

“I think we’re seeing no one is offended by hypocrisy anymore,” Vladeck said. “And so when you have state officials take completely inconsistent positions on similar topics for no perceivable reason other than to serve a political purpose, they pay no price. Courts don’t hold it against them. Voters don’t hold it against them.”

Let’s be clear: This is not a theoretical exercise. The U.S. Supreme Court in 2013 gutted another part of the Voting Rights Act that had required communities with a history of racial discrimination to get federal approval, or preclearance, before changing any election procedures. With that check gone, the main path for recourse against unfair voting policies is a lawsuit under Section 2, a portion of the Voting Rights Act that still stands.

Residents in the Houston suburb of Pasadena learned how important that avenue can be. Freed from preclearance, the city in 2013 revamped the structure of its City Council to add a couple of at-large seats, diluting the voting power of Hispanic residents. Lawsuits brought by those residents — notably, not by the feds — ultimately forced Pasadena to dismantle that plan and return to equitably drawn council districts.

If Paxton had his way, those residents would have had no recourse.

“A Voting Rights Act that could be enforced only by the Department of Justice would leave a lot of Voting Rights Acts violations untouched,” Hasen said, “because the Department of Justice, while large, does not have unlimited resources, especially to deal with problems at the local level, where private plaintiffs have brought very important lawsuits to court.”

Paxton now finds himself in court to defend the latest maps carving up legislative and congressional districts that give an outsized advantage to white, rural, conservative Texans. But he’s not only defending those maps. He’s loading up on arguments to further diminish the reach of the Voting Rights Act, in case the increasingly conservative Supreme Court is interested in taking another swipe at the landmark elections law.

What a shame. This shouldn’t be a Republican issue or a Democratic one. Anyone who values fair elections should expect the courts to hear out potentially disenfranchised voters.

If your rights are at stake, you should have a right to be heard.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Taylor: Low-Tax Texas? That's A Tall Tale, And State's Tax Structure Leads To Fiscal Distortions

By Michael Taylor

San Antonio Express News

I trust everyone enjoyed meeting their tax-filing obligations this week. If not, you have until Monday to satisfy the feds.

Satisfying the various taxing authorities in Texas is done at different times. The biggest annual bill for many households is a wealth tax on real estate, owed to the county you live in.

I sense that the majority of Texans think two things as a result of there being no personal income tax here: The first is that we have a low-tax state. The second is that no personal income tax is good. I disagree on both counts.

Texas is not a low-tax place. It's a high local-tax and low state-tax state. The absence of a state income tax gives us the illusion of living in a low-tax state.

More professional rankers than I have dug into this topic, though significant disparities in methodology exist. I'll give you their rankings then provide my totally unscientific comparison of taxation in Texas with that in California and Massachusetts, two supposed "high tax" states.

Determining whether one lives in a high- or low-tax state is not without controversy and disagreements.

The rankings

The Tax Foundation ranks Texas as the No. 6 state-and-local tax burden state, meaning only five states have lower taxes per person. This ranking takes into account all types of taxes including sales, estate, fees, licenses and corporate income taxes.

The Tax Policy Center also does a ranking of all state and local general revenue as a percentage of personal income. With its methodology, Texas comes in as the 13th-lowest tax-burden state.

Finally, Wallet Hub has a different ranking, placing Texas with the 19th-lowest tax burden. Its ranking takes into account income taxes, property taxes and sales taxes, all as a percentage of personal income.

But careful analysis of the question of which states levy the least tax ends up with the answer "it depends" because tax burdens vary according to individual circumstances. Averages — like the rankings above — are blunt instruments that obscure particular circumstances.

I like to engage in my own unscientific "let's suppose" analysis comparing California, Massachusetts and Texas.

Reader Steven Alexander, transplanted to Texas from California, provided me a good way to understand California vs. Texas taxes with the following example:

Consider a Texas family with a \$50,000 income that purchases a modest \$150,000 house. Their 20 percent down payment would be \$30,000, which we could imagine is nearly all of their personal net worth. Now consider that the family will pay a 2.7 percent property tax, or \$4,050, on the house. This Texas family in this scenario would be paying 8.1 percent of its annual income on property taxes every year. Because \$30,000 is their net worth, this family is also paying an annual 13.5 percent tax on its wealth even with a modest home. This is a severe wealth and income tax penalty in Texas for the modestly compensated.

A family living in California with similar circumstances would pay 1 percent of its home value in property taxes (\$1,500) and 4 percent in state income taxes (\$2,000), for an all-in lower combined tax than the Texas family paying \$4,050.

Wealth wins

Moving up the wealth scale, we can see that a California family with a \$1 million income and \$2 million home would pay an estimated \$113,000 in state income taxes and \$20,000 in property taxes for a total of \$133,000 in combined state and local taxes. Income taxes in California range from a low of 1 percent to a high of 12.3 percent for families earning more than \$1.2 million.

The Texas family with the same \$1 million income and same-priced home at \$2 million would expect to pay zero in state income taxes and \$54,000 in state and local taxes. So, from a tax perspective, it's better to be a millionaire in Texas than in California. But, as we've seen, it's worse for those who are modestly paid.

So we can say that Texas is an all-in low-tax state for the extremely wealthy or highly compensated but not for the modest or average income family.

Now let's compare the combination of Texas property taxes and income taxes to the combination of property taxes and income taxes in my home state, so-called "Taxachusetts." My nearly 80-year-old mother owns two properties. One is my childhood home in Massachusetts and the other a modest condominium apartment in San Antonio, near me.

Texas vs. Taxachusetts

My childhood home, near the ocean on Cape Cod, is big. Five bedrooms, 3.5 baths, finished basement. It's assessed at a market value of \$737,900. She will pay \$6,118.30 in 2022 in property taxes. This is 0.83 percent of market value. In fact her taxes are even more modest than they appear because the assessed value is probably below market value, but I'll go with official values for this comparison of Massachusetts versus Texas.

Her condominium in Texas, meanwhile, is 1,091 square feet with 2 bedrooms and 2 baths. Its appraised value is \$363,380, or almost exactly half the assessed value of her house in Massachusetts. She'll pay \$10,152 this year in property taxes on the condo in Texas, or 2.79 percent of market value. I mention all this to illustrate that Texas property taxes are at least 3.3 times higher than in Massachusetts. Probably more.

"But I don't pay state income taxes in Texas!" you say. Correct. My mom pays the flat 5

percent income tax in her state. For a median worker in Massachusetts making \$38,000, that would add \$1,900 to their tax bill. The median worker would still be better off in Massachusetts.

My mom paid \$7,894 in state income tax. All in, she pays more property and income tax in her home state of Massachusetts (\$14,000) than in Texas (\$10,000), but she lives here only four months of the year and has a much more modest living arrangement in Texas.

Neither she nor I are complaining about her paying taxes. She's fine. I mention this really to point out the distorted lie of Texas as a low-tax state.

So what's the point of all this? Most Texans — who are by definition closer to the median income than the upper extremes of wealth and income — are poorly served by the state's regime of no income tax and punishing property tax.

I can't prove the following, but I believe it. Many of the state's weirdest financial contortions — the “Robin Hood” system of public school finance pitting school districts against one another, terrible corporate welfare programs like Chapter 313, and even the lack of Medicare expansion — stem from this aversion to state income taxes.

Michael Taylor is a columnist for the San Antonio Express-News, author of “The Financial Rules for New College Graduates” and host of the podcast “No Hill For A Climber.”

-
[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Analysis: Texas Schools Need Support From Politically Distracted State Leaders

By Ross Ramsey
Texas Tribune

While the state's top political performers are talking about books in school libraries, and about whether history teachers ought to be allowed to teach history, Texas schools — schools everywhere, really — are up against a daunting fundamental problem.

Education.

Look at what the pandemic has done to our kids.

One way Texas measures academic progress in public schools is with the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness, a standardized test better known as STAAR. Grades took a hit during the pandemic, leaving teachers with the job of pulling students not just to their grade level, but to the performance level they might have had without the long break in in-person, on-site schooling.

In 2019, before the start of the pandemic, 47% of Texas students in third through eighth grade had English and reading skills at or above where they should have been for their grade level. More than half weren't reading at grade level. And the numbers fell to 43% of those kids by 2021, after more than a year of the pandemic and its disruption of education. Their English skills actually improved, to 54% in 2021 from 50% in 2019. But reading results dropped from 45% reading at grade level to 39%.

The declines in math and algebra scores were pronounced for that age group in Texas public schools. Before COVID-19, 50% were doing arithmetic at grade level; four years later, that had dropped to 35%, based on STAAR scores.

Students in districts where classes were mostly remote during the pandemic — where fewer than 25% of students attended in person — did worse than students in districts that were mostly in school — where more than 75% of students attended in person — but STAAR performance worsened in both groups.

The mostly remote districts saw a 9% drop in reading scores, compared with a 1% drop in the mostly in-person districts. Math scores were down 32% in the remote districts, 9% in in-person districts.

Texas is in its political season. Party primaries were held last month, the runoffs are next month, and the seven-month march to the November general election is underway.

Some candidates in both major parties are talking about falling scores and the learning losses of the last two years, about teacher shortages, school funding, pandemic precautions and so on — the education part of the education conversation.

Others, particularly Republicans, are talking instead about political hot-button issues, like critical race theory, what books are available in school libraries, gender identity, and other cultural and social issues.

It's enough to make you wonder whether the quality of education is as important as riling up voters in advance of elections.

And what happens in the election often sets the table for the other season of Texas civics — that part after the election when the people who are asking for votes now will turn to the business of setting state policy and making laws.

Public education is at the center of state and local government in Texas, in any terms you choose: time committed, money spent, voter expectations, parent concerns, economic development, jobs, civic engagement and knowledge.

It's usually a subject where the politicians align on one big idea: The better the state's education system is, the better the state will be. And even if you get them talking about just the education part of the education puzzle, they have plenty of disagreements. They're supposed to; their voters don't agree, either, and the halls of government were built so we'd have a place to debate big ideas.

But first, you have to agree on what needs to be done. The pandemic disrupted education, and the elected class is supposed to get that back in shape, and then to improve it — before the current group of students starts spilling out of public schools without the tools they went there to obtain.

Arguing over hot social topics gets more attention, and that's why candidates are fond of doing that. But there's work to be done in public schools — and the schools are something voters hold dear.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

From: [OOG News Alerts](#)
Subject: Morning News Clips 4.14.22
Date: Thursday, April 14, 2022 9:32:27 AM
Attachments: [Morning News Clips 4.14.22.pdf](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

Morning News Clips 4/14/2022

- [Texas Take](#)

- [Texas Tribune: The Brief](#)

- [Politico Playbook](#)

Greg Abbott News

The New York Times – J. David Goodman: [Texas Governor Offers Deal To End Snarled Traffic At Border](#) [[Web](#)]

KSAT – Uriel J. Garcia and Mitchell Ferman: [Gov. Greg Abbott Eases State Inspections At One Commercial Bridge, As Trade Remains Snarled Across The Border](#) [[Web](#)]

Houston Chronicle – Jeremy Wallace: [Gov. Greg Abbott Eases Truck Inspection At Key Border Crossing in Laredo](#) [[Web](#)]

Texas Legislature

Texas Tribune – Abby Livingston: [Democrats Are In Danger Of Losing Three Congressional Strongholds In South Texas](#) [[Web](#)]

Texas Tribune – Patrick Svitek: [Two Democrats, two Republicans will compete in special election for South Texas congressional seat that GOP wants to flip](#) [[Web](#)]

State News

- *KXAN* – Kelly Wiley: [Lawmaker To Take Fresh Look at Texas Homebuilding Industry](#) [[Web](#)]

Austin Monitor – Chad Swiatecki: [City Anticipating Three New Hotel Acquisitions For Homeless Housing](#) [[Web](#)]

Dallas Morning News – Nataly Keomounhkoun: [Rep. Henry Cuellar ‘Not A Target’ After FBI Raided Home, Campaign Office, Lawyer Says](#) [[Web](#)]

Education

Houston Chronicle – Hannah Dellinger: [Klein ISD Teacher Fired, Charged After Allegedly](#)

[Showing Video Of Adult Content In Classroom](#) [Web]

Immigration/Border Security

Abilene Reporter News – Madlin Mekelburg: [gov. Greg Abbott Agrees To Ease Inspection Requirement For Trucks At One Border Crossing](#) [Web]

2nd Amendment Rights

CNN – Paul LeBlanc: [Gun Violence Keeps Supercharging America's Second Amendment Debate](#) [Web]

National News

Fox Business – Stephan Sorace: [Elon Musk Offers To Buy Twitter, Take It Private](#) [Web]

Fox – Tyler O’Neil: [Second Texas Bus Drops Off Migrants Near Us Capitol In Washington, DC](#) [Web]

Opinion/Editorial

Austin American Stateman – Austin American Stateman Editorial Board: [Editorial: Republicans Must Fix The Mail-In Voting Mess They Created](#) [Web]

Houston Chronicle – The Editorial Board: [Editorial: Mad Truckers, Molded Strawberries Latest Fruits Of Abbott’s Border Security Crackdown](#) [Web]

#

Greg Abbott News

Texas Governor Offers Deal To End Snarled Traffic At Border

By J. David Goodman

The New York Times

HOUSTON — Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas said on Wednesday that days of snarled traffic on the border, caused by new safety inspections he ordered last week, were part of a concerted effort to force Mexican officials to do more to stop the flow of migrants into the United States.

Ratcheting up the stakes in a clash over immigration that has tangled trade routes into Texas, Mr. Abbott said he would end the inspections only at one entry point — the bridge between Laredo and the Mexican city of Colombia, Nuevo León — and only because the governor of that state had agreed to increase border security on the Mexican side.

The Texas police, Mr. Abbott said, would continue to stop all trucks coming from other Mexican states for safety inspections, despite increasing pressure from truckers, business groups and officials from both parties who are calling for an end to the delays that have stretched for hours and even days and sharply limited commercial traffic.

“Clogged bridges can end only through the type of collaboration that we are demonstrating today between Texas and Nuevo León,” said Mr. Abbott, a two-term Republican up for re-

election this year.

The announcement marked a shift in Mr. Abbott's public description of the safety inspections he ordered last week, an acknowledgment that they were a means to exert political pressure, both on Mexican officials and on President Biden.

"The goal all along has been to ensure that people understood the consequences of an open border and that Texas isn't going to tolerate it anymore," Mr. Abbott said.

In a statement on Wednesday, Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, called the inspections "unnecessary and redundant" and said that "the continuous flow of legitimate trade and travel and C.B.P.'s ability to do its job should not be obstructed," referring to blockages at Customs and Border Protection facilities. State police in Texas have established their vehicle safety checkpoints just beyond where trucks pass through federal inspection, creating the backups. Ms. Psaki said commercial traffic had declined by as much as 60 percent.

The Mexican Foreign Ministry, in a statement, said that it opposed Mr. Abbott's actions and that Mexican officials had been in touch with Mr. Abbott and with federal officials to "find alternatives that ensure the security of our shared border without harming binational trade." The safety checks have applied to all commercial vehicles entering Texas at major commercial crossings, and in the days since they commenced, backups at the border have grown substantially.

Businesses complain that they cannot get goods into Texas. Mexican truckers, facing daylong delays in sweltering heat without food or bathrooms, began to protest, and created blockades at crossings in the cities of Pharr and El Paso late Monday into Tuesday.

Even some Republican politicians, like the conservative agriculture commissioner, Sid Miller, urged Mr. Abbott to end the inspections, saying they were "increasing the cost of food and adding to supply chain shortages."

And so on Wednesday, Mr. Abbott appeared in the border city of Laredo with the governor of the Mexican state of Nuevo León, Samuel Alejandro García Sepúlveda, and said that Texas would end the safety checks for trucks coming into Laredo, a crossing that serves a relatively limited area of the border. "The Texas Department of Public Safety can return to its previous policy" of random checks at that crossing, Mr. Abbott said.

Mr. García said that, in exchange, officials in his state had set up some checkpoints on the Mexican side of the crossing and promised that "our 14 kilometers of border with Texas will be continually patrolled with our police." (The border between Texas and Mexico is 1,254 miles, or more than 2,000 kilometers.)

Mr. Abbott presented the decision as a victory, suggesting he had been able to reach an agreement with Mexican leaders in one state on border security, and promised to do so with others at well.

Mr. Abbott on Wednesday urged Mr. Biden to maintain the public health policy, which is expected to end next month.

Another part of Mr. Abbott's effort to pressure the Biden administration, also announced last week, has been to charter buses to take migrants released from federal custody into Texas and bring them to Washington or other locations outside of the state. The migrants went on a voluntary basis, state officials said.

On Wednesday, the first of the buses arrived in Washington, Mr. Abbott said in a statement, carrying two dozen migrants from Colombia, Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua. A second was on the way.

A camera crew from Fox News was on hand for the arrival of the first bus and captured images of the migrants as they exited near the Capitol, wearing masks and gripping manila envelopes.

Mr. Abbott and his political strategists have seen the border, and opposition to the Biden

administration's immigration policies, as a winning issue with voters, including many Democrats in Texas.

But the backups caused by the inspections, which industry experts said affected tens of millions of dollars in produce deliveries alone, provided a rare opening for Democrats to use the border against Mr. Abbott.

"It's the wrong response to the problem of Title 42," said Representative Henry Cuellar, a Democrat whose district includes Laredo. "All he's done is delay the national supply chain. He's affecting a lot of incomes here. The cost, it's going to be passed on from the companies to the consumer."

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Gov. Greg Abbott Eases State Inspections At One Commercial Bridge, As Trade Remains Snarled Across The Border

By Uriel J. Garcia and Mitchell Ferman

KSAT

Gov. Greg Abbott and Nuevo León Gov. Samuel Alejandro García Sepúlveda announced an agreement Wednesday they say will help ease commercial traffic at the Laredo-Colombia bridge, one of at least four international ports of entry where international trade has been snarled since Abbott ordered Texas state troopers to do additional inspections on cargo.

As part of the deal, Texas Department of Public Safety troopers will stop inspecting every commercial truck on the Laredo-Colombia Solidarity International Bridge as long as Nuevo León has checkpoints on its side of the Mexican state's 9-mile-long border. Texas' controversial inspections — which have caused hourslong delays, spurred protests at ports of entry and fueled fears of food shortages — will continue for trucks coming from the other three Mexican states that border Texas.

"If Nuevo León can assure security, technology, security checkpoints and patrol the border to help Texas and Texas can help us with more merchandise, with more commerce, we will do it," García Sepúlveda said.

He said his state has started inspecting commercial vehicles at different checkpoints in Nuevo León. García Sepúlveda didn't go into detail about what the inspections consisted of on the Mexico side of the border but he said they involved federal, immigration and state police.

It's not clear if Mexican authorities will inspect every commercial vehicle, as Abbott ordered state troopers to do, or whether checks on the other side of the border will also cause delays in commercial crossings.

Abbott and García Sepúlveda signed the agreement during a news conference in Laredo, where it has taken truckers three hours or longer to cross into Texas, which is significantly longer than the average wait time of 15 minutes on a Wednesday afternoon. The agreement says the two states will work cooperatively to ensure vehicles crossing the border meet safety standards in both states, to reduce human trafficking and drug smuggling by criminal groups and to stop immigrants from heading to the Texas-Mexico border.

Abbott previously said the goal of the new inspection program is to seize narcotics and stop undocumented migrants from crossing into Texas. But neither Abbott nor the Texas DPS could point to any drug seizures or encounters with undocumented migrants when asked

Wednesday about the success of the initiative. Instead, they pointed to hundreds of vehicle safety violations.

A DPS spokesperson said the agency has inspected 4,133 commercial vehicles and 973 of those “were placed out of service for serious safety violations to include defective brakes, defective tires and defective lighting.”

The move to ease Texas' inspections at one of the 13 commercial crossings along approximately 1,200 miles of border the state shares with Mexico came after Abbott has been heavily criticized by the White House, Mexican federal and state governments and the American private sector about the inspections. Even fellow Republican Sid Miller, Texas' agriculture commissioner, called on Abbott to reverse course, citing supply chain issues that he predicted would leave grocery store shelves empty. U.S. Customs and Border Protection, or CBP, which already conducts commercial inspections, has called the state inspections “unnecessary.”

Abbott mandated the vehicle inspections on April 6 in response to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announcing plans to lift Title 42 — a pandemic-era rule that allows immigration officials to turn away recently arrived migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border, including those who are seeking asylum.

The deal with García Sepúlveda provides little relief for the overall trade logjam that has been playing out between the two countries since Abbott's order went into effect. The Colombia bridge is just one of 13 commercial crossings between Texas and Mexico and the only one connected to Nuevo León. Over the last two years, around 20,000 commercial vehicles have crossed that bridge per month, according to statistics from the city of Laredo, but noncommercial vehicles also cross the Colombia bridge.

El Paso's two commercial bridges reported four- to five-hour waits as of Wednesday afternoon. The average wait time is usually 10 to 30 minutes.

Abbott defended his actions during the Wednesday news conference, saying sometimes it takes drastic actions to get things done.

“We knew that as soon as we did what we did on the border that we would be contacted by officials in Mexico because it is a very high price to pay,” Abbott said. “Sometimes it just takes action like that to spur people sitting down and working things out like the way that they are beginning to work out.”

Abbott also dismissed complaints that wait times at the border are creating supply chain issues.

“The same people who have suffered a few hours of delay, they have been shouting for the past 15 months to the Biden administration, ‘Do not open those borders,’” Abbott said.

Title 42, implemented in March 2020, is meant to be used to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. But Republicans have said the rule is still needed to keep order at the border, which they say has been chaotic as a result of the Biden administration's immigration policies.

Another border crossing in Laredo, the World Trade Bridge, is open only for commercial traffic and more than 165,000 trucks crossed that bridge each month over the last two years, according to that city. But the World Trade Bridge connects to the state of Tamaulipas, not Nuevo León, so it is unaffected by today's agreement

Abbott said he hopes he can reach similar agreements with the rest of the Mexican border governors. García Sepúlveda said Nuevo León can serve as an example to the other Mexican border states.

Texas borders four Mexican states — Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León and Tamaulipas. On Tuesday, the governors of Tamaulipas and Coahuila sent a letter to Abbott telling him the inspections are "overzealous" and criticizing him saying, "political points have never been a good recipe to address common challenges or threats."

María Eugenia Campos Galván, the governor of Chihuahua, said in a statement she is concerned over how the added inspections have affected both countries' economies. She said she hopes all Mexican states that border Texas will join her in having a dialogue with Abbott to find another solution.

"I am a faithful believer in dialogue and mediation; and I am sure that it is possible to promote better actions to strengthen the security of both sides of the border, without affecting the economy of Mexican and American families," she said.

No commercial vehicles crossed the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge, typically the busiest commercial crossing in the Rio Grande Valley, since truckers on the Mexico side began blocking north- and southbound lanes Monday in protest of the new inspections. That quickly led to widespread delays for cross-border trade after Abbott announced the program last week.

Mexican truckers in Reynosa, south of McAllen, and Ciudad Juárez, south of El Paso, earlier this week created blockades preventing cargo from coming into the United States as a protest against Abbott's added inspections. Some truckers reported having to sleep overnight in their 18-wheelers because the state inspections were holding up lines, they said.

Other bridges in the Valley — the Anzalduas International Bridge in Mission and the Progreso International Bridge closer to the Gulf Coast — have also experienced traffic blockades this week on the Mexico side, disrupting passenger vehicle flows as well.

CBP officials said that blockades in Juárez and Reynosa have concluded and commercial traffic has resumed as of Wednesday evening. The blockade in Reynosa ended on Wednesday after cartel operatives set cargo trucks ablaze in an effort to end the logjam, according to The Monitor newspaper in McAllen.

Also in response to next month's lifting of Title 42, Abbott announced last week Texas will provide free transportation to migrants released and processed by immigration officials at the border to Washington, D.C. The first group arrived on Wednesday.

Over the past year, state officials have deployed thousands of Texas National Guard troops and dedicated billions of dollars to stem an increase in migrants crossing the Texas-Mexico border. But that mission, dubbed Operation Lone Star, has been mired in controversy as

National Guard troops have called it a disaster. Several service members tied to the mission have also died by suicide, leading to calls for an investigation from congressional Democrats

Abbott and DPS have repeatedly boasted in news conferences, on social media and during interviews on Fox News that the mission has disrupted drug and human smuggling networks. Officials touted more than 11,000 criminal arrests, drug seizures that amount to millions of “lethal doses” and the referrals of tens of thousands of unauthorized immigrants to the federal government for deportation.

But the state’s claim of success has been based on shifting metrics that included crimes with no connection to the border, work conducted prior to the operation, plus arrest and drug seizure efforts that do not clearly distinguish DPS’s role from that of other agencies, according to an investigation by ProPublica, The Texas Tribune and The Marshall Project.

The largest share of Operation Lone Star arrests were of people accused only of trespassing on private property. Many spend months in prison, but the strategy does not appear to have slowed immigration.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Gov. Greg Abbott Eases Truck Inspection At Key Border Crossing In Laredo

By Jeremy Wallace
Houston Chronicle

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott relented Wednesday, agreeing to ease the additional safety inspections of trucks at the busiest border entry point near Laredo in exchange for promises of more border security by Mexican officials along one 8-mile stretch of the border.

The move comes after Abbott endured days of withering criticism from both Democrats and Republicans and faced pushback from shipping companies and the Texas Trucking Association.

Since he implemented the more thorough inspections a week ago, truck traffic at many of the Texas ports of entry have stalled. In Laredo, the nation’s biggest trucking port, the normal 30 minutes or less to get across ballooned to three hours or longer, delaying shipments of everything from produce to electronics and driving up costs for trucking companies.

But Abbott said on Wednesday that the easing of inspections is only happening along the 8-mile stretch of border with Nuevo Leon, which has just a tiny portion of the 1,254-mile border with Texas. Abbott said he’s talking to leaders of other Mexican states to work out similar agreements in return for speeding up inspections in Texas.

“Since Nuevo Leon has increased its security on its side of the border, the Texas Department of Public Safety can return to its previous practice of random searches of vehicles crossing the the bridge from Neuvo Leon,” Abbott said with the Nuevo Leon Gov. Samuel Alejandro García Sepulveda at his side.

Almost instantly, wait times plummeted for truckers trying to get across the Columbia-

Solidarity Bridge in Laredo, which connects Nuevo Leon to Interstate 35 and is by far the busiest port in Texas for truck traffic coming from Mexico. More than 2.5 million trucks crossed into Laredo in 2021, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation.

At 3 p.m. it was taking those trucks six hours to get across the bridge. Within an hour of Abbott signing his agreement with García, the wait dropped to five minutes.

Abbott was far from admitting defeat on Wednesday, insisting the increased inspections were always about improving safety on Texas roadways and forcing Mexican officials to do more at the border.

DPS officials have estimated that they have found that 25 percent of all vehicles coming across the border had serious mechanical issues, like bad brakes or tires.

“There may be Texans whose lives were saved because of the vehicles taken out of operation by what the Texas Department of Public Safety did,” Abbott said. “Because otherwise those dangerous vehicles, with dangerous brakes could have run into a Texan walking across the road or driving down a road.”

Abbott last week instructed the Texas Department of Public Safety to ramp up truck inspections because “the cartels that smuggle illicit contraband and people across our southern border do not care about the condition of the vehicles they send into Texas.”

However, the state troopers were not allowed to inspect vehicles for illegal drugs or human smuggling. They could only check vehicle working conditions, like brakes, tires and taillights.

But as those inspections went into place, travel times at the busiest truck traffic ports exploded, with drivers saying waits lasted eight hours at some border crossings, forcing truckers to burn more diesel and risking perishable cargo like produce.

In Mexico, the governor’s order triggered a revolt from truckers who have set up blockades shutting off all U.S. trucks from entering the country at key points in Hidalgo County and in El Paso.

The White House slammed Abbott on Wednesday, saying his actions were resulting in more supply chain disruptions and hindering U.S. Customs checks at the border.

“The continuous flow of legitimate trade and travel and CBP’s ability to do its job should not be obstructed,” White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said in the statement.

Even Abbott’s biggest allies began to turn against his policy over the last few days. The Texas Trucking Association, which just two months ago endorsed his re-election, released a statement criticizing the policy.

“Unfortunately, this new initiative duplicates existing screening efforts and leads to significant congestion, delaying the products Americans rely on from our largest trading partner, Mexico,” TTXA President & CEO John D. Esparza said.

Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller, a Republican, called the Abbott inspections “catastrophic.”

“This is not solving the border problem, it is increasing the cost of food and adding to supply chain shortages,” Miller said.

Abbott blames the Biden administration for not doing more to secure the border. He said he’s having to take unprecedented action to make up for Biden’s neglect, and that the goal all along was to make sure people understood the consequences of an open border and that “Texas isn’t going to tolerate it any more.”

Abbott said he knew the order would lead to Mexican officials reaching out to him, and that he could push directly for better security on their end. He credited García for making commitments to beef up patrols along the border south of the Rio Grande.

“We’re willing to make an effort to patrol all that 14 kilometers we have with Texas to be an example for other states in Mexico,” García said Wednesday.

Abbott said DPS has already been seeing stepped up patrols in Nuevo Leon at the port of entry and along the river.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Texas Legislature

Democrats Are In Danger Of Losing Three Congressional Strongholds In South Texas

By Abby Livingston

Texas Tribune

WASHINGTON — Fending off the Republican advance in South Texas this fall was already going to be a taller-than-usual order for Democrats. But few Democrats anticipated it would be this hard.

Thanks to a succession of self-inflicted choices, fallout from redistricting and some flat bizarre circumstances, Democrats are confronting a mind-numbing set of complications in their fight to hold on to three seats in South Texas. And national polling indicates Democrats have no room for error if they want to hold off a Republican challenge in a region that was once a historical Democratic stronghold.

The seats in question are held by U.S. Reps. Henry Cuellar of Laredo and Vicente Gonzalez of McAllen. A third vacant seat recently belonged to Filemon Vela of Brownsville, who stepped down to take a private sector lobbying job.

“For Democrats, there may simply be too many fires to put out at once,” national political analyst David Wasserman, of the Cook Political Report, said to The Texas Tribune.

Democrats have been united and energized in recent days in their opposition to Gov. Greg Abbott ordering security checks of trucks crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, a move that has

ground trade in the region to a halt.

But they have multiple other vulnerabilities to contend with: In the 28th Congressional District, the FBI raided Cuellar's home and campaign just ahead of his primary campaign. (His attorney has since said that Cuellar is not the target of the investigation.) In the neighboring 15th Congressional District, Gonzalez is vacating his once-safe, now-ripped-apart-by-Republicans district for safer ground, making it even harder for Democrats to hold on to his old seat. And in the 34th Congressional District, Vela abruptly resigned late last month, setting off a summer special election that could put a Republican incumbent on the ballot for that seat in the fall.

Going back to the 1980s, these three neighboring districts have traditionally made up South Texas, a region of the state with a high proportion of Hispanic voters that has leaned left politically. Emerging from the Rio Grande, each district stretches from border town population centers north through ranchland.

"Each of the South Texas districts has some unique circumstances, but they could all add up to a big headache for Democrats and make it more difficult to retain control of the House," said Nathan Gonzales, a political analyst and publisher for Inside Elections.

Nationally, Democrats have a slim margin of control in the House, and even losing one South Texas seat could jeopardize Democrats' hold on the gavel. Currently, there are 23 Republicans and 12 Democrats in the Texas U.S. House delegation.

Per Wasserman, who rates the competitiveness of U.S. House races for a living, Democratic circumstances are becoming dire.

"President Biden's anemic approval ratings with Hispanic voters and on the immigration issue could already be putting TX-15 out of reach (now that it's a Trump seat), and the FBI raid and a Vela-triggered special election are massive distractions for Democrats in TX-28 and TX-34, respectively," he wrote in an email to the Tribune.

House Democratic operatives say they're ready for the fight.

Monica Robinson, a spokesperson for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, said there are "challenges and opportunities in South Texas" and Democrats are not taking anything for granted.

"We're confident in our Democrats in South Texas and our ability to run smart, nimble campaigns that will win in November," she added.

He announced in March 2021 that he wouldn't seek reelection in his district. But he upgraded his retirement announcement to a full-blown resignation on March 31, vacating his office nine months earlier than expected.

That move set off what will be a confusing special election in which the winner will hold the seat for only a matter of months, while creating an opportunity for Republicans to gain an advantage for the main event in November where they will face a more difficult district.

District 34 was redrawn by the Legislature last year to be a more safe seat for a Democrat,

making it the Republicans' hardest South Texas target in November. If the new map had been in place in 2020, President Joe Biden would have carried the district by 16 points.

But Vela's exit means there will now be a June 14 special election that still adheres to the old district map, where Biden won by only 4 points, which could make it easier for a Republican to win. If a Republican wins the special election, it could boost their name recognition when they compete again in November.

Democrats are now dealing with a resulting scramble in South Texas.

Gonzalez is running for Vela's open seat in November — after switching districts because redistricting tilted his district boundaries toward Republicans. Gonzalez already declined to run in the special election, given that he is still a sitting member of Congress.

There's also little incentive for other Democrats to run for the special election. At best a candidate would be able to hold the office for a few months while not being allowed to run for reelection for the full term in November, since that primary has already been settled. Gonzalez won the Democratic primary for Vela's seat in March.

"I wish we had a member till the end of the year," Gonzalez said in an interview. "But it is what it is, and under the circumstances we gotta deal with what we have."

Republicans, meanwhile, are giddy about the special election contest. The GOP nominee for the two-year term, Mayra Flores, is in the race

"We see an opportunity to try and pick off this seat in the special," said Dan Conston, the president of the Congressional Leadership Fund, the Republican super PAC that controls much of the party's House campaign general election spending.

"And if Mayra Flores wins, it gives her a significant jump-start of a fall campaign against a weak candidate in Vicente Gonzalez," he added.

For Republicans, the stakes are historic: Should Flores win the special election, she will become the first Republican Latina elected to Congress from Texas. If that's the case, her fall campaign against Gonzalez would mark the first member-versus-member federal race in Texas since 2004, when Republican U.S. Rep. Pete Sessions defeated Democratic U.S. Rep. Martin Frost for a newly drawn Dallas seat after a mid-decade round of redistricting.

"Why would we want to spend a boatload of money for an election that is meaningless?" Texas Democratic Party Chair Gilberto Hinojosa said of the special election in an interview. "There's not a doubt anywhere that Vicente Gonzalez is going to be sworn in in January of 2023."

The most formidable Democrat running in the special election is former Cameron County justice of the peace and commissioner Dan Sanchez, who announced his own campaign last week.

Gonzalez, who will face Flores in November for the two-year term no matter what comes to pass over the summer, predicted a Democratic victory in the special election that "will take the wind out of the sail of most of the Republicans in South Texas, after we win that special."

“It’ll be a preview of what’s coming in November,” he added.

For his part, Vela said he’s not worried that his exit will hurt Democrats’ chances for retaining the seat.

“Vicente is going to slaughter Mayra Flores in the November election,” Vela said in an interview on his last day in Congress. “I don’t think it’s going to be even near close.”

Flores responded in kind via text: “Congressmen Vela and Gonzalez will find out the hard way that South Texas Hispanics know the national Democratic Party has abandoned us in favor of radical policies that harm our communities.”

15th Congressional District

First elected in 2016, Gonzalez ran for Congress when the 15th District was once a safe Democratic seat.

This past fall, Republican state lawmakers gutted that original 15th District in redistricting, turning it from a seat Biden narrowly carried in 2020 to one that Trump would have won by almost 3 points. Gonzalez secured the 34th District nomination on March 1.

The destabilization of the 15th District is a direct result of Republican redistricting. Gonzalez did not flee his old seat for a friendlier one. Republicans did it for him, drawing a conspicuous peninsula out of the 34th District to bring in the Gonzalez residence, separating him from nearly all of his old constituents.

Members of Congress don’t have to live in their districts, and his move leaves behind an open-seat race for the 15th District, now the most endangered Democratic-held seat in Texas.

The Republican emphasis is on the 15th District, demonstrated by GOP nominee Monica de la Cruz Hernandez’s designation as a House GOP “Young Gun,” or top-tier candidate. GOP activity could expand further, though, as campaign committees are known to add candidates to these lists over the course of the cycle.

Vallejo has the backing of state and national groups and politicians, including EMILY’s List, U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, U.S. Rep. Sylvia R. Garcia of Houston and state Reps. Terry Canales of Edinburg and Mando Martinez of Weslaco. Ramirez has endorsements from Gonzalez, Vote Vets PAC and the Blue Dog Democrats, a group that pushes for moderates. Both candidates have union endorsements.

More broadly, Gonzalez told the Tribune that national Democratic groups were failing South Texas Democrats. He called the DCCC, a member-driven institution with which he has clashed in the past, “asleep at the wheel when it comes to South Texas.”

But there is an equitable amount of Democratic frustration on Capitol Hill for having to deal with the open-seat race and the Vela vacancy.

DCCC staffers say the committee has hired two staffers in the 15th District and the committee is in the process of expanding that staff and opening a headquarters there as well.

And then there is Laredo.

In January, the FBI raided Cuellar's home and campaign office. The FBI has yet to elaborate on why it conducted the raids so close to the election, a highly controversial move by the Department of Justice.

Cuellar has proclaimed his innocence. But six weeks later, he found himself in the first Democratic runoff of his congressional career.

Cuellar's attorney Joshua Berman told the Tribune that a DOJ official told him that Cuellar was not the target of the investigation. The DOJ did not comment when asked to verify the claim.

But it was not merely the ugliness of an unexplained raid. For the last three years, liberals have been trying to chase Cuellar out of office and spending big against him. Their candidate is attorney Jessica Cisneros, who challenged Cuellar two years ago.

She is at the vanguard of the progressive left in Texas, but she is running in a district where many Catholic voters do not agree with her social positions — particularly on abortion.

“It's not so much a problem that there would be no incumbent running, it's that Cuellar's rival could be too far left for the general electorate,” said Wasserman, the political analyst, reflecting a consensus that Republicans privately hold.

Cisneros' campaign manager Regina Monge said pundits like Wasserman have it all wrong.

“Voters like Jessica because she's independent, not accepting a dime of corporate money and represents change from the status quo. She's focused on the issues that matter to South Texans: health care and good jobs,” she said.

Republicans Cassy Garcia — a former staffer to U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz — and activist Sandra Whitten are currently in a runoff election for the GOP nod to take on whomever wins the Cuellar-Cisneros nomination fight. Garcia recently picked up an endorsement from U.S. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy.

Republican enthusiasm

House Republicans argue Democrats' South Texas problems are rooted in policy. Ever since Democrats underperformed in 2020, a widespread consensus settled on the notion that positions like defunding the police and the Green New Deal from out-of-state politicians did significant damage to the party in South Texas.

“South Texas has become Democrats' worst nightmare,” wrote House GOP campaign spokesperson Torunn Sinclair, blaming Democratic policies on the border, energy and economy in an email to the Tribune. “Trends show South Texas is already leaning Republican,

and Democrats have done nothing to reverse the trend, and their policies are making it worse.”

Moses Mercado, a Washington-based Democratic lobbyist who grew up in the Rio Grande Valley, blames Republican control of redistricting for much of the South Texas turbulence.

“This is their dream,” he said of Republican ambitions in South Texas. “They created the mess.”

What is clear: Both parties are organizing here in ways they have not before. National party staffers are on the ground, and the cheap television markets will likely feature political commercials on loop by September.

“We’re changing how we do business in South Texas this cycle,” said Robinson, the House Democratic campaign spokesperson. “The DCCC is reaching voters earlier than ever before, we’re being intentional about how we communicate with Hispanic voters in the Valley and we’re resuming in-person organizing after Democrats put public health over politics in 2020.”

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Two Democrats, Two Republicans Will Compete In Special Election For South Texas Congressional Seat That GOP Wants To Flip

By Patrick Svitek
Texas Tribune

Two Democrats and two Republicans have filed for the June 14 special election to replace former U.S. Rep. Filemon Vela, D-Brownsville, in a South Texas congressional seat that the GOP wants to flip.

The filing deadline was 5 p.m. Wednesday, and the candidates are Democrat Dan Sanchez, a Harlingen attorney; Republican Mayra Flores, the current GOP nominee for the seat in the November general election; Republican Juana "Janie" Cantu-Cabrera, one of Flores' competitors from the March primary; and Democrat Rene Coronado of Harlingen, who listed his occupation as "city civil service director."

The special election was triggered by Vela's resignation last month to take a job with Akin Gump, a prominent law and lobbying firm. He had already announced he was not seeking reelection.

The winner of the special election will only get to finish Vela's term, which extends until January. But Republicans are eager to capture the seat as they try to gain new ground in South Texas, and the special election is happening under the previous, more competitive boundaries of the 34th District. The November election for a full term in Congress will be held under new district boundaries that were redrawn during last year's redistricting process.

Top Republicans have already consolidated behind Flores. She has been endorsed for the special election by Gov. Greg Abbott, Texas GOP chair Matt Rinaldi, Texas GOP vice chair Cat Parks and the Congressional Leadership Fund, the leading super PAC aligned with House GOP leadership.

Sanchez, a former Cameron County commissioner, has the support of Vela, as well as U.S. Rep. Vicente Gonzalez, D-McAllen, who is currently the Democratic nominee for the full term in the 34th District. He declined to run in the special election.

The other Republican, Cantu-Cabrera, previously faced Flores in the March 1 primary for the full term in the 34th District. Cantu-Cabrera came in last in the four-way primary, getting 7% of the vote to 61% for Flores.

Early voting for the special election starts May 31.

- [\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

State News

Lawmaker To Take Fresh Look at Texas Homebuilding Industry

By Kelly Wiley
KXAN

AUSTIN (KXAN) — Texas Sen. Nathan Johnson, D-Dallas, said in an interview he believes it may be time for the state legislature to take a closer look at the residential home building industry following a KXAN investigation. KXAN found families across the state are dealing with crumbling foundations and years-long disputes with developers.

“It’s something that was attempted to be fixed and addressed more than a decade ago and was not, so it may be time for us to take another look at it,” Sen. Johnson said.

Across Texas, municipalities are charged with coming up with rules for developers who want to build subdivisions, but a KXAN investigation found some of the largest cities in the state don’t require developers to hand over the results of soil tests where they build. Those tests can reveal problematic geographical conditions for building homes.

What does the problem look like?

In Buda, city officials paid nearly \$50,000 to investigate why water was coming from the ground for years, destroying home foundations in a large subdivision. Engineers hired by the city found a perched aquifer had developed below the homes there.

The neighborhood was originally developed by Ryland Homes, but in 2017 Lennar Corporation merged with CalAtlantic Group — enveloping Ryland Homes’ developments and liabilities in the process.

Soil evaluations on the land before homes were built show engineers warned the original developer homes built over the geologic formation found in the neighborhood often end up with “serious detrimental cracking.” They also warned groundwater might be found during the construction of the subdivision.

In a statement, Lennar Corporations’s Vice President of Communication Danielle Tocco said “Prior to development of the community, all soil and geotechnical reports were reviewed by the appropriate local government agencies as part of the public approval process.”

Fixing Foundations: What’s under your home?

Over the years, homeowners in the Whispering Hollow neighborhood installed sump pumps to pump out water from under their homes and prevent further foundation damage. More than a dozen homes have had their foundations repaired, city permits show.

Jimmy Fort, who has lived in Whispering Hollow since 2008, filed a lawsuit against the builder alleging deceptive practices and breach of contract after multiple attempts to repair the foundation did not stop water from collecting under his home — or the cracks from emerging on his walls.

“I was wronged along with other homeowners here and it’s like I told them at city hall — there are places to build homes and there are places not to build homes,” said Fort in an interview with KXAN in January 2022.

“Lennar stands behind every home we build and honor warranty requests when something is not right. We acquired Whispering Hollow from another builder and have attempted to resolve the concerns of the handful of homeowners who reported issues with the expansive soils that are common throughout the Austin area,” Tocco said.

Possible solutions

The City of Buda changed its ordinance in 2014 to require builders to submit the results of soil evaluations before being issued building permits, but many large cities in Texas don’t require it, including Austin, San Antonio, El Paso and Corpus Christi.

‘Somebody messed up.’ Water flowing under Buda homes for 11 years

In Austin, large developers aren’t required to submit soil evaluation results before building — and a KXAN investigation found nearly 50 permits were approved for foundation repair in a single neighborhood over 11 years.

At least three homeowners filed lawsuits against the developer, Lennar Corporation, alleging it was negligent in constructing its foundation and failed to honor warranties.

A spokesperson for Lennar Corporation said in a statement, “We have built thousands of homes in Austin, and we stand behind all of them, including those in Bradshaw Crossing. We will repair any home that does not meet the commitments we made to our buyers.”

City of Dallas officials’ don’t automatically require soil reports, according to officials. It is required if there is already data available indicating expansive, compressible, shifting or other questionable soil characteristics where a developer intends to build.

The building official with the city would determine whether soil tests would need to be done. The decision is made on “a case-by-case basis.”

This would not be the first time Texas lawmakers tried to tackle home building defects and the long-legal battles that can follow. After only six years in existence, the Sunset Advisory Commission in 2009 shuttered the Texas Residential Construction Commission, which was tasked with regulating homebuilding and resolving disputes between builders and homeowners.

‘Too much money at stake’ Who in Texas is looking out for homeowners?

Critics, including Texas homeowners, accused the commission of favoring builders and

delaying families in filing lawsuits against developers.

“What the answer is... I don’t know. I do think it’s time to see if we need some sort of state-mandated minimum standards that would give municipalities a reason to perform some of the things they are being pressured not to perform now,” Sen. Johnson said. “I think we could help them out and help cities help their residents.”

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

City Anticipating Three New Hotel Acquisitions For Homeless Housing

By Chad Swiatecki

Austin Monitor

The city expects to have about 175 new hotel rooms available by the end of June to provide permanent supportive housing to homeless people who are found to need long-term assistance to avoid winding up on the streets again.

During a presentation at Tuesday’s meeting of City Council’s Housing and Planning Committee, staff from the Housing and Planning Department gave an update on the purchase process for three hotels: Pecan Gardens, Bungalows at Century Park and Balcones Terrace. The three properties are moving through the process, with staff members securing vouchers to cover resident costs and working on rehabilitating the properties for permanent residents.

The hotels will be managed by Family Eldercare, Integral Care and Foundation Communities, with the units assigned to residents evaluated through the coordinated assessment program managed by ECHO, the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition. Units will be allocated based on need, with those who are found to have the most severe health or other issues receiving priority.

The new hotel shelters will be different from other recent hotel acquisitions the city has completed to address homelessness, with existing hotel/motel properties used as bridge housing for those who will likely be able to secure permanent housing with some assistance in two years or less.

During questioning from Council members, Dianna Grey, the city’s homeless strategy officer, said there is an ongoing search to purchase two additional hotels to use as bridge shelters, either of which could eventually be converted for use as permanent supportive housing.

“The distinction with bridge shelters is that we acknowledge there is a time-limited stop on the way to getting someone into permanent supportive housing,” she said. “One of the great things about the hotel strategy is that there is an opportunity in some cases to acquire a property and use it temporarily as that bridge shelter while we’re lining it up for permanent housing conversion.”

Council Member Kathie Tovo said she would like to see a financial analysis of the hotel strategy, with the city shouldering all of the costs, including paying service organizations for the assistance they provide to shelter residents. She said there may be value in looking at using multifamily apartment complexes for permanent housing and creating more congregate shelters for emergency housing situations rather than relying solely on acquiring hotels that could be costly to convert and may not be suited for permanent residents.

Grey and James May, acting housing and community development officer for the housing department, said apartment complexes can cost two or three times as much as hotel properties.

“It would be worth getting a sense of whether this is still the most cost-effective way to deliver bridge shelters,” Tovo said. “I don’t know if (hotels) are built in quite the same way and I know we’re doing renovations on them to help bring them into alignment with what we need for permanent supportive housing. But as we talk about costs and benefits, we need to evaluate if this is the most effective way to deliver the best level of services.”

Council Member Chito Vela expressed support for expanding the city’s portfolio of hotel properties, suggesting they could be redeveloped years down the road as the city’s homelessness issues are reduced.

“Ultimately it’s an asset the city holds indefinitely, and who knows what’s going to happen to those sites in the future. Maybe we can build affordable housing there once the need for helping unsheltered folks has dissipated.”

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Rep. Henry Cuellar ‘Not A Target’ After FBI Raided Home, Campaign Office, Lawyer Says

By Nataly Keomounghkoun
Dallas Morning News

U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar, a Laredo Democrat whose home and campaign office were searched by the FBI in January, is not a target in a federal investigation, a lawyer for the congressman said.

It’s unknown why the FBI searched Cuellar’s home and campaign headquarters earlier this year, but the San Antonio Express-News reported that Cuellar’s attorney Joshua Berman told Fox News this week that a prosecutor said that the congressman is “not a target” in the investigation.

ABC News has reported that the investigation is part of a wide-ranging probe in which a federal grand jury subpoenaed records on multiple U.S. businesses and organizations that have ties to the former Soviet state of Azerbaijan.

Cuellar, a 17-year incumbent who faces a runoff in May against challenger Jessica Cisneros, has said that he has done nothing illegal or unethical.

“I’m fully cooperating with law enforcement and committed to ensuring that justice and the law is upheld,” Cuellar said in a video posted to Twitter after the raid. “There is an ongoing investigation that will show that there was no wrongdoing on my part.”

Cuellar is one of the most conservative Democrats in Congress — he opposes abortion rights and supports free trade, gun rights, oil and gas, and tougher border security.

He has also co-chaired the Congressional Azerbaijan Caucus and has previously promoted a

pipeline that would deliver Azerbaijan gas to Europe.

Speculation about the FBI investigation has focused on Kemal Oksuz, a Houston-based Azerbaijani businessman, who has donated to Cuellar's campaigns. In 2018 Oksuz pleaded guilty to lying to Congress about a 2013 trip to Azerbaijan that he had organized for 10 members of Congress. Foreign money paid for the trip, which is illegal.

Cuellar and his wife took a separate trip to Azerbaijan and Turkey earlier in 2013 that cost nearly \$20,000. Oksuz has maintained that foreign money did not pay for that trip.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Education

Klein ISD teacher fired, charged after allegedly showing video of adult content in classroom

By Hannah Dellinger
Houston Chronicle

A Klein ISD high school teacher was fired Tuesday and criminally charged for allegedly displaying inappropriate adult material on a classroom projector, the district confirmed Wednesday.

Kevin Welchel, who taught at Klein Collins High School, was fired after being accused of watching adult content on a school laptop and inadvertently showing it on a classroom projector, district officials said Wednesday.

"The individual was immediately removed and is no longer employed by the district," said Justin Elbert, executive director of communications for the district, in a statement. "Law enforcement filed charges that have been accepted by the district attorney's office, and all appropriate legal action will be taken to the fullest extent of the law. The district does not tolerate such completely unacceptable conduct."

Welchel was charged with "display of harmful material to a minor," a Class A misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail and a fine of up to \$4,000, the district said.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Immigration/Border Security

Gov. Greg Abbott agrees to ease inspection requirement for trucks at one border crossing

By Madlin Mekelburg
Abilene Reporter News

Gov. Greg Abbott has agreed to ease state inspection requirements for commercial vehicles at one Texas-Mexico border crossing, partially backtracking on his directive after nearly a week of intense backlash and substantial delays at the border.

Abbott said Wednesday that state troopers will no longer inspect every commercial vehicle

entering the country through the Laredo-Colombia Solidarity International Bridge after coming to an agreement with Nuevo León Gov. Samuel Alejandro García Sepúlveda.

The two states share about nine miles of border and one port of entry, which processed about 40,000 commercial vehicles during the first two months of the year.

"I understand the concerns businesses have about trying to move products across the border," Abbott said. "But I also know well the frustration of my fellow Texans and my fellow Americans caused by the Biden administration not securing our border."

In exchange, García said Nuevo León would agree to enhance security enforcement measures at the border.

But this agreement still leaves every other Texas-Mexico bridge subject to the inspection mandate, offering little relief to businesses and consumers on both sides of the border. So far, the additional inspections have been limited to bridges in El Paso and Laredo.

Abbott said he wants to work with governors of the three other Mexican states bordering Texas — Tamaulipas, Coahuila and Chihuahua — to come to similar agreements, noting that those conversations are slated to start Thursday.

"Until, however, those agreements are reached with those states, the Texas Department of Public Safety will continue to thoroughly inspect vehicles entering the United States from every Mexican state except Nuevo León," he said.

A long line of trucks sits stalled at the Zaragoza International Bridge from Ciudad Juarez to El Paso on Tuesday.

Clogged bridges at Texas-Mexico border clogs traffic, might hamper economy
On April 6, Abbott imposed the extra inspection requirements for commercial vehicles, directing the DPS to inspect every incoming truck after it clears federal customs checkpoints and drives onto Texas soil.

The result has been hourslong delays at key bridges connecting both countries and massive disruptions to the manufacturing supply chain, which could soon be felt by U.S. factories, consumers and the Texas economy.

"Border bridges have become clogged because of a policy by Texas to thoroughly inspect vehicles coming from Mexico," Abbott said at Wednesday's event.

It is unclear whether the inspections are bolstering immigration or drug enforcement, however. When he first issued the order, Abbott said DPS troopers will be conducting the same inspections on commercial vehicles at the border that they conduct on other state roads.

During those reviews, troopers typically identify possible safety issues with a vehicle such as faulty brakes and defective tires. They also check whether drivers are in compliance with state and federal laws, including whether they have the appropriate license to operate their vehicle and whether they have violations of hours-of-service requirements limiting how many consecutive hours they can spend behind the wheel.

Abbott said the inspections conducted so far found that almost 25% of vehicles entering Texas from Mexico "were unsafe for Texas roads and were removed from service."

But John Esparza, president of the Texas Trucking Association, said the state inspections are duplicative of efforts already underway at the border. Rather than improving safety, he said they are resulting in significant congestion and worsening existing supply chain issues.

"The current situation on the border simply cannot be sustained," Esparza said in a statement. "As delays increase at the border, deliveries are postponed or canceled, perishable goods spoil, and grocery and retail store shelves begin to empty. Exports in Texas also await empty trucks on the Mexican side of the border and the lost revenue due to these delays will be felt by consumers as the price of goods increase across the country."

Tensions have continued to rise since the directive was implemented. On Tuesday, hundreds of truckers began blocking traffic across the Zaragoza International Bridge in protest of Abbott's policy and extremely long wait-times. Truckers typically wait two or three hours to cross the bridge into El Paso from Juárez, but this week the lines have lasted for 10-plus hours.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's truck inspection mandate called 'unnecessary inspections' The delays have resulted in a 60% drop in commercial traffic at the border, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protections. The agency said the delays are a direct result of "additional and unnecessary inspections being conducted" at Abbott's request.

Abbott said his order was a direct response to the Biden administration's decision to end Title 42, a Trump-era coronavirus policy that allowed the federal government to expel asylum-seekers before they were given the opportunity to make a case for staying in the country legally.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Wednesday that Abbott's inspections are causing "significant disruptions to the food and automobile supply chains" nationwide.

"The continuous flow of legitimate trade and travel and CBP's ability to do its job should not be obstructed," she said in a statement. "Gov. Abbott's actions are impacting people's jobs, and the livelihoods of hardworking American families."

Abbott also faced calls to end the effort from the governors of Tamaulipas and Coahuila.

Tamaulipas Gov. Francisco García Cabeza de Vaca and Coahuila Gov. Miguel Angel Riquelme Solís sent a letter to Abbott on Tuesday, urging him to reconsider the state inspection requirements that they say "are creating havoc and economic pain on both sides of the border."

"Unfortunately, political points have never been a good recipe to address common challenges or threats," the letter reads. "However, taking advantage of collaborative opportunities to address issues is the best way to solve problems. What we have today is a no-win situation for anyone."

The leaders expressed concern about high logistics costs and environmental damage associated with the delays at the border.

“Trade security between Mexico and the United States is national security for both countries and we realize that there are serious issues that must be addressed, and we think it is important we all come to the table,” they wrote. “We must find another way than blocking international commerce.”

Gov. Greg Abbott

Abbott said he was prepared to hear from government officials in Mexico, noting that "it is a very high price to pay with regard to what is going on on the border."

"Sometimes it just takes action like that to spur sitting down and working things out," he said.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

2nd Amendment Rights

Gun Violence Keeps Supercharging America's Second Amendment Debate

By Paul LeBlanc

CNN

Washington (CNN)"There was blood on the floor. There was a lot of blood trailing on the floor," one eyewitness said.

"We heard a lot of loud pops," another recalled.

"There was police coming in. There was emergency vehicles pouring in," an additional eyewitness recounted.

Tuesday morning's Brooklyn subway shooting, which left 10 commuters with gunshot wounds, is the latest entry in America's shameful tradition of gun violence.

"We're facing a problem that is hitting our entire nation right now and that is why this is a national response," New York City Mayor Eric Adams told CNN's Dana Bash. "We need a national response to this issue."

It's hard not to view this incident as yet another result of America's polarized gun debate. Many Americans hold their right to bear arms, enshrined in the US Constitution, as sacrosanct. But critics of the Second Amendment say that right threatens another: the right to life. Each shooting seems to entrench everyone's respective convictions.

A most American problem

While there's a roiling debate over how to handle gun violence in the US, there's no question about its prevalence.

A rash of shootings over the weekend underscored the nationwide issue: Four people, including two teens, were shot near Nationals Park shortly after a Major League Baseball game in Washington, DC, on Saturday night, police said. In Illinois, six people were found injured after a shooting in a residential neighborhood early Sunday morning.

Police are investigating a shooting at a weekend birthday party in Indianapolis where six people were shot and one was killed. And two people were killed and 10 injured after a "targeted attack" at a Cedar Rapids, Iowa, nightclub, police say.

The head of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention even deemed gun violence a "serious public health threat" last year.

"Something has to be done about this," CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said in an exclusive interview with CNN in August. "Now is the time -- it's pedal to the metal time."

Unlike the Covid-19 pandemic, which has spread through populations worldwide, or the opioid epidemic gripping countries near and far, gun violence is a uniquely American tragedy.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

National News

Elon Musk Offers To Buy Twitter, Take It Private

By Stephen Sora

Fox Business

Tesla CEO Elon Musk offered to buy Twitter in a deal worth more than \$43 billion and take the social media company private.

Musk's best and final offer was to pay \$54.20 per share for 100% of Twitter, and said that if his offer was not accepted he'd have to reconsider his position as a shareholder, according to an SEC filing.

Musk recently disclosed a 9.2% stake in Twitter, but he rejected an offer to join its board of directors and criticized the social media platform in tweets.

"I invested in Twitter as I believe in its potential to be the platform for free speech around the globe, and I believe free speech is a societal imperative for a functioning democracy," Musk wrote. "However, since making my investment I now realize the company will neither thrive nor serve this societal imperative in its current form."

Musk said the takeover attempt is "not a threat, it's simply not a good investment without the changes that need to be made."

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Second Texas bus drops off migrants near US Capitol in Washington, DC

By Tyler O'Neil

Fox

A second bus from Texas arrived near the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., just before 4:30 a.m. Thursday, transporting more than a dozen illegal immigrants as part of Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's new plan to counter federal immigration policies during an ongoing border crisis.

Abbott announced last week that he was directing the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) to transport migrants released from federal custody in Texas to the nation's capital and other locations outside his state.

Fourteen migrants stepped off the bus a block from Union Station on First Street. The migrants are from Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba and Colombia, one man said.

One individual, who identified himself as Juan from Colombia, told Fox News that he flew by plane to Mexico and crossed the Rio Grande into the U.S.

Juan and his friend said they are going to New York to join their friends. Juan said he wants to be a barber.

Capitol Police arrived at around 4:45 a.m. to ask questions. Members of a Catholic charity arrived, waiting for the migrants, who began to walk to Union Station at around 4:47 a.m.

Thursday's arrival follows that of the first bus, which arrived in the nation's capital Wednesday morning. That bus also carried immigrants from Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Colombia. Fox News learned that they had come from the Del Rio sector in Texas.

According to TDEM, Abbott's plan is already working. The agency told Fox News on Monday that many of the communities that originally reached out for support – from the Rio Grande Valley to Terrell County – say the federal government stopped dropping immigrants in their towns since Abbott's announcement on April 6.

TDEM said it dispatched buses over the weekend to border communities where it coordinated with officials to identify these immigrants. The agency added that each bus has the capacity and supplies necessary to carry up to 40 migrants released in Texas communities and transport them to Washington, D.C.

The governor's legal authority to transport busloads of migrants to the U.S. Capitol remains in question. The 2012 Supreme Court case *Arizona v. the United States* prevents states from making their own immigration policies.

Abbott insists that the federal government is failing to adequately address the situation.

"Texans demand and deserve an aggressive, comprehensive strategy to secure our border—not President Biden's lackluster leadership," Abbott said in a statement. "As the federal government continues to roll back commonsense policies that once kept our communities safe, our local law enforcement has stepped up to protect Texans from dangerous criminals, deadly drugs, and illegal contraband flooding into the Lone Star State."

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Opinion/Editorial

Editorial: Republicans must fix the mail-in voting mess they created

Austin American Stateman

Texas Democrats and civil rights advocates warned that sweeping voter restrictions approved by the Republican-controlled legislature last year would disenfranchise voters. Sadly, the predictions are coming true.

Nearly 25,000 mail-in ballots cast in the March 1 primary elections -- more than 12 percent of the total ballots mailed -- were rejected because voters of both parties struggled to comply with confusing new rules for voting by mail. Texas Republicans sold this and other

overzealous voting restrictions in the name of "election security," based on the falsehood that voter fraud is rampant. Let's be clear: The evidence proves it is not.

The new mail-in ballot restrictions are creating roadblocks for law-abiding voters who simply want to participate in our democracy. In Travis County, election officials were forced to toss more than 1,000 mail-in ballots in the March primary. In Houston-based Harris County, a heavily Democratic area the GOP targeted with restrictions in their 2021 law, Black areas were 44 percent more likely to have ballots rejected than white areas, according to a New York Times analysis. This tracks with accusations that the GOP's intent was to make it harder for people of color, many of whom support Democrats, to vote.

Westminster Manor residents Joyce and Dan Wilson faced recent problems with mail-in and in-person voting due to recent changes in state election laws.

The 12 percent statewide rejection rate is appallingly high -- at least 10 percentage points higher than comparable figures for the 2018 and 2020 midterm and presidential elections. Even some Republicans concede the new mail-in ballot rules are confusing and complicated.

State leaders should address this erosion of trust in the Texas electoral system immediately.

If Gov. Greg Abbott and the state legislature want to ensure that every vote counts in Texas, they should convene a special session and repeal the new mail-in ballot requirements before the November general election. If they won't, Abbott should authorize spending -- in addition to money already in the Secretary of State's budget -- to educate voters on how to comply with the mail-in ballot requirements. And the state should get creative with its messaging, using social media, text messages, and other tools to reach the most voters possible.

In the meantime, important runoff elections - including in the Texas attorney general and railroad commission races -- are looming next month. The registration deadline for early voting in the runoffs is Monday, April 25. Applications to vote by mail must be received (not just postmarked) by April 26.

The new election law requires mail-in voters to include their driver's license number or the last four digits of their Social Security number under the flap of the envelope that contains their ballot. That number must match the number on the voter's registration record. If an individual registers to vote using one form of ID and applies for a mail-in ballot using the other number, the application must be rejected.

All this confusion doesn't instill confidence in Texas elections, as Republicans promised. It erodes it. Abbott blamed hard-working local election officials for misinterpreting the new law and rejecting more ballots than necessary. But the blame for this fiasco lies squarely with him and Republicans in the legislature who passed voting restrictions that weren't necessary in the first place.

Abbott and the state legislature should fix their mail-in ballot crisis in Texas immediately, and restore confidence in this cherished hallmark of our democracy -- voting.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Editorial: Mad truckers, molded strawberries latest fruits of Abbott's border security crackdown

Houston Chronicle

Something smells at the border. And it's not molding strawberries or precious avocados ripening past the point for salvageable guacamole.

No, it's a governor who'll stop at nothing to boost his political profile — and future presidential prospects. At a press conference Wednesday in Laredo following a firestorm of criticism from businesses and elected officials on both sides of the border, Abbott defended his stunt to conduct excessive, duplicative vehicle inspections that have backed up commercial traffic for days, disrupting international trade, exacerbating supply chain issues and angering Mexican truckers to the point that they formed a blockade against south-bound traffic in protest.

Abbott appeared alongside Nuevo Leon Gov. Samuel Alejandro García Sepúlveda and the two announced an agreement in which law enforcement on the Mexican side would better patrol its 9 miles of shared border to thwart illegal crossers in exchange for Texas letting up on vehicle inspections and allowing traffic and commerce to resume. Before the cameras, the two governors depicted the memorandum of understanding they signed as an historic win-win.

There were two ways to read Abbott's performance: either he was donning his apron and working clean up on aisle three. Or he was indeed declaring a small victory in a shrewd plan to essentially hold border commerce hostage until Mexican officials acquiesce to deals he can construe as border security triumphs.

Probably a little of both.

-
[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

From: [OOG News Alerts](#)
Subject: Morning News Clips 5.9.22
Date: Monday, May 9, 2022 8:09:29 AM
Attachments: [Morning News Clips 5.9.22.pdf](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

Morning News Clips 5/9/2022

- [Texas Take](#)

- [Texas Tribune: The Brief](#)

- [Politico Playbook](#)

Greg Abbott News

Dallas Morning News— Gromer Jeffers Jr.: [Beto O’rourke Says Outreach To Nonvoters Key To Beating Incumbent Greg Abbott](#) [Web]

State News

Austin American Statesman – Nusaiba Mizan: [Fact-check: Does Texas Abortion Law Allow Rapists To Sue Their Victims For Getting An Abortion?](#) [Web]

Houston Chronicle— Maria Jimenez Moya, Scott Atkinson, Robert Chiarito and Lola Fadulu, New York Times: [Abortion Rally Draws Thousands In Houston](#) [Web]

Houston Chronicle— Shelly Hagan: [Voters Approve Decriminalization Of Marijuana, Ban ‘No-Knock’ Warrants In Texas Capital](#) [Web]

Houston Chronicle— [Farmers In Texas Can Apply For Drought Loans From The USDA](#) [Web]

Texas Tribune— Zach Despart And James Barragán: [Texas Republicans Say If Roe Falls, They’ll Focus On Adoptions And Preventing Women From Seeking Abortions Elsewhere](#) [Web]

Education

Dallas Morning News— Corbett Smith: [Texas Educators Say Immigrant Children Aren’t As Much Of A Worry As State Funding](#) [Web]

Energy

- *The Street* – Sabrina Toppa: [Crypto Mining Strains Energy Grid And Creates Fresh Demands For Housing In Texas](#) [Web]

Business/Economy

-

Fox Business News– Reuters: [Battered U.S. Stocks May Not Be Bargains As Investors Brace For Inflation Data](#) [[Web](#)]

-

National News

-

Fox Business News– Reuters: [Biden To Give Remarks On Inflation Tuesday, Contrast Plan With Republicans](#) [[Web](#)]

Fox Business News– Landon Mion: [US National Gas Average Jumps Again, Reaches \\$4.38 Per Gallon](#) [[Web](#)]

Fox News– Kelsey Koberg: [Lawmakers Sound The Alarm On Biden's Plan To Cancel Student Loan Debt: 'Crazy Idea'](#) [[Web](#)]

Opinion/Editorial

-

Dallas Morning News– Dallas Morning News Editorial: [Don't Hate The STAAR Exam](#) [[Web](#)]

San Antonio Report– Robert Rivard: [Broadband Equity And The High Cost To Texans Of Rejecting Federal Funds](#) [[Web](#)]

#

Greg Abbott News

Beto O’rourke Says Outreach To Nonvoters Key To Beating Incumbent Greg Abbott

By Gromer Jeffers Jr

Dallas Morning News

RICHARDSON — Democratic nominee for governor Beto O’Rourke on Sunday said a significant voter mobilization effort will be needed to defeat incumbent Greg Abbott, and that

in turn would secure abortion rights, encourage voting and protect transgender residents.

Speaking to a large Mother's Day crowd at Huffhines Park, O'Rourke said that more than 400,000 eligible Dallas County voters didn't participate in the 2020 elections. He surmises that those voters, which include the disaffected and downtrodden, would fit nicely with the existing coalition of Texans that want change.

Beating Abbott, he said, would turn back what he described as an assault on women's and voting rights.

"No longer do we worry about these attacks on women because every woman will make her own decision about her own body and her own future," O'Rourke said about winning in November. "And we will make sure that every woman working the same job as every man is paid the same ... we're going to make sure that no transgender child or their parent feels that they're going to be attacked by this governor, prosecuted for child abuse."

Last week a draft U.S. Supreme Court opinion, leaked to Politico, revealed that the high court is prepared to strike down Roe vs. Wade. That would end the national protection of abortion rights and toss the issue to the states.

Since then, O'Rourke has focused much of his campaign for governor on abortion rights, even as a Supreme Court opinion that strikes down Roe vs. Wade is set to trigger an outright ban of abortion in Texas. The Texas trigger law passed in 2021 would take effect 30 days after the court's ruling and make those who perform or help provide an abortion subject to a felony. The only exception in that law is if there is risk for the patient's life or "substantial impairment of major bodily function." Doctors who perform abortions not allowed under the law could face life in prison and up to \$100,000 in fines.

In his Richardson speech, O'Rourke said history is filled with heroes who fought for civil rights and abortion rights. And it was up to modern-day Texans to make their stands.

"We're up against some tough odds," O'Rourke said. "We're up against the majority of the Supreme Court."

He said Texans were also up against U.S. Senate Democrats who have failed to approve legislation to protect abortion rights. The House has approved the Women's Health Protection Act, which would codify Roe vs. Wade.

"I'm a proud Democrat, but we're up against our own party in the United State Senate. They cannot get their act together and do the right thing," O'Rourke said. "In this defining moment of truth it's on us. It's down to the people of Texas."

O'Rourke, a former El Paso congressman, has an uphill fight to defeat Abbott, the Republican seeking his third term as governor.

Republicans enjoy a structural advantage in the Texas electorate. More of them vote statewide than Democrats.

But O'Rourke hopes the potential Supreme Court opinion and Abbott's record as governor will spark a crusade. He said the fight for women's and civil rights has been waged against

grim circumstances.

“We’ve overcome this before under much tougher odds,” he said.

O’Rourke got one of his biggest cheers when he pledged to fight for the legalization of marijuana.

“We’re going to legalize marijuana and no longer are we going to put people behind bars for possession of a substance that’s legal almost everywhere else,” he said.

O’Rourke’s Sunday stop in North Texas included a visit to Mother’s Day service at Friendship-West Baptist Church in southern Dallas.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

State News

Fact-check: Does Texas Abortion Law Allow Rapists To Sue Their Victims For Getting An Abortion?

By Nusaiba Mizan

Austin American Statesman

Days before Politico reported that a leaked U.S. Supreme Court draft opinion indicates that a majority intends to overturn Roe v. Wade, U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., tweeted an alarming claim about victims of rape in Texas.

Ocasio-Cortez was addressing the claim from right-wing politicians that "the extreme left is taking over." To that, Ocasio-Cortez asked "WHERE" in all caps.

“In Texas, Republicans passed a law allowing rapists to sue their victims for getting an abortion," Ocasio-Cortez tweeted.

Texas has some of the strictest laws restricting access to abortion. As discussion and concern rises for Roe v. Wade — the landmark 1973 ruling that established a right to abortion — and what this means for Texas, let's look at Ocasio-Cortez's claim.

Texas law targets abortion providers

We reached out to Ocasio-Cortez's media office and campaign email addresses but did not hear back.

She seems to be referring to Senate Bill 8, which took effect in September. The law prohibits abortion after six weeks of pregnancy and leaves enforcement up to the public, allowing any person to sue abortion providers or people who aid or abet illegal abortions. There are no exceptions for pregnancies from rape or incest.

But the law specifically prohibits a rapist from suing: "Notwithstanding any other law, a civil action under this section may not be brought by a person who impregnated the abortion patient through an act of rape, sexual assault, incest, or any other act prohibited by Sections 22.011, 22.021, or 25.02. Penal Code."

This provision is the only limit placed on who can sue under the law.

In addition, Ocasio-Cortez claimed that a victim's rapist could sue them. However, SB 8 permits people to sue providers and those who aid and abet someone who gets a prohibited abortion, not the person seeking an abortion.

In other words, University of Houston law professor Seth Chandler said, the person seeking an abortion could not be sued under this law, but anyone helping them could.

"Now, it is true that the defendant in an SB 8 action may need to prove that the plaintiff wasn't a rapist," Chandler wrote in a follow-up email. "It's not entirely clear (since there are no cases) on whom the burden of proof lies. But to go from that to saying that Texas allows the rapist to sue strikes me as a canard."

Protesters march from the Capitol to the United States Federal Courthouse to rally for abortion rights on Tuesday May 3, 2022. Hundreds of protesters marched in the middle of Congress Avenue following the leak of a draft majority opinion for the Supreme Court case that would overturn Roe v. Wade.

Our ruling

Ocasio-Cortez tweeted on April 29, "In Texas, Republicans passed a law allowing rapists to sue their victims for getting an abortion."

The law specifically bars someone's rapist to sue because they sought a prohibited abortion. The law also allows actions against abortion providers, rather than the patient, for procedures past a pregnancy's six-week mark.

We rate this claim as False.

-
[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Abortion Rally Draws Thousands In Houston

By Maria Jimenez Moya, Scott Atkinson, Robert Chiarito and Lola Fadulu, New York Times
Houston Chronicle

HOUSTON — Several thousand people in Texas' largest city rallied for abortion rights Saturday, one of numerous demonstrations held across the country days after a draft opinion from the Supreme Court overturning Roe v. Wade was leaked. They were joined by a host of Democratic officials, including former Rep. Beto O'Rourke, who is running for governor.

The rally in Houston, at Discovery Green, a downtown park, might have been the largest gathering of the protests that were scheduled in more than a dozen cities and communities Saturday. They varied widely in scale and attendance. A morning event outside a Catholic church in the New York City borough of Manhattan drew dozens of people. A demonstration in downtown Detroit featured roughly 200. A rally in Chicago attracted more than 1,000.

Many more protests were planned Sunday in cities including San Jose, California, Kansas City, Missouri, Fort Wayne, Indiana, Oklahoma City and Orlando, Florida. Next weekend, thousands could gather in Washington for the Women's March.

exp-player-logo

In Houston on Saturday, some in attendance took advantage of the rally to turn it into a family outing. Marco Barbato, 35, an engineer, brought his 4-year-old daughter so she could see how democracy worked and witness people standing up for what they believed in, he said.

“It is a woman’s business to do what they wish with their bodies. She needs to know that, and she needs to be heard and speak up herself,” Barbato said, referring to his daughter.

Another protester, Sara Mielke, who wore a dress made entirely of hangers, said she was hurt and disappointed by the news that Roe could be struck down. “The government should not be getting between women and their doctors when it comes to reproductive health,” she said.

Speaking after the event, O’Rourke said he had been moved by hearing the personal stories of so many women. “People’s lives are on the line now, and I’m going to do everything in my power to fight for them,” he said after the event. During the rally, he was joined by speakers that included U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, Texas state Sen. Carol Alvarado and the mayor of Houston, Sylvester Turner.

In Detroit, demonstrators met in front of the Theodore Levin U.S. Courthouse downtown. After listening to speakers for about a half-hour, the group marched through downtown, chanting slogans that included “2-4-6-8, you can’t make us procreate.”

Heather Summers Webb of Oakland County, attending the rally with her 19-year-old daughter, said she has worked in a variety of nursing roles and has always thought that every woman should have a choice. She added that working as an abortion nurse broadened her understanding of the importance of abortion rights.

“I didn’t realize how profound some of the women’s reasons were,” she said. “I didn’t realize how many women show up to an abortion clinic because their resources are already depleted — taking care of themselves, children, aging family members, disabled family members, working multiple jobs — and then there’s just no way that they could have another mouth to feed.” She went on to cite several more obstacles she had seen women face such as a lack of access to prenatal care.

“There are so many reasons and, really, in the end, it’s just up to that woman and her body,” she said. “It really took that point home for me.”

Kess Ballentine, a professor of social work at Wayne State University in Detroit, also said her own experiences had underscored the importance of abortion rights for her.

“I’ve been pro women’s rights since I was a little girl, but I will say that having been through difficult pregnancies opened my eyes to like a new layer of the whole situation,” she said, adding that it was critical for women to have a choice that would help them navigate health issues during pregnancy.

In Chicago, on one of the warmest days in weeks, a large crowd gathered at Federal Plaza and heard speakers including Gov. J.B. Pritzker of Illinois, who told the crowd that “politicians do not belong in the doctor’s office, period.”

Greta Powell, an attorney from suburban Oak Park, attended the protest with her husband,

mother and two young daughters, ages 4 and 10 months. She said that even though she felt that Illinois would keep abortion legal, the thought of overturning Roe was extremely worrisome.

“Assuming that the court reverses Roe, my daughters will be growing up with less rights than I had, and that’s very troubling to me,” she said

Donna Lewis, who lives in Atlanta but was in Detroit to visit family for Mother’s Day, said she felt compelled to attend with her 30-year-old son to stand up for others. In 1990, she protested against abortion, but she said she had changed her mind. Lewis held a sign that read, “I don’t regret my abortion.”

“I had an abortion as a teenager, but after I had children, I realized how much it really is our right to do that,” she said.

Although the crowd was dominated by supporters of abortion rights, a group of about 20 anti-abortion counterprotesters stood across from the plaza and voiced its opposition.

“We believe in protecting the innocent, the voiceless children in the womb,” said Julio Arriola, a member of the Christ Forgiveness Ministries of Chicago. Addressing the fact that his side was greatly outnumbered Saturday, Arriola said, “We believe in standing up for righteousness, even if it’s less popular.”

Tensions were higher earlier that morning in lower Manhattan, when about a dozen members of the Basilica of St. Patrick’s Old Cathedral gathered outside the church and were met by about 75 abortion rights demonstrators.

On the first Saturday of the month, the church members usually walk in an organized procession to a Planned Parenthood clinic a couple of blocks away. But this week, out of safety concerns, some of the members instead decided to station themselves outside the church and behind a fence that separated the church from the street. There, they stood in the rain, singing hymns and praying over their rosaries.

On the other side of the fence, a number of the abortion rights supporters shouted and sang, “Thank God for Abortion.” Some also hung up a green, black and white sign that said, “Anti-Abortion Laws Kill Us.”

One of the protesters, Payal Patel, a resident of Harlem who provides family medicine services, abortions and abortion pills across the city, said that people in New York City were lucky because abortion would remain legal even if Roe were overturned. But she said it was important to teach future generations “that abortion is health care.”

The Rev. Brian A. Graebe, who has been the pastor of the church for the past three years, said he saw the leaked draft of the Supreme Court ruling as a sign of hope.

“We’ve certainly had more than our share of setbacks over the past 50 years on this issue, but it’s something that would be a wonderful step forward for our society,” he said.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Voters Approve Decriminalization Of Marijuana, Ban ‘No-knock’ Warrants In Texas Capital

By Shelly Hagan

Houston Chronicle

(Bloomberg) -- Austin residents voted to decriminalize low-level marijuana possession and ban police from using no-knock warrants, a win for a liberal group that pushed the ballot initiative in Texas’ capital.

The measure received 85% support, according to unofficial results posted by county election officials Saturday. The rules, which the city council must codify into law, prohibit police officers from issuing citations or arrests for possession of small amounts of marijuana except in very limited circumstances and will require that officers executing search warrants announce their presence before entering homes.

Neither of the changes represent a major departure from current policy. The Austin City Council passed a resolution in 2020 to end misdemeanor weed arrests and tickets, although it will now become law. Officials say the police execute just a handful of no-knock warrants every year.

The results represent a success for Ground Game Texas, an Austin-based group that has pushed for progressive policies in the state and organized the ballot measure. With no Democrat elected to statewide office in Texas since 1994, the organization has focused on generating voter enthusiasm on local issues.

It’s “an amazing first step to show that progressives in Texas have an opportunity to win elections and increase voter engagement by leaning into progressive issues,” said Mike Siegel, the group’s political director.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Farmers In Texas Can Apply For Drought Loans From The USDA

Houston Chronicle

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The U.S. Department of Agriculture says drought during the growing season has made farmers in most of Texas, all of Louisiana and parts of Arkansas and Mississippi eligible to apply for federal aid.

The department’s Farm Service Agency says low-interest emergency loans can be used to meet various recovery needs including the replacement of equipment or livestock. They can also be used to reorganize a farming operation or refinance certain debts.

The agency will consider the extent of losses, security available and repayment ability.

The agency says 60 Louisiana parishes are primary disaster areas because of drought, and the other four — Orleans, St. Tammany, Vernon and Washington — are adjacent to such parishes.

USDA declares drought disasters if a county is under extreme or exceptional drought, or has had at least eight straight weeks of severe drought.

In Texas, 216 of the state's 254 counties are primary drought disaster areas and 20 others border such counties, FSA state outreach coordinator Joshua Coleman said Friday.

Twenty-three Mississippi counties and 20 in Arkansas are primary disaster areas, with farmers and ranchers eligible to apply for loans in another 13 counties in Mississippi and 11 in Arkansas, according to news releases.

Application deadlines vary according to when a county was declared an agricultural disaster area. That and other details are available on the Farm Service Agency website, fsa.usda.gov.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Texas Republicans Say If Roe Falls, They'll Focus On Adoptions And Preventing Women From Seeking Abortions Elsewhere

By Zach Despart And James Barragán

Texas Tribune

During their 20 years in control of the Texas Legislature, Republican lawmakers have steadfastly worked to chip away at abortion access.

Bound by the limits of *Roe v. Wade*, which stopped them from enacting an outright ban on the procedure, lawmakers got creative. They required abortion clinics to have wide hallways and deputized private citizens to sue providers in an effort to shut down facilities that offer the procedure.

Future lawmaking on the topic will likely not require such ingenuity. A leaked draft of a U.S. Supreme Court opinion, published last week by Politico, suggests the court will reverse the landmark abortion ruling in the coming weeks, allowing states to regulate abortion as they see fit. Texas has a “trigger law” that would make performing an abortion a felony, which would go into effect 30 days after the Supreme Court overturns *Roe*.

Their decades long goal achieved, Republican lawmakers said there's still work to be done. Texas GOP leaders and members of the Legislature said it is now time to turn their attention to strengthening the social safety net for women and children and investing in foster care and adoption services.

“It only makes sense,” said Rep. Steve Toth, R-The Woodlands. “The dog's caught the car now.”

At least some of the more conservative members of the House said they also want to ensure strict enforcement of the abortion ban and to prevent pregnant Texans from seeking legal abortions in other states.

“I think I can speak for myself and other colleagues that align with my policy beliefs — we'll continue to do our best to make abortion not just outlawed, but unthinkable,” said Rep. Briscoe Cain, R-Deer Park, a member of the far-right Freedom Caucus.

Catch up on health and human services news with our weekly newsletter
Health and Human Services Weekly Roundup newsletter
Catch up on health and human services news with our weekly newsletter

Texas already has an arsenal of statutes to punish virtually anyone involved in the procurement of an abortion, said University of Texas at Austin law professor Liz Sepper. These include last year's Senate Bill 8, which empowers private citizens to sue anyone who "abets" an abortion after six weeks of gestational age, as well as unenforced pre-Roe abortion statutes criminalizing a person who gets the procedure, which the Legislature never repealed — some dating to the 1850s.

"If Roe is overturned, there's already a criminal ban, there's already an aiding and abetting ban, there's already a ban on mailing medication abortion," Sepper said. "In terms of law's ability to change behavior, they've almost filled all the gaps — with the exception of criminalizing the pregnant person involved in an abortion."

Cain said he has a particular interest in going after abortion funds, which seek contributions from donors to help defray the cost of out-of-state trips for pregnant Texans to receive the procedure, citing a state law that prohibits "furnishing the means for procuring an abortion."

In a March letter to one such group, the Lilith Fund, Cain threatened to file a bill in the coming legislative session that would empower district attorneys to prosecute abortion-related crimes across the state even when local authorities refuse to do so.

Attempts to prohibit individuals from contributing to abortion funds would likely violate the First Amendment's protections on free speech, said South Texas College of Law Professor Charles "Rocky" Rhodes.

"Helping people go get abortions is going to be one of these difficult questions that's going to arise in a post-Roe world if a legislature tries to criminalize the ability of a pregnant person to get an abortion someplace where it's legal," Rhodes said.

Cain said he is in discussions with fellow Republicans about other abortion-related legislative priorities but that it is premature to discuss them. The next legislative session is scheduled to begin in January.

Texas Democrats, who are vastly outnumbered at the Legislature, characterized the leaked opinion as "bleak" but said they would not stop fighting for access to abortion.

"This will only power our fight to codify the right to abortion at the federal level," Hannah Roe Beck, the Texas Democratic Party's co-executive director, said in a news release. "It's more important than ever that we elect leaders who are ready to put everything on the line to get this through Congress. We cannot tolerate anything less."

An effort in Congress to do this, however, failed to pass the Senate in February. Another vote scheduled for this week is also expected to fail.

Austin state Rep. Donna Howard spoke of expanding the safety net in terms of pregnant Texans who still will be seeking abortions.

“How do we provide enough health care to those who we are going to be forcing to have pregnancies and carry them to term?” Howard said. “It’s more going to be a focus, I think, on that now, if there’s a way to look at how people can access medication abortion that is a way to get around the law.”

Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, a staunchly conservative Republican, said in a statement Tuesday that the Legislature would continue to strengthen adoption programs in the state.

“Texas has led the way to protect innocent life in the womb, and we will continue to do so moving forward in the Texas Senate,” Patrick said.

Gov. Greg Abbott did not respond to questions from The Texas Tribune about abortion-related legislative priorities for the coming session in January. House Speaker Dade Phelan said in a statement that he was confident the Legislature would “rise to the occasion and redouble our commitment to maternal health care in our state.”

State Sen. Bryan Hughes, R-Mineola, the author of SB 8, did not respond. He posted on Twitter on Thursday that Texas would “lead the way in a post-Roe world.”

Republicans have good reason to avoid discussing enforcing Texas’ pre-Roe laws, said Renée Cross of the Hobby School of Public Affairs at the University of Houston: A full abortion ban is broadly unpopular with voters.

Just 15% of respondents in a University of Texas at Austin poll released this week said they support prohibiting all abortions. More troubling for Abbott’s reelection bid this year, Cross said, is the fact that a majority of independents said they believe abortion should be available in most circumstances.

“The Republican Party has been able to rely often on independent voters, but not on this issue,” Cross said. “We saw some Republican voters, particularly suburban women, not vote for President Trump in 2020. A lot of those women will probably think twice about voting for Gov. Abbott.”

Other Republican lawmakers spoke about pitching nonpunitive measures in the upcoming legislative session. Toth said if abortion is outlawed in the state, Republicans in the statehouse will focus on expanding social programs to help pregnant women and their children.

“Now more than ever, the pro-life community and legislators need to step up and make sure we help out women in a crisis pregnancy,” he said. “It means prenatal care, helping them stay in school. It means making sure that we help women once the baby is born, it means adoption services.”

Toth said the expansion of safety net programs would be a “moral response” to the outlawing of abortion in the state. Such an expansion would require an increase in state funding for adoption services, foster care and welfare programs, which Republicans have been hesitant to support in the past. But Toth, a member of the staunchly conservative House Freedom Caucus, said he believes GOP lawmakers would now support the increased funding.

Joe Pojman, executive director of the anti-abortion group Texas Alliance for Life, said he

would also support an increase in funding for the Alternative to Abortions program, which the Legislature funded with \$100 million this two-year budget cycle. The program pays a far-flung network of nonprofits — many of them ardently anti-abortion — for counseling, classes on prenatal nutrition and newborn care, and the provision of baby items.

But Pojman says lawmakers need to better promote the program so more pregnant people have access to it.

“For a lot of women who find themselves pregnant, they don’t even know that those exist,” he said.

State Rep. Giovanni Capriglione, R-Southlake, who is a member of the budget-writing House Appropriations Committee, said he would support an increase in funding for social safety net programs for pregnant women and young children.

He said he’d push for an increase in Medicaid coverage for low-income new mothers. That coverage was increased last year from 60 days to six months, but experts had recommended extending it by a whole year.

House lawmakers agreed to extend it by a year, but the Senate brought the coverage back down to six months during final negotiations in the 2021 legislative session.

“We have to now work really hard to help these new moms and these new babies,” Capriglione said. “I’m going to be pushing for it.”

But Republicans are also preparing for a protracted fight with Democrats in Congress who will be reenergized to push for access to abortion at the federal level.

“This is not going to go away,” Toth said. “Nothing really changes.”

Rhodes, the South Texas law professor, said the potential overturning of Roe could also weaken federal protections ensuring access to contraceptives. He said states could consider reclassifying emergency contraception such as Plan B, the pill that prevents pregnancy by the delaying the release of an egg from the ovary, as forms of abortion.

“It’s pretty wide open, with how creative our Legislature has been lately, for creating additional restrictions on our reproductive freedoms,” Rhodes said.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Education

Texas Educators Say Immigrant Children Aren’t As Much Of A Worry As State Funding

By Corbett Smilth

Dallas Morning News

Texas’ school leaders say the state’s focus should be on providing a strong education for all students — unauthorized immigrants included.

Chiseling away at state funding for immigrants would hamper the state's economy, undercut communities and do irreparable harm to those whom educators are bound to help, they said.

Gov. Greg Abbott said last week on a radio show that he wants to fight a decades-old U.S. Supreme Court case that overturned a Texas law denying enrollment and withholding state funding for students not "legally admitted" into the country.

When combined with lax federal immigration enforcement, the ruling on the case, *Plyler vs. Doe*, has created "extraordinary" expenses to Texas, he said.

But Dallas schools Superintendent Michael Hinojosa called the governor's concerns "manufactured crises in the name of politics."

"It's telling that it didn't come from the Commissioner of Education. It didn't come from the [Legislative Budget Board]," Hinojosa said. "It was just a comment that Gov. Abbott made on a radio station that he knew his base would be listening to. So it's, you know, hard-core urban politics."

During a House Public Education Committee meeting April 26, before Abbott's comments, three superintendents offered their views on how Texas' border crisis has affected their schools. None who spoke said they faced an undue strain because of unauthorized immigrant students.

In fact, despite reports of immigrants flooding over Texas' borders, two of the superintendents — McAllen's J.A. Gonzalez and Garland's Ricardo López — said their districts had lost enrollment over the past few years, likely because of the pandemic.

Gonzalez, López and Fabens Superintendent Veronica Vijil were more concerned with seeing other changes: universal prekindergarten, more funding for career training, increased teacher pay for better recruitment and retainment, and an increase in weighted funding for bilingual programs.

State Rep. Mary González, D-Clint, said that the committee's initial focus on the financial impact of migrant students needed to be reframed to account for the positive effect immigrants have on the Texas economy.

López agreed.

"When we look at schools, it's about how are kids going to develop into young, productive citizens that are in our workforce," he said.

The governor had said Thursday during a news conference, according to The New York Times, that the "real crux of the challenge would be to say, listen, we are dealing with billions more a year just in education expenses, so you the federal government, it's only because of you, and it's your responsibility to pay for that."

Abbott's comments come with a significant caveat attached: It's unclear how much Texas spends on education for unauthorized immigrants, because it's unclear how many students fall under that designation.

While admission in Texas public schools is mostly based on residency, Texas Education Agency's general counsel Von Byer told lawmakers in April, under federal case law, such residency "includes all persons regardless whether they are citizens or not."

Hinojosa said he didn't know how many unauthorized immigrants are attending his schools. Nearly half of Dallas ISD students, 70,000 children, are English-language learners, but that should not be conflated with legal status, he said.

According to 2016 estimates by the Pew Hispanic Center, while 9.5 million people are living with unauthorized immigrants in the United States, most of them are U.S.-born minor and adult children. Pew's numbers estimated 675,000 unauthorized immigrant children living in the United States at that time.

The state last examined the issue in 2006, when a report from the Texas comptroller estimated 135,000 unauthorized immigrant students in Texas, roughly 3% of the student K-12 population, at a financial cost of \$957 million. Estimated revenues from those immigrants far outstripped that expense, generating \$1.58 billion.

Regardless, in Texas classrooms, the impact of such a policy shift would be more personal.

"It would be pretty, pretty devastating," Dallas teacher Rosie Curts said on Friday.

Curts teaches at Adamson High School, part of a community in Oak Cliff with a sizable immigrant population.

"They're kids that were brought here for a better life, and I think there's a moral obligation in our society to educate them," Curts said.

Hinojosa — who was born in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, before moving with his family to Lubbock when he was 2 — said he was deeply saddened by Abbott's comments.

Latinos are "the future economic engine of the Metroplex and the state of Texas," he said. "I'm proud to be an immigrant. I'm proud that we came to the greatest country in the world so that we could get an education, and it's deeply personal."

The DMN Education Lab deepens the coverage and conversation about urgent education issues critical to the future of North Texas.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Energy

Crypto Mining Strains Energy Grid And Creates Fresh Demands For Housing In Texas
By Sabrina Toppa
The Street

FORT WORTH, TEXAS — The influx of crypto mining to rural Texas has engendered an

outsized demand for energy, housing, and other essential services that the Lone Star state is struggling to deliver, according to Bloomberg News.

Large swathes of Texas that are opening up mining centers are devoid of infrastructure to sustain the new out-of-state workforce, who require essential services like hotel lodging, gas stations and restaurants.

When China banned crypto miners last year, Texas – with its cheap electricity, low taxes, and strong pro-crypto policies — became the main state that absorbed the new industry. However, it has struggled to deliver those services, and its power grid continues to be tested by surging demand during extreme weather events like cold snaps and heat waves.

Despite this predicament, Texas is the number one state in the U.S. for crypto mining, accounting for almost a quarter of the total mining activity in the country, according to mining firm Luxor Technologies.

In September 2021, a Virtual Currency Bill went into effect in Texas that legalizes crypto in the state. "Texas should lead on this like we did with a gold depository," said Governor Greg Abbott at the time.

However, despite government support, the siting of crypto mines across rural Texas has presented its own challenges: "The housing situation out there is tricky," CEO Jamie McAvity of Cormint Data Systems, told Bloomberg.

"You can bring all these jobs to rural Texas, but then you have to be able to lodge these people," Collin McLelland, the CEO of Digital Wildcatters, told Bloomberg. "It's all the same issues of where do people live and having to invest in infrastructure."

Part of the appeal of Texas is the abundance of electricity, but the reliability of the state's electric grid is also a major cause for concern.

This month, the state's grid operator, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) said in a statement that Texas was under severe heat threat that might require a "larger than normal demand for power" — a move which is likely to impact crypto miners, many of whom have agreed to shut off mines during hours of peak demand. And there's even a financial incentive during peak hours: when they turn off the power, miners can sell the energy back to the state grid.

Others even believe the increased strain from crypto mining might compel the state to adopt more power generators. "Bitcoin mining is not going to solve all the grid's problems, but it is a part of the solution to be sure," Lee Bratcher, the president of Texas Blockchain Council, told CBS News.

However, although Texas lured in miners for its ability to provide cheap and abundant electricity quickly — as well as quickly connect mines to the power grid — there are also clear disincentives.

"This will put a massive amount of stress on the Texas energy grid," William Magnuson, an expert in cryptocurrency and the law at the Texas A&M Law School told CBS News. "We know the Texas energy grid has had its struggles in the last couple of years, so I do worry

about the effects of imposing massive new energy use on a grid that we know is has been relatively unstable."

"How are they going to weigh the costs and benefits of adding this new mining companies to the grid? That is where the rubber meets the road," he added.

According to data from the Texas Blockchain Council. crypto mining is expected to explode in the Lone Star state over the next two years, quadrupling in number and making Texas the largest producer in the world of Bitcoin.

However, producing just one Bitcoin in the state requires energy consumption equal to powering an average home in Texas for 62 days, CBS News reports.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Business/Economy

Battered U.S. Stocks May Not Be Bargains As Investors Brace For Inflation Data

By Reuters

Fox Business News

U.S. stocks' tumble this year is putting an increased focus on equity valuations as investors assess whether recently discounted shares are worth buying in the face of a hawkish Federal Reserve and widespread geopolitical uncertainty.

With the benchmark S&P 500 index down 13.5% year-to-date, valuations stand at their lowest levels in two years, putting the index's forward price-to-earnings ratio at 17.9 times from 21.7 at the end of 2021, according to the latest data from Refinitiv Datastream.

Although many investors tended to brush off elevated valuations during the market's dynamic surge from its post-COVID-19 lows, they have been quick to punish companies viewed as overvalued this year as the Fed rolls back easy money policies that had kept bond yields low and buoyed equities.

While recently discounted valuations may boost stocks' appeal to some bargain hunters, other investors believe equities may not be cheap enough, as the Fed signals it is ready to aggressively tighten monetary policy to fight inflation, bond yields surge and geopolitical risks such as the war in Ukraine continue roiling markets.

"Stocks are getting close to fair valuation ... but they're not quite there yet," said J. Bryant Evans, portfolio manager at Cozad Asset Management in Champaign, Illinois. "If you take into account bond yields, inflation, what is going on with GDP and the broader economy, they're not quite there yet."

Wild swings shook markets in the past week after the Fed delivered a widely expected 50 basis point rate increase and signaled similar moves for the meetings ahead as it tries to quell the highest annual inflation rates in 40 years. The index has declined for five straight weeks, its longest losing streak since mid-2011.

More volatility could be in store if next week's monthly consumer price index reading exceeds expectations, potentially bolstering the case for even more aggressive monetary policy tightening from the Fed.

"There has ... been a healthy reset in valuations and sentiment," Keith Lerner, co-chief investment officer at Truist Advisory Services, wrote in a recent note to clients.

"For stocks to move higher on a sustainable basis, investors will likely need to have greater confidence in the Fed's ability to tame inflation without unduly hurting the economy."

Though valuations have come down, S&P 500's forward P/E stands above its long-term average of 15.5 times earnings estimates.

Potentially burnishing stocks' appeal, S&P 500 companies are expected to increase earnings by about 9% this year, according to Refinitiv data as they wrap up a better-than-expected first-quarter reporting season.

One likely factor is whether Treasuries extend a sell-off that has lifted the benchmark 10-year note yield, which moves inversely to prices, to its highest since late 2018.

Higher yields in particular dull the allure of technology and other high-growth sectors as their cash flows are often more weighted in the future and diminished when discounted at higher rates.

The forward P/E for the S&P 500 technology sector has declined from 28.5 times to 21.4 so far this year, according to Refinitiv Datastream data as of Friday morning.

"In terms of growth valuations, they have been hit the hardest and likely the most oversold," said Art Hogan, chief market strategist at National Securities.

But the sector continues to trade at a nearly 20% premium to the overall S&P 500, above the 15% premium it has averaged over the broader index over the past five years.

If the 10-year yield hovers between 3% to 3.5%, after being a "fraction" of that level for a long period, "that is going to continue to be a weight on the P/E and therefore the discounting mechanism for the growth and technology space," said John Lynch, chief investment officer for Comerica Wealth Management, which favors value over growth shares.

"To a large extent, (the pressure from higher yields) has been baked in," Lynch said. "But I don't think it is going to go away. I think it is going to persist."

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

National News

Biden To Give Remarks On Inflation Tuesday, Contrast Plan With Republicans

By Reuters

Fox Business News

WILMINGTON, Del. - President Joe Biden will draw a contrast between his economic plans and those of Republicans in remarks on Tuesday focused on inflation, a White House official said.

Biden, a Democrat who is suffering from low approval poll numbers ahead of the November midterm elections, has sharpened his rhetoric against Republicans in recent weeks, dismissing, for example, former President Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" MAGA movement as extreme.

President Joe Biden will draw a contrast between his economic plans and those of Republicans in remarks on Tuesday focused on inflation, a White House official said.

On Tuesday Biden will lay out his plan to fight inflation and "contrast his approach with Congressional Republicans' ultra-MAGA plan to raise taxes on 75 million American families and threaten to sunset programs like Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid," the official said.

Last week Biden took aim at Republican U.S. Senator Rick Scott's economic plan, saying it would raise taxes on 75 million Americans, most of whom make less than \$100,000 a year. Scott, who said he planned to cut taxes, is leading Republican efforts to get Republicans elected to the Senate.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

US National Gas Average Jumps Again, Reaches \$4.38 Per Gallon

By Landon Mion

Fox Business News

The national average of regular-grade gasoline in the U.S. has reached \$4.38 per gallon, an increase of 15 cents from two weeks ago.

The Lundberg Survey's Trilby Lundberg, an industry expert, said Sunday the current cost of gas is only 5 cents below the highest average price in the nation's history. The \$4.43 mark was reached on March 11.

The current average price for gas is \$1.36 more than it was this time last year.

The highest average price for regular-grade gas in the country is in the San Francisco Bay Area, where it currently sits at \$5.85 per gallon. Meanwhile, the lowest average price is \$3.80 per gallon in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The average price of diesel in the U.S. has also increased substantially. It has soared 43 cents, to \$5.58 a gallon.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Lawmakers Sound The Alarm On Biden's Plan To Cancel Student Loan Debt: 'Crazy Idea'

By Kelsey Koberg

Both Republican and Democrat lawmakers sounded the alarm on President Biden's potential plan to cancel student loan debt, and suggested alternatives to support borrowers without costing taxpayers billions.

Biden said in a press conference late last month he is considering canceling "some" student loan debt.

"I am not considering \$50,000 debt reduction, but I am in the process of taking a hard look at whether or not there will be additional debt forgiveness," Biden said.

"I think it's a crazy idea, it's wasting too much money," Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, R., told Fox News Digital at the Milken Institute's 2022 Global Conference. "We've been working to try and make college more affordable, we've been trying to help people that are struggling, but to say we're just going to pump more money into an economy where we have out-of-control inflation... I don't think it's the right solution."

Biden, Harris reportedly at odds over cancellation of student loan debt
Video
Rep. Cheri Bustos, D-Ill., said lawmakers need to look at whether the country can afford to cancel student loan debt.

"I don't think it can just be a blanket, 'we're going to wipe out all of the student loans,'" she said. "I think there's all different kinds of levels of that we've got to really dig deep on."

Some members of the media don't think canceling student loan debt it is such a crazy idea.

MSNBC host Mehdi Hasan cheered Biden's plans, and encouraged him to "do it."

"Canceling federal student debt could be a game changer ahead of the midterms. Activists energized, base enthused, young people turning out again. And the best part: Joe Manchin wouldn't be able to do a single damn thing to stop Joe Biden from doing it," Hasan said.

Washington Post columnist Perry Bacon made "The political case for forgiving student loan debt."

"There are three big electoral reasons to forgive student loan debt," Bacon wrote. "To appeal to younger voters and those with debt, to please the Democratic base, and to give Biden's presidency momentum."

"Why can't we let good things happen to other people?" she questioned.

Author Christina Wyman called opposition to student loan forgiveness "selfish" and "extreme" in a NBC News column.

Lawmakers who spoke to Fox News Digital supported alternate plans to support borrowers in paying off their student loan debt.

"My vision is we ought to have a way to reward people who have been taking out a student loan by encouraging it to be paid off by an employer," Rep. French Hill, R-Ark., said.

"My vision is we ought to have a way to reward people who have been taking out a student loan by encouraging it to be paid off by an employer," Hill added. "We need to be positive about this because it's utterly unfair to ... the thousands of people who've worked their tails off to pay back their student loans just to have Uncle Sugar in the form of Joe Biden just forgive it."

Rep. Peter Meijer, R-Mich., suggested getting the federal government out of the student loan business altogether, and having a conversation "about where the buck actually stops."

"If this was a scam, if this was a fraudulent effort, which some of the forgiveness conversation suggests, then who were the perpetrators? It was universities." He said. "It was especially for-profit universities. It was especially those offering graduate degrees of dubious worth and value."

Bustos suggested considering some student loan forgiveness, but on a more limited scale. "I believe in taking a look at the professions where we are having a really hard time filling those – teachers, nurses, for that matter, even apprenticeships in jobs ... where we're building things," she said. "First of all, can we afford that as a nation? Number two, is it worth taking a look at that by profession? And then number three, is it worth taking a look at those who are in the higher earning jobs?"

During his presidential campaign, Biden supported erasing \$10,000 in student debt for most borrowers, but has raised questions about his legal authority to do so via executive order. During a press briefing last week, press secretary Jen Psaki said an income cap for student loan forgiveness was under consideration.

Biden has extended the freeze on student loan payments through Aug. 31, citing the COVID-19 pandemic.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Opinion/Editorial

-

Don't Hate The STAAR Exam

By Dallas Morning News Editorial

Dallas Morning News

This week, untold thousands of Texas public school students will wake up with a knot of stress and some lost sleep. It will be nothing compared to what their teachers and principals are feeling.

Across the state, it is time for the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness, better known to us all as the STAAR.

For many third, fifth and eighth graders, it's a week with a No. 2 pencil and an extra dose of worry.

It shouldn't be this way, but the STAAR has become one of the few areas of agreement in the contentious world of Texas education. Nobody's happy.

The focus, though, should not be on the test itself, at least not entirely. The focus, instead, should be on the way too many teachers and administrators give the test outsized control of what happens in the classroom.

Anyone who has watched kindergartners bent over multiple choice worksheets has a clear picture of the dystopian consequences of STAAR "prep."

Not that we are blaming teachers for trying to get their students ready for a test that actually carries no consequences for K-8 students and limited consequences for high schoolers. The test does, in fact, carry burdensome consequences for teachers, principals and schools that underperform.

Human nature is such that when administrators worry, teachers worry. And when teachers worry, students worry. There is likely no changing that.

For that reason, we support the Texas Education Agency's redesign of the STAAR to make test prep look more like what classroom instruction looks like. That means more writing exercises and more critical thinking work that can be applied directly to the annual assessment of learning.

We need to test our students. We need to understand how they are progressing through school and where we are failing and where we are succeeding. What we don't need is a testing situation that is so stressful for students it becomes a social burden and a political target.

So the right solution is to make the test look more like good classroom instruction so that teachers who are preparing kids to take the test are using the best instructional methods. Filling out bubbles from a worksheet downloaded from the internet is not the best instruction method, but we are kidding ourselves if we don't believe that happens all across Texas throughout the school year.

The redesigned STAAR will be more expensive to grade, and we would not be surprised if many students found it more challenging. That's a fine trade so long as the instruction that goes into preparing students for the STAAR is better instruction.

Teaching to the test has long been a criticism. But if the test was more aligned to better teaching, it could help everyone involved.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Broadband Equity And The High Cost To Texans Of Rejecting Federal Funds

By Robert Rivard

San Antonio Report

Gov. Greg Abbott and other top elected officials in Texas have plenty of evidence before them of the social, educational and economic consequences for hundreds of thousands of families around the state without broadband internet service at home.

Creating equal access to high-speed internet, experts agree, is as necessary now as electricity was when President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Rural Electrification Administration in 1935 to provide power to rural America, including the 97.7% of Texas farms and ranches without electrical service, according to the Texas State Historical Association.

The latest issue of Fiscal Notes, published online by the Texas comptroller of public accounts, states, “In its 2010 National Broadband Plan, the Federal Communications Commission stated that ‘like electricity a century ago, broadband is a foundation for economic growth, job creation, global competitiveness and a better way of life.’”

The article goes on to note, “In 2016, well before the pandemic, the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas found that the gap between those with broadband access and those without (often called the digital divide) ‘leads to further economic, social and political disparities for low-income and underserved populations.’ The COVID-19 pandemic likely has widened the economic gap between Texans who have broadband and those who don’t.”

Once Congress finally passes enabling legislation, Texas is expected to receive \$53 billion from the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) signed into law by President Joe Biden in November 2021, according to a White House fact sheet. Only \$100 million of those funds are earmarked for expansion of broadband service in Texas, enough to deliver service to an estimated 1 million Texas households without service now. The state already has \$500 million in American Recovery Plan Act funds intended to improve broadband service in rural communities.

Nearly 30% of all Texans, according to the Biden administration, will qualify for the infrastructure bill’s Affordability Connectivity Benefit, monthly stipends to partially offset the cost of internet service.

Abbott, however, has consistently expressed reservations about accepting federal funding that includes requirements for additional state funding, or funding that could prove to be short-lived. His predecessor, Gov. Rick Perry, believed the same, and as a result, Texas has forgone billions of dollars annually in badly needed Medicaid funding since passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010.

In a Dec. 13, 2021 letter, Abbott encouraged state leaders to scrutinize the infrastructure legislation.

“As you and your staff begin to review the IIJA, and as you review each federal funding agreement or contract associated with the programs you administer, please consider all of the requirements, particularly new ones, and carefully assess their implications,” Abbott wrote. “We must be conscientious of conditions attached to any of these funds by the federal statute itself or by the federal implementing agency.”

Readers belonging to both political parties reminded me of that letter after reading my Thursday column headlined “Texas leaders must close the digital divide.”

“That’s code for ‘don’t take the money’ without actually having to say it,” said one Democrat who spoke on condition of not being named.

A Republican reader noted that even if Texas does accept all of the IIJA funding, which he

agreed was unlikely, \$100 million won't even solve the connectivity problem in a single major city in the state.

SA Digital Connects, the San Antonio-Bexar County government collaborative, recently produced a 302-page Digital Equity Community Plan that estimates it will take \$600 million to close the city and county's digital divide and an additional \$90 million annually to maintain universal household access to high-speed internet, devices and, where needed, training.

The SA Digital Connects plan estimates that a total of \$500 million in federal funding could flow into the city and county through various programs, while a Texas 2036 report projects a total influx of \$4 billion for broadband expansion.

Yet the only thing more expensive than making broadband internet universal in the state is not doing so and watching the consequences unfold in the coming decades. More and more studies show a widening education attainment and lifetime earning gap between those with internet, smart devices and the know-how to use them, and those living on the wrong side of the digital divide.

A crisis creates opportunity, yet accepting or rejecting federal funds likely will be an issue in statewide and legislative races this year. As learned in the pandemic, there are serious consequences when partisan politics trump the public interest. Texas should take the money and invest it wisely.

-
[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

From: [OOG News Alerts](#)
Subject: Morning News Clips 5.25.22
Date: Wednesday, May 25, 2022 8:06:22 AM
Attachments: [Morning News Clips 5.25.22.pdf](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

Morning News Clips 5/25/2022

- [Texas Take](#)

- [Texas Tribune: The Brief](#)

- [Politico Playbook](#)

Greg Abbott News

The Daily Wire— Hank Berrien: [‘D.C. Is Going To Soon Find Out’: Greg Abbott Warns He Might Send 450 Buses Of Illegals To Washington](#) [Web]

My San Antonio— Steven Santana: [Abbott, Cruz, Trump To Appear At Houston NRA Conference Days After Texas School Shooting](#) [Web]

Dallas Morning News— Robert T. Garrett: [On Gun Safety After Uvalde, Look For Abbott, Texas Republicans Not To Budge](#) [Web]

Administration News

Associated Press— Zeke Miller And Chris Megerian: [Biden Says ‘We Have To Act’ After Texas School Shooting](#) [Web]

Fox News— Thomas Phippen: [Biden Demands Gun Control Following Uvalde, Texas, Elementary School Shooting](#) [Web]

Fox News— Thomas Phippen: [Harris Calls For Action After Texas Elementary School Shooting](#) [Web]

State News

Fox News— Andrew Mark Miller: [Federal Judge Rules Houston University's Harassment Policy Unconstitutional: 'Not Guidance, It Is The Law'](#) [Web]

Houston Chronicle– Ariana Garcia: ['Heartbroken And Troubled': State Leaders React To Uvalde, Texas Elementary School Shooting](#) [[Web](#)]

Texas Tribune– Zach Despart And James Barragán: [Texas GOP Primary Runoff Results Show Most Legislative Incumbents Prevailing, Bucking Past Trends](#) [[Web](#)]

Business/Economy

-

Texas Tribune– Chris Tomlinson: [Tomlinson: Elon Musk's Move To Texas Has Been An Epic Disaster, With No End In Sight](#) [[Web](#)]

-

Immigration/Border Security

-

Fox News– Yael Halon: [George Bush Assassination Plot 'Precisely' The Concern We Had With Biden's Open Border Policies: Rep. Katko](#) [[Web](#)]

-

2nd Amendment Rights

-

Insider– Erin Snodgrass: [Politicians Respond To Mass Shooting At Texas Elementary School: 'When In God's Name Are We Going To Stand Up To The Gun Lobby?'](#) [[Web](#)]

Opinion/Editorial

-

Dallas Morning News– Dallas Morning News Editorial: [After Uvalde Shooting, Will Americans Finally Say Enough?](#) [[Web](#)]

Houston Chronicle– The Editorial Board: [Editorial: Abbott Says 'Never Again' After Uvalde School Massacre. Don't Fall For It, Texans.](#) [[Web](#)]

Austin American Statesman– American-Statesman Editorial Board: [Editorial: Texas Land Office Should Not Jeopardize Disaster Funding](#) [[Web](#)]

-

Greg Abbott News

‘D.C. Is Going To Soon Find Out’: Greg Abbott Warns He Might Send 450 Buses Of Illegals To Washington

By Hank Berrien

The Daily Wire

Texas GOP Governor Greg Abbott, who has sent busloads of illegal immigrants to Washington D.C. in order to relieve the burden on local communities in his state, said he is willing to flood Washington D.C. with ten times the previous number of buses in order to awaken Washington D.C. to the stress border states are facing.

Abbott said that the Biden administration didn't seem to care about the thousands of illegal immigrants crossing the southern border over the river rather than through ports of entry, then turned to the buses he had already sent.

“We’re up to our 45th bus now; when you add a zero to that I think that Washington D.C. is going to soon find out they’re going to be dealing with the same consequences we’re dealing with,” he warned.

“One thing we know for a fact is that there are maybe as many as 100,000 migrants who are across the border waiting to cross into Texas,” Abbot noted. “The Biden administration seems to be letting in people whether they’re crossing through the port of entry or across the river.” Abbot pointed out that the drug cartels on the other side of the border wanted illegals to cross the river instead of the ports of entry because that would keep the border patrol preoccupied with them rather than the cartels and their transports.

Then Abbott pointed out that the problem of illegal immigration was not limited to Texas: Right now Texas has the largest number of people crossing the border. One thing we have found with the implementation of Operation Lonestar is it has shifted cartel activity to New Mexico to Arizona, to California. ... With every day that Texas has success, it may mean failure for some other state. That means failure for the United States of America.

“Results won’t be attained and achieved until we have a president who is willing to step up and enforce the rule of law,” he declared. “Remember this: It was only a year and a half ago that we had the lowest amount of illegal immigration in decades. And then it only took a year and a half of the current administration to lead to the highest illegal immigration ever.”

Asked if President Biden or his administration had reached out to him, Abbott replied,

“President Biden has never once even tried to contact me.”

“The czar for the border, Kamala Harris, has never once tried to contact me,” he added.

“My last contact with [Homeland Security] Secretary Mayorkas was something like in February a year ago,” Abbott said. “They have no interest in talking to Texas or talking to leaders who are actually on the border. Remember Joe Biden himself has never even been to the border.”

“We are dealing with a crisis that is man-made by President Biden, who doesn’t want to take the time to even come to the border or talk to the governor of a border state,” he concluded.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Abbott, Cruz, Trump To Appear At Houston NRA Conference Days After Texas School Shooting

By Steven Santana

Days after a deadly mass shooting at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and Sen. Ted Cruz are expected to appear at a National Rifle Association conference in Houston this Friday, May 27, along with former president Donald Trump. All three are on the schedule to appear along with Rep. Dan Crenshaw at the NRA Institute for Legislative Action (NRA-ILA) Leadership Forum at the George R. Brown Convention Center, according to an announcement.

Sen. John Cornyn was scheduled to attend the conference, but his office confirmed to MySA that he canceled his appearance.

Their expected appearance comes after 14 students and one teacher were killed by an 18-year-old suspected shooter Salvador Ramos at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde on Tuesday, May 24. It's not known if any of the Texas officials will speak on the shooting, but the announcement says they will appear during "a celebration of Second Amendment rights." Abbott said that he mourned "this horrific loss" in a statement made Tuesday afternoon about the Uvalde shooting. Cruz also tweeted Tuesday that he was praying for the families, among many other reactions from Texas officials.

Their appearances and the NRA-ILA's conference draws comparison to when the NRA held a conference in Denver days after the deadly mass shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999. The NRA held the conference despite recordings released years later showing NRA officials were shaken by the shooting while also discussing alternatives to the conference.

Thousands turned out to protest the NRA conference in Denver.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

On Gun Safety After Uvalde, Look For Abbott, Texas Republicans Not To Budge

By Robert T. Garrett

Dallas Morning News

AUSTIN — Will the latest school shooting change the minds of any Republican politicians in Texas about gun safety policies? It's hard not to be skeptical, judging from Gov. Greg Abbott's vague statements Tuesday about "doing everything necessary" to prevent a recurrence. He didn't even muster the emotion he flashed after some prior massacres in the Lone Star State.

In any large organization, the tone is set at the top. And as he hastily responded to the slaughter at Uvalde's Robb Elementary School, it was clear Abbott failed to take some passion pills before he went before the TV cameras.

If he couldn't get choked up over little kids, is he likely to budge from the state GOP's hard-line resistance to any changes in gun laws? In a word, no.

Abbott missed the uniqueness of the moment. Unlike the four previous major mass shootings on his gubernatorial watch (Sutherland Springs, Santa Fe, El Paso, Midland-Odessa – five, if you include the fatal ambush of five Dallas police officers almost six years ago), this one involved elementary students.

Yes, Abbott inserted the phrase "horrific tragedy" in his first sentence and, 50 seconds later, describing the perpetrator, whom he kept calling "the subject," Abbott paused to inject two adverbs – "horrifically, incomprehensibly."

But it was a curious performance in every way.

Speaking from Abilene, where, incidentally, he again reassured West Texans that the state is all over the Mesquite Heat Fire in Taylor County, and that pet and livestock shelters are still open, even if all humans evacuated last week are now safe, Abbott's just-the-facts-ma'am affect could not have encouraged state residents who may be eager to see mental-health "red flag" laws and better background checks for gun buyers.

You could be forgiven for thinking it was another Abbott briefing on severe weather approaching Texas. He looked down at his papers and droned on, for stretches of up to 45 seconds, before again looking at the cameras – but conveying zero emotion.

"The Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District Police Department is the investigating agency and we will provide them and the city of Uvalde substantial investigative and patrol assistance," he said. "We're in the process of obtaining detailed background information on the subject — his motive, the types of weapons used, the legal authority to possess them; and conduct a comprehensive, crime-scene investigation and reconstruction; and identify and interview all witnesses and provide victim services and other support as needed."

After past mass shootings in Texas, we've watched Abbott and Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, the two most influential leaders of state government and Texas' dominant political party, speak, respectively, of possibly passing red flag laws and expanding background checks on some private sales. But by the time the next Legislature convened, they'd cooled their jets.

With more than seven months until next year's session, it's hard not to expect more of the same.

In the meantime, as Abbott's news release on the wildfires late Tuesday advised, "Texans are encouraged to remain weather-aware and follow the guidance of their local officials to keep themselves and their loved ones safe."

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Administration News

Biden Says 'We Have To Act' After Texas School Shooting

By Zeke Miller And Chris Megerian

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Lamenting a uniquely American tragedy, an anguished and angry President Joe Biden delivered an urgent call for new restrictions on firearms after a gunman shot and killed at least 19 children at a Texas elementary school.

Biden spoke Tuesday night from the White House barely an hour after returning from a five-day trip to Asia that was bracketed by mass shootings in the U.S. He pleaded for action to address gun violence after years of failure — and bitterly blamed firearm manufacturers and their supporters for blocking legislation in Washington.

"When in God's name are we going to stand up to the gun lobby?" Biden said with emotion. "Why are we willing to live with this carnage? Why do we keep letting this happen?"

With first lady Jill Biden standing by his side in the Roosevelt Room, the president, who has suffered the loss of two of his own children — though not to gun violence — spoke in visceral terms about the grief of the loved ones of the victims and the pain that will endure for the students who survived.

"To lose a child is like having a piece of your soul ripped away," Biden said. "There's a hollowness in your chest. You feel like you're being sucked into it and never going to be able to get out."

At least 19 students were killed at Robb Elementary School in the heavily Latino town of Uvalde, Texas, according to local officials. The death toll also included two adults. The gunman died after being shot by responding officers, local police said.

It was just a week earlier that Biden, on the eve of his overseas trip, traveled to Buffalo to meet with victims' families after a racist, hate-filled shooter killed 10 Black people at a grocery store in Buffalo, New York.

The back-to-back tragedies served as sobering reminders of the frequency and brutality of an American epidemic of mass gun violence.

"These kinds of mass shootings rarely happen anywhere else in the world," Biden said, reflecting that other nations have people filled with hate or with mental health issues but no other industrialized nation experiences gun violence at the level of the U.S.

Youtube video thumbnail

"Why?" he asked.

It was much too early to tell if the latest violent outbreak could break the political logjam around tightening the nation's gun laws, after so many others — including the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut that killed 26, including 20 children — have failed.

"The idea that an 18-year-old kid can walk into a gun store and buy two assault weapons is just wrong," Biden said. He has previously called for a ban on assault-style weapons, as well as tougher federal background check requirements and "red flag" laws that are meant to keep guns out of the hands of those with mental health problems.

Late Tuesday, Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer set in motion possible action on two House-passed bills to expand federally required background checks for gun purchases, but no votes have been scheduled.

Biden was somber when he returned to the White House, having been briefed on the shooting on Air Force One. Shortly before landing in Washington, he spoke with Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and offered "any and all assistance" needed, the White House said. He directed that American flags be flown at half-staff through sunset Saturday in honor of the victims in Texas. His aides, some of whom had just returned from Asia with the president, gathered to watch Biden's speech on televisions in the West Wing.

"I'd hoped when I became president I would not have to do this, again," he said. "Another massacre."

In a stark reminder of the issue's divisiveness, Biden's call for gun measures was booed at a campaign event in Georgia hosted by Herschel Walker, who won the Republican nomination for U.S. Senate.

Speaking at an Asian Pacific American event that was intended to celebrate Biden's Asia trip, Vice President Kamala Harris said earlier that people normally declare in moments like this, "our hearts break — but our hearts keep getting broken ... and our broken hearts are nothing compared to the broken hearts of those families."

"We have to have the courage to take action ... to ensure something like this never happens again," she said.

Echoing Biden's call, former President Barack Obama, who has called the day of the Sandy Hook shooting the darkest of his administration, said, "It's long past time for action, any kind of action."

"Michelle and I grieve with the families in Uvalde, who are experiencing pain no one should have to bear," he said in a statement. "We're also angry for them. Nearly ten years after Sandy Hook—and ten days after Buffalo—our country is paralyzed, not by fear, but by a gun lobby and a political party that have shown no willingness to act in any way that might help prevent these tragedies."

Congress has been unable to pass substantial gun violence legislation ever since the bipartisan

effort to strengthen background checks on firearm purchases collapsed in the aftermath of the 2012 shooting.

Despite months of work, a bill that was backed by a majority of senators, fell to a filibuster — unable to overcome the 60-vote threshold needed to advance.

In impassioned remarks on the Senate floor Tuesday, Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., who represented Newton, Connecticut, in the House at the time of the Sandy Hook massacre, asked his colleagues why they even bother running for office if they're going to stand by and do nothing.

"I'm here on this floor to beg — to literally get down on my hands and knees — to beg my colleagues," he said.

Murphy said he was planning to reach out to Texas Republican Sen. John Cornyn after the two had teamed on an 2021 effort to toughen background check requirements that never became law. He said he would also reach out to Texas' other Republican Sen. Ted Cruz.

"I just don't understand why people here think we're powerless," Murphy said. "We aren't." Cornyn told reporters he was on his way to Texas and would talk with them later. Cruz issued a statement calling it "a dark day. We're all completely sickened and heartbroken."

Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., who sponsored gun legislation that failed to overcome a filibuster in the Senate after Sandy Hook, said, "We're just pushing on people who just won't budge on anything."

"It makes no sense at all why we can't do commonsense things and try to prevent some of this from happening," he said.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Biden Demands Gun Control Following Uvalde, Texas, Elementary School Shooting

By Thomas Phippen

Fox News

President Biden called for changes to gun laws Tuesday and expressed his heartbreak in his address to the nation following a mass shooting at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas. "To lose a child is like having a piece of your soul ripped away," said Biden, who learned of the shooting at Robb Elementary School while on Air Force One returning from his trip to Asia. "There's a hollowness in your chest, you feel like you're being sucked into it, never able to get out. Suffocating. It's never quite the same."

A shooter identified as Salvador Romas opened fire at Robb Elementary School Tuesday, killing at least 18 students and one teacher. The gunman also died. Two police officers were shot and wounded but were expected to survive, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said.

"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit," Biden said, quoting Psalm 34. Biden asked for prayers for the families and friends of the children but then turned to call for more restrictive gun laws.

"As a nation, we have to ask, when in God's name are we going to stand up to the gun lobby? When in God's name, will we do what we know in our gut what needs to be done?" Biden said.

"We have to act. Don't tell me we can't have an impact on this carnage," Biden added.

First lady Jill Biden looks on as President Joe Biden approaches the lectern to make a statement about the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, at the White House, May 24, 2022.

First lady Jill Biden looks on as President Joe Biden approaches the lectern to make a

statement about the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, at the White House, May 24, 2022.
(Reuters/Kevin Lamarque)

Biden called for "commonsense" gun laws, saying that "we know they work and have a positive impact." Biden claimed that after the assault weapons ban was passed in 1994, mass shootings went down. After the law expired in 2004, Biden said, "mass shootings tripled."

"What in God's name do you need an assault weapon for unless to kill someone?" Biden asked. "Deer aren't running through the forest with Kevlar vests on for God's sake."

Gun manufacturers have "spent two decades aggressively marketing assault weapons, which make them the most and largest profit," Biden said. "For God's sake, we have to have the courage to stand up to the industry," he added.

Biden said that other nations, which also have mental health illness, domestic violence and other concerns, do not see the same kinds of massacres. "These kind of mass shootings never happen with the kind of frequency they happen in America. Why?" he asked.

"Why are we willing to live with this carnage? Why do we keep letting this happen?"

"It's time to turn this page into action," Biden said.

Vice President Kamala Harris spoke earlier in the day. "Enough is enough," Harris said. "As a nation, we have to have the courage to take action and understand the nexus between what makes for reasonable and sensible public policy to ensure something like this never happens again," Harris said.

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., blamed Republicans for the shooting.

"There is no such thing as being 'pro-life' while supporting laws that let children be shot in their schools, elders in grocery stores, worshippers in their houses of faith, survivors by abusers, or anyone in a crowded place," she wrote on Twitter. "It is an idolatry of violence. And it must end."

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Harris Calls For Action After Texas Elementary School Shooting

By Thomas Phippen

Fox News

Vice President Kamala Harris called on leaders to take action following the deadly mass shooting at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, Tuesday.

"Every time a tragedy like this happens, our hearts break and our broken hearts are nothing compared to the broken hearts of those families," Harris said.

Harris, who was speaking at an Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies (APAICS), urged leaders to take action.

"Enough is enough. As a nation, we have to have the courage to take action and understand the nexus between what makes for reasonable and sensible public policy to ensure something like this never happens again," Harris said.

Harris referred to the recent mass shootings in Buffalo, New York, as well as Laguna Woods, California and Dallas, stating that there was a "new sense of urgency" to take a stand against evil in America. "Today, we are witnessing again and again the terrible consequences of hate and the consequences of violence," Harris said.

A shooter identified as Salvador Ramos opened fire at Robb Elementary School Tuesday, killing over a dozen children Tuesday, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said. Two police officers were shot and wounded but were expected to survive, Abbott said.

As the elementary school shooting unfolded, Uvalde Mayor Don McLaughlin told Fox News that the shooter had become barricaded inside the school, which is located 80 miles west of

San Antonio and serves students in the second, third and fourth grades.
President Biden on Tuesday ordered all American flags at the White House and public buildings be flown at half-staff to honor the victims of the Uvalde school shooting that took 15 lives, many of them children.

The order also applies to all military posts, naval stations and vessels until Saturday at sunset. Biden will address the shooting at 8:15 P.M. ET from the Roosevelt Room in the White House.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

State News

Federal Judge Rules Houston University's Harassment Policy Unconstitutional: 'Not Guidance, It Is The Law'

By Andrew Mark Miller

Fox News

A federal judge in Texas has blocked a university from re-implementing an anti-discrimination policy and sided with a conservative group who argued it was a violation of the free speech protections of the First Amendment.

The ruling by U.S. District Judge Lynn Hughes, a Reagan appointee, was a victory for the nonprofit group Speech First in its lawsuit against the University of Houston after it implemented a policy that stated students could face disciplinary action ranging from probation to suspension or expulsion for subjecting other students "to unlawful severe, pervasive, or persistent treatment" on the basis of their race, color, gender, age, religion or sexual orientation.

Speech First had argued that the university's definition of harassment was too broad and included "denigrating jokes" and "negative stereotyping" which they say is protected by the First Amendment.

Hughes agreed and said the school's policy did not comport with standards adopted by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1999's *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education* and that a preliminary injunction was necessary to provide students "defenses against arbitrary professors."

"The University cannot choose to abide by the First Amendment in the Constitution," Hughes wrote. "It is not guidance — it is the law."

The university earlier this month ahead of a court hearing changed its policy to more narrowly define harassment. But Hughes said there remained a risk the school could reinstate the original one.

He cited an earlier case Speech First brought against University of Texas at Austin, in which the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in 2020 held that the school's decision to change similar policies did not moot the group's lawsuit.

In a statement to Fox News Digital, the University of Houston says it adopted a new anti-discrimination policy on May 13 and now "delineates employees and students separately."

"In the ruling on Friday, the judge prohibited enforcing a previous version of the UH System anti-discrimination policy," Shawn Lindsey Associate Vice Chancellor and Associate Vice President of Media Relations said. "We look forward to future discussions of the new policy with the plaintiffs and the court in this ongoing case. The University remains committed to the

welfare of our community, including protecting the rights of its students and employees."

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

'Heartbroken And Troubled': State Leaders React To Uvalde, Texas Elementary School Shooting

By Ariana Garcia

Houston Chronicle

Texas leaders are offering their thoughts and prayers to victims following a mass shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas Tuesday that left 14 students and one teacher dead. Gov. Greg Abbott confirmed during a press conference in the aftermath of the deadly attack that the shooter was also among the dead.

The Republican leader also shared a statement saying he and his wife, Cecilia, are grieving for the victims of the "senseless crime."

"Texans across the state are grieving for the victims of this senseless crime and for the community of Uvalde," Abbott wrote. "Cecilia and I mourn this horrific loss and we urge all Texans to come together to show our unwavering support to all who are suffering. We thank the courageous first responders who worked to finally secure Robb Elementary School."

Abbott said he has directed the Texas Department of Public Safety and the Texas Rangers to work with local law enforcement to investigate the crime. The Texas Division of Emergency Management is also providing local officials resources to respond to the tragedy, Abbott said.

Other Texas lawmakers also said they are uplifting victims in prayer at this time, including Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX). Cruz tweeted: "Heidi & I are fervently lifting up in prayer the children and families in the horrific shooting in Uvalde. We are in close contact with local officials, but the precise details are still unfolding. Thank you to heroic law enforcement & first responders for acting so swiftly."

Locally, Houston leaders are also weighing in on the tragedy, several pointing fingers at a lack of gun control legislation. Mayor Sylvester is among those who issued a statement: "I am heartbroken and troubled to learn about today's tragic event at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas, that took the lives of 14 innocent children and one teacher and left dozens of children injured. My deepest condolences go to the families, teachers, and classmates enduring this unspeakable tragedy."

Turner pointed to the recent mass shooting in Buffalo where 10 people were killed and called on lawmakers to do more to prevent such tragedies. "Congress must act, and governors and state legislators must pass reasonable gun control legislation," Turner wrote. "The voters must demand it from their representatives. How many more children must lose their lives from senseless gun violence."

Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo tweeted, "In the coming hours, we will begin to see the faces of more children whose lives have been stolen by yet another senseless act of gun violence in Texas. How much longer will we be willing to put the interests of the gun lobby over the lives of innocent people?"

Texas state Rep. Gene Wu (D-Houston) noted the cycle that has grown all too familiar following similar tragedies. Wu tweeted: "It's happened again. We'll call for action. They'll say it's too soon. There's going to be workgroups. But nothing will change. Persistent gun violence IS the new normal."

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Texas GOP Primary Runoff Results Show Most Legislative Incumbents Prevailing, Bucking Past Trends

By Zach Despart And James Barragán

Texas Tribune

Three of the four Republican state representatives forced into primary runoffs prevailed on Tuesday, bucking a statewide trend over the last decade that favored challengers who advanced to the second round.

Gov. Greg Abbott had endorsed the winners in all four races, and the establishment-backed candidate also prevailed in the only Republican primary runoff for state senate.

Rep. Stephanie Klick, the only member of House leadership in a runoff, held on to win the GOP nomination for House District 91 in Tarrant County over challenger David Lowe. Lowe had the financial backing of far-right activists and had attempted to paint Abbott-backed Klick, a nine-year statehouse veteran, as insufficiently conservative. Klick's camp raised questions about Lowe's fitness after reports emerged that he had owned several sexually explicit URLs in the 1990s.

In House District 12, a largely rural district that stretches from Waco to College Station, Rep. Kyle Kacal defeated challenger Ben Bius. Kacal had the backing of Abbott and House Speaker Dade Phelan, while Bius earned the endorsement of U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz. A national group in favor of school choice, which Bius supports, produced an ad attacking Kacal as "the most liberal Republican in the Texas House."

Rep. Glenn Rogers prevailed over Mike Olcott in House District 60, another rural district that includes Hood, Stephenson and Palo Pinto counties. Again, Abbott had backed the incumbent while Cruz endorsed the challenger. Rogers, a first-term state representative who also faced stiff opposition two years ago from far-right opponents, is well on his way to reelection in the heavily Republican district.

In the past 10 years, just 8% of Republican incumbent legislators in runoffs prevailed. This year's good fortune did not extend to four-term Rep. Phil Stephenson of Wharton.

Stephenson lost to challenger Stan Kitzman in House District 85, which includes Fort Bend, Jackson and Wharton counties. Stephenson had struggled with fundraising and, after his camp sent mailers and text messages claiming he had the governor's backing, Abbott instead endorsed Kitzman.

Stephenson had an independent streak that had gotten him crossways with House GOP leadership — neither Abbott nor Phelan had endorsed him. In 2017, he had voted against a proposal to limit how much local governments can raise in revenue to slow property tax growth and in 2019, he'd called for the removal of then-House Speaker Dennis Bonnen, who'd asked a conservative activist to target Stephenson in the primary elections.

Ben Bumgarner trounced Jeff Younger, whose custody battle helped ignite a movement against transgender health care for kids, in the Republican runoff for House District 63. The seat is open because incumbent Tan Parker of Flower Mound is running for state senate.

State leaders were eager to see Younger defeated. Abbott and Phelan had cast their lot with Bumgarner, while Younger was backed by the Defend Texas Liberty PAC, whose candidates often criticized state officials for not pushing hard enough for conservative legislation.

Younger repeatedly blasted leadership for not doing enough to outlaw gender-affirming care for transgender children. He centered his campaign on the issue after a custody battle with his ex-wife over the social gender transition of one of their children.

The Defend Texas Liberty PAC did notch some victories in Republican runoffs Tuesday evening, including Nate Schatzline in House District 93, Mark Dorazio in House District 122 and Terri Leo Wilson in House District 23.

Austin police officer Justin Berry lost his Republican runoff with Ellen Troxclair for House District 19. Berry, whom Abbott endorsed, was one of 19 officers charged with using excessive force during the 2020 protests in the city after the killing of George Floyd in Minnesota. Troxclair, a former Austin council member, will face Democrat Pam Baggett in November for the newly drawn district in Central Texas.

In the Republican Senate District 24 runoff, former Sen. Pete Flores defeated activist Raul Reyes.

After former Sen. Carlos Uresti was convicted of fraud and money laundering and resigned his seat, Flores won a special election for the heavily Democratic Senate District 19 seat in 2018, becoming the first Hispanic Republican elected to the Texas Senate before losing to Sen. Roland Gutierrez in 2020 during a regular election cycle.

But during last year's redistricting period, the Republican-dominated Legislature significantly redrew Senate District 24, to include Flores' hometown of Pleasanton. Flores was immediately backed by Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, the senate's president, and the incumbent in the seat, Sen. Dawn Buckingham, who is running for land commissioner.

Reyes tried to paint himself as an independent conservative who would represent his district better than Flores, who he derided as Patrick's "lap dog."

Morgan LaMantia beat Sara Stapleton-Barrera in the Democratic primary for Senate District 27. LaMantia hopes to succeed Eddie Lucio, a conservative Democrat, who served eight terms representing the South Texas district before announcing his retirement last year. Lucio was known for bucking his party and siding with the Republican majority on issues like abortion, school choice and border security. In 2017, he voted in favor of the so-called "bathroom bill" which would have dictated what restrooms transgender Texans could use.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Business/Economy

Tomlinson: Elon Musk's Move To Texas Has Been An Epic Disaster, With No End In Sight

By Chris Tomlinson
Texas Tribune

Elon Musk has to wonder if he squatted on his spurs by moving to Texas from California. Tesla's stock price has plummeted 40 percent, he's launched an ill-considered attempt to buy Twitter, and Gov. Greg Abbott is deleting supportive tweets, trying to avoid getting caught up in allegations Musk engaged in indecent in-flight behavior.

The whole "Gone To Texas" thing isn't working out for the world's wealthiest man. For those who didn't learn Texas History, our state had a reputation in the early 1800s for welcoming people fleeing law enforcement, debt collectors, illicit lovers, and all manner of scams. Frederick Law Olmsted wrote in his 1857-book "Journey Through Texas" that authorities would write GTT next to the names of known scoundrels on the lam and on the doors of their abandoned homes.

Musk did not exactly flee California, but it was close. He initially defied public health orders to shutter the Fremont Tesla factory to slow COVID-19. He then sued the county for not lifting the order in May 2020 and announced plans to relocate Tesla's headquarters.

On Oct. 7, 2021, Musk announced the Tesla factory in Austin was the new home office. The

company's stock peaked at \$1,243.49 in November. This weeks, TSLA has traded in the mid-\$600s, and some analysts think it will go lower.

Tesla's descending stock price makes Musk's purchase of Twitter more difficult if he even thinks it's still a good idea. I wonder if Rocket Man's thinking is clouded by his weekly chats with Abbott, smoking weed with Austin-based podcaster Joe Rogan, or hanging out on the Boca Chica launchpad with Kanye West.

Musk began purchasing Twitter stock in January. But he rapidly changed his mind about accepting a board seat and decided to buy the joint.

Then he priced it as if it were a joint. His offer of \$54.20 referenced 4:20, which according to legend, is an optimal time for a toke. Suppose the stock was actually worth \$50 a share, which would be high, adding \$4.20 to make a joke cost \$4.1 billion.

Twitter's share price this week hovers around \$37. He offered \$44 billion for a company that Wall Street values at \$27.8 billion.

Investors doubt he'll seal the deal. Musk recently said the transaction was "on hold" until Twitter can explain how many accounts are automated bots rather than people.

Musk said if 25 percent of the accounts are bots, he'll expect a 25 percent discount. A quarter off \$54.20 would be \$40.65 a share, a more reasonable price. But who wants to bet he won't suggest \$42 a share?

The real reason for the fuss is Musk's net worth has dropped by about \$124.20 billion since November. Most of his money is tied up in Tesla stock, so he borrows against it to buy things like Twitter. The lower value, the less money he can borrow.

Since moving to Texas, Musk has also found himself more entangled in politics. Abbott told CNBC that he talks to Musk weekly and that he approves of the state's conservative policies, including an abortion ban. Tesla, meanwhile, has promised to fly women to other states if they need an abortion.

"In the past I voted Democrat, because they were (mostly) the kindness party," Musk tweeted on May 18. "But they have become the party of division & hate, so I can no longer support them and will vote Republican. Now, watch their dirty tricks campaign against me unfold."

Musk did not mention that a Business Insider reporter had recently contacted SpaceX about a \$250,000 legal settlement to silence a flight attendant who accused Musk of exposing himself and propositioning her. Republicans have a better history of overlooking such things than Democrats.

After Business Insider posted the story on May 19, Musk wrote: "The attacks against me should be viewed through a political lens - this is their standard (despicable) playbook - but nothing will deter me from fighting for a good future and your right to free speech."

Abbott's campaign Twitter predictably voiced support for Musk: ".@elonmusk picked the right state to move to." But then someone deleted the tweet seven minutes later, the Dallas Morning News reported. Campaign officials did not respond to a request for comment.

Musk claims to support free speech, but he's not releasing his employees from their non-disclosure agreements. He also tried to buy off a man who tracks Musk's private jets on Twitter. Rocket Man is not a fan of free speech about him.

People can debate whether Musk has changed since moving to Texas or if only his luck has changed. But the new Texan's wealth and reputation have definitely taken a turn.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Immigration/Border Security

George Bush Assassination Plot 'Precisely' The Concern We Had With Biden's Open Border Policies: Rep. Katko

By Yael Halon

Fox News

The alleged plot to assassinate former President George W. Bush is "precisely" what critics of President Biden's open border policies have been warning about, one Republican lawmaker told Fox News on Tuesday.

"This is precisely the concern we had with the open border policies of the Biden administration. For the first year or so, we were fighting with them tooth and nail to try and get information about the number of terrorists that were coming across the border on the terror watch list that had been seized," Rep. John Katko, R-N.Y., who serves as ranking member of the House Committee on Homeland Security, said on "The Story."

"They wouldn't give it to us. They finally gave it to us, and now we know there's a plot to assassinate a former president, and it was going to be carried out by smuggling people across the southern border."

The Justice Department announced in a press release Tuesday that a man affiliated with ISIS is under arrest for his participation in the alleged plot. The statement added that the suspect, identified as 52-year-old Shihab Ahmed Shihab, a resident of Columbus, Ohio, originally came to the United States in September 2020 on a visitor visa and in March 2021 filed for asylum, which is pending review.

Katko said he hopes the "deeply troubling" announcement will force the White House to finally confront the national security implications of Biden's immigration policies, before imploring the president to "take a reality check here and realize that the border policies are making the country much less safe."

"For them to say that the open border is not a national security issue is laughable," he said.

"And... with what's going on in Afghanistan emboldening the ISIS elements and the terrorist elements, worldwide, you have a real recipe for disaster that was narrowly averted here. But it doesn't bode well for the future of this country unless they secure this border once and for all," Katko told anchor Martha MacCallum.

Shihab, according to the Department of Justice, exchanged money with other individuals in an attempt to illegally smuggle foreign nationals into the United States and specifically planned to help four Iraqi nationals enter the country across the southern border to help kill Bush. Katko blamed the United States' botched withdrawal from Afghanistan for creating instability in the region, which "gave once again a breeding ground for terrorist activities and encouragement for terrorism around the world."

"They're attempting to work into this narrative, the exploitation of the southern border," he said. "For months and months, the administration is trying to tell us it was only Mexicans and people from the northern triangle coming across. It's just not true."

Katko added, "I shudder to think about what has gotten through and what we don't know."

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

2nd Amendment Rights

-

Politicians Respond To Mass Shooting At Texas Elementary School: 'When In God's Name Are We Going To Stand Up To The Gun Lobby?'

By Erin Snodgrass

Insider

A gunman killed at least 19 people, including 18 children, in a Tuesday mass shooting at a Texas elementary school, before he was killed by responding officers.

The tragedy is the deadliest elementary school shooting since the 2012 Sandy Hook shooting that left 26 people dead.

In the hours since gunfire erupted in the small community of Uvalde, several politicians have addressed the incident, offering a mixture of thoughts, prayers, and fierce calls for gun control. President Joe Biden

The President addressed the nation on Tuesday evening, calling for action and reflecting on his own first-hand knowledge of losing a child.

"To lose a child is like having a piece of your soul ripped away. There's a hollowness in your chest, you feel like you're being sucked into it," Biden said. "And it's never quite the same." Biden has lost two children. His baby daughter Naomi and first wife died in a car crash in 1972, and his son Beau died of brain cancer in 2015.

"When in god's name are we going to stand up to the gun lobby?" Biden asked viewers, recalling that ten years ago as Vice President, he lamented the loss of young life after the deadly shooting at Sandy Hook elementary school in 2012.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott

The Republican governor was the first official to confirm the stark death toll and provide details about the suspected gunman in a Tuesday press conference.

"He shot and killed — horrifically, incomprehensibly — 14 students and killed a teacher," Abbott said.

In a separate Twitter statement, Abbott said he and his wife are grieving for the victims and the community of Uvalde and urged all Texans to "come together."

Vice President Kamala Harris

The Vice President addressed the shooting while speaking at an event in DC on Tuesday, saying "our hearts keep getting broken."

Former President Barack Obama

The former President decried the shooting and said he and Michelle Obama grieve with the impacted families and are "also angry for them."

"It's long past time for action, any kind of action. And it's another tragedy—a quieter but no less tragic one—for families to wait another day," Obama wrote.

Texas Senator Ted Cruz

The Republican tweeted a response to the shooting on Tuesday afternoon, thanking law enforcement and first responders for acting swiftly.

"Heidi and I are fervently lifting up in prayer the children and families in the horrific shooting in Uvalde," he wrote.

In separate remarks to CNN reporter Ali Zaslav, Cruz on Tuesday said "you see Democrats and a lot of folks in the media whose immediate solution is to try and restrict the Constitutional rights of law-abiding citizens. That doesn't work. It's not effective. That doesn't prevent crime."

"We know what does prevent crime, which is going after felons and fugitives and those with serious mental illness," Cruz added.

Texas Senator John Cornyn

The state's other Republican senator called the shooting "every parent and teacher's worst nightmare."

"No parent, child, or teacher should ever have to wonder whether it's safe to go to school," he wrote. "This is an excruciatingly painful time for the tight-knit Uvalde community and for all Texans."

The lawmaker told Politico that he is heading back to his home state after the shooting.

"My heart goes out to those in the hospital receiving care and to the loved ones of those

Texas Rep. Joaquin Castro

Castro, a Democrat who represents a district that includes half of San Antonio, which is approximately 85 miles east of Uvalde, commented on the close-knit community of the small town.

"My heart goes out to the community and the families in Uvalde devastated by gun violence today," he tweeted. "This is a parent's worst nightmare. We need gun reform now."

Texas Rep. Tony Gonzalez

The Republican lawmaker represents the district that includes Uvalde. Gonzalez on Tuesday said his heart was breaking for the community.

Texas Gov. Candidate Beto O'Rourke

Connecticut Senator Chris Murphy

The Democratic Senator, who represents the Sandy Hook community and has long been an advocate for gun control, delivered an impassioned speech on the Senate floor immediately following the Tuesday shooting.

For five minutes, Murphy emphatically addressed his colleagues, calling for gun control.

"This isn't inevitable. These kids weren't unlucky. This only happens in this country and nowhere else," Murphy said. "Nowhere else do little kids go to school thinking that they might be shot that day."

California Rep. Nancy Pelosi

The Democratic speaker of the House told CNN that "words are inadequate to describe the agony and outrage at the cold-blooded massacre of little schoolchildren and a teacher at Robb Elementary School today."

"This monstrous shooting stole the futures of precious children."

New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

Ocasio-Cortez called for action in a Tuesday tweet.

"There is no such thing as being 'pro-life' while supporting laws that let children be shot in their schools, elders in grocery stores, worshippers in their houses of faith, survivors by abusers, or anyone in a crowded place," she wrote. "It is an idolatry of violence. And it must end."

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy

The Garden State's Democratic governor called for an end to the nation's "gun violence epidemic" in a Tuesday tweet.

"Heartbroken by today's elementary school shooting in Uvalde, Texas," Murphy wrote. "No child or educator should ever fear going to school, and no parent should ever fear sending their child to school."

Washington Rep. Pramila Jayapal

The Democratic lawmaker said her heart breaks for the families impacted by the shooting and said "enough is enough."

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Opinion/Editorial

- After Uvalde Shooting, Will Americans Finally Say Enough?

By Dallas Morning News Editorial

Dallas Morning News

The feeling is too familiar now. It hits like a shock and then twists into emotions of horror, anger, sadness and fear until it settles in the mind as a sickening numbness that we don't know what to do with.

The place this time is Texas. Uvalde. The deaths at this writing include at least 18 children and three adults.

Schoolchildren. Teachers. Executed on their own campus. Murdered in the place where they should be safe, where they should be growing and becoming.

As a nation, we lack the capacity — morally, intellectually, politically — to seriously grapple with the evil sickness that has set in, manifested in the incomprehensible nihilism of a murderer who would destroy the lives of the most innocent among us. But the rage spreads through all of us as we spin in the powerless frustration that nothing is done, that nothing will be done and that we will simply await the next slaughter.

Politically and legally, this country refuses to accept or act upon the obvious connection between the easy availability of powerful weapons designed to kill humans and the way they get into the hands of young men, even boys, with histories of disturbing behavior.

Our political conscience as a nation is so stunted now that we cannot even enforce laws that are on the books to stop these shootings. We cannot seriously discuss, much less legislate, common-sense laws that could get broad agreement that might stop the next shooter. We cannot even agree that we should use the resources of the federal government to study gun violence.

We believe in the right to bear arms. But every human right is balanced with human responsibility. No right is unlimited. Every leading Republican in this state has made more permissive gun access a political cause while doing precious little or actively undermining efforts to enforce existing regulation.

We do not know, at this writing, the details of how the Uvalde murderer got his hands on the weapon or weapons he used. We do not know his motive. We do not know much beyond the fact that he was 18, he wanted to kill children and he had the means to do it.

It is time to re-enact the restrictions in the Federal Assault Weapons Ban that were so foolishly permitted to expire. It is time to limit high-capacity magazines. It is time to ensure that background checks and red flag laws have the most serious and uniform enforcement. And it is time to open broad debate about other measures.

Saying this law or that law would not have prevented what happened in Uvalde is not enough. We must demand from our elected officials that they study, propose and enact legislation that has an effect. If you are in elected office, this is your job. It is urgent — a moral imperative. There will be calls for addressing mental illness. Those are valid. But if one thing is clear from mass shooting after mass shooting, it is that killers generally acted with careful planning and clear intent. They understood the depravity and evil of their actions. They did these things because they knew they were terrible and because they had the ready means to do them. After so much blood of so many children has been spent, after so many mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers have been left with lives of agony and mourning and loss, after all of this horror and pain, are we still unable to act?

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Editorial: Abbott Says 'Never Again' After Uvalde School Massacre. Don't Fall For It, Texans.

By The Editorial Board

Houston Chronicle

“Horrifically, incomprehensibly.”

That’s how Gov. Greg Abbott described the actions of a gunman who slaughtered at least 18 children and their teacher Tuesday at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde.

The first word is apt — especially for the moms and dads who dropped off their little ones at school Tuesday morning, maybe lingering a little bit in the car line, just to crane their necks back and watch as that precious little body, that floppy ponytail or that lanky little stringbean frame, laden with backpack and lunch box, made it safely through the schoolhouse door, where, it seemed, they would be safe.

Horrific was the moment they got the news. Horrific will be their nights of endless tears. Horrific will be the bright, sunny mornings when they remember it wasn’t a dream. The bed is empty, no little lump beneath the blankets, waiting to be awoken.

But the second word Abbott used — “incomprehensibly” — is just as much cowardice as it is a bald-faced lie.

Of course it’s impossible to fathom why someone would shoot up an elementary school, or any school, but it’s hardly incomprehensible that it happened. It keeps happening, in Texas and across the nation. No one, especially not the governor of a state with some of the most inept, irresponsible and dangerous gun laws in the nation, should be confused, somehow unable to comprehend, the reasons for this never-ending tragedy of mass shootings in our country.

Yes, there are people evil enough, or sick enough, to kill. Yes, they can try to perpetrate a massacre in search of revenge or some grotesque fantasy of fame.

But there is one weapon, readily available in Texas, that will ensure efficiency and exponentially increase the chances of tragic success: the gun.

Whether it’s a handgun, rifle or semi-automatic invented for war, the governor has supported and the Legislature has passed law after law that have obliterated any semblance of good sense regulation — laws so permissive that they’ve even defied the objections of police chiefs and gun safety instructors, including the 2021 permitless carry bill that the governor bragged on Twitter allows any eligible Texan to carry a gun in public with “no license or training” needed. As though that were progress.

Texas lawmakers won't even pass universal background checks to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people even though about 80 percent of Texans support them.

Texas had 1 million registered weapons in 2021, more than second-place Florida and third-place Virginia combined. The United States leads all wealthy nations with its gun murder rate, and all nations in the rate of suicide by gun. And since September 2018, Texas has far more than its fair share of victims of mass shootings. Of the 2,000 such deaths recorded, 195 happened in Texas, far more than any other state.

Earlier Tuesday, before an 18-year-old gunman began killing innocent children, Abbott was busy with his usual politicking and Biden-beating on Twitter, talking about how Texas is a "law & order state" and how Texas is "doing the federal government's job & securing the border."

What kind of law-and-order state does so little to prevent the massacre of 18 babies in their own school? And who is going to do your job, governor, to secure our classrooms from mass shootings when you continually refuse to do so?

After Tuesday's shooting, Abbott pledged state resources to help Uvalde heal and to "do everything that is necessary to make sure that crime scenes like this are not going to be repeated in the future."

We've heard that before.

"It's time in Texas," Abbott said in 2018 after the school shooting in Santa Fe, "that we take action to step up and make sure this tragedy is never repeated ever again."

Instead, when lawmakers needed his help passing gun reform bills, including a red flag law and another closing a loophole in background check requirements that were recommended in a task force Abbott convened himself, he backed away from everything, either letting bills die or flat out vetoing them.

"When you get 10 pro-Second Amendment bills to the governor, and he signs them all," an NRA lobbyist crowed at the time to the Dallas Morning News, "I would rank it up there with one of the most successful sessions we've had since I've been doing this."

And when mass shootings happened again in 2019 — first in El Paso and then in Odessa and Midland — Abbott still failed to act.

NRA-backed gun laws have failed to keep Texans, including our most precious and most vulnerable constituency — our children — safe. But they've thrilled the constituencies that truly matter in Republican primary politics: Second Amendment extremists and the gun lobby. As we speak, the National Rifle Association is excitedly gearing up for its annual meeting in Houston this Friday, May 27-29, at the George R. Brown Convention Center. A website touts a showcase of "over 14 acres of the latest guns and gear," and a "freedom-filled weekend for the entire family." It notes: children get in free!

Founded to represent the interests of hunters and marksmen, and known for decades for expertise in gun safety, the NRA has morphed in recent decades into a morally, and fiscally, bankrupt lobbying apparatus in service to mostly gun manufacturers, opposing everything from background checks to research on gun crime.

Among the list of dignitaries expected to speak in Houston to the NRA are Abbott, former President Donald Trump, Sens. Ted Cruz and U.S. Rep. Dan Crenshaw.

But also on hand this weekend, in a fierce, strong, protesting posture, should be every single Texan, including sensible gun owners, who want to stop the madness, stop the killing, and stop the NRA's stranglehold over Texas' elected leaders.

There is room for loving the Second Amendment and for reasonable gun control. The late Antonin Scalia knew that. President George W. Bush knew that. Heck, even Trump knew that, when he ever-so-briefly challenged his party's thralldom to the NRA and when he ordered the DOJ to ban sale of bump stocks. Gun control by itself may well not be enough to address the kind of madness these shootings represent. But it is an essential part of any reasonable response.

We call on Abbott, whose campaign war chest is comfortably overflowing in his reelection bid against Democrat Beto O'Rourke, to replenish his bankrupt conscience and do something, anything, to stop the blood of children and the tears of parents.

We call on O'Rourke as well to demonstrate the kind of leadership, passion and gun reform policy ideas that we've lost faith Abbott can provide.

And we call on ordinary Texans, some of whom will be watching the news and hugging their own babies tight, to take action.
Don't just sit there and say, "My God, I have no words."
Oh yes you do.
Go vote. Go fight. Those are all the words you need.

-
[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Editorial: Texas Land Office Should Not Jeopardize Disaster Funding

By American-Statesman Editorial Board

Austin American Statesman

In the wake of Hurricane Harvey, the Texas General Land Office directed more than \$1 billion in federal disaster preparedness money to whiter, wealthier areas of the state instead of sending it to lower-income Black and Hispanic neighborhoods typically harmed most by hurricanes.

That prompted the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development last week to declare the Land Office violated the Civil Rights Act. HUD is threatening to withhold additional federal monies for disaster aid if the Land Office doesn't fix the problem. Texas can't afford that risk. For that reason alone we urge the Land Office to work with HUD to make this right and ensure that crucial federal disaster assistance continues to flow to Texas. The aid should go to people and communities with the most need and, according to HUD, the Land Office didn't do that in this case.

HUD's criticism stems from the way the Land Office allocated federal disaster preparedness money in southeast Texas after Hurricane Harvey devastated the region in 2017. The storm killed 103 people and caused \$125 billion in damage. It dumped the most rainfall in U.S. history, causing catastrophic flooding, especially in Houston. Inexplicably, the Land Office awarded none of the grant money to Houston.

Southeast Texas counties benefitting the most under the Land Office's plan to distribute HUD money were further inland, whiter and more conservative than counties receiving the least aid, a Texas Tribune analysis found. HUD, in a letter to Land Commissioner George P. Bush, has given the Land Office until Thursday to respond with a plan for a remedy, or at least indicate a willingness to negotiate a settlement.

But in a statement to our editorial board this week, the Land Office denied wrongdoing and said HUD approved its initial plan for doling out the money in March, but now accuses it of discrimination.

"GLO did not engage in discrimination, and HUD's false allegations about a process HUD approved is nothing more than a fake political attack," Land Office spokeswoman Brittany Eck wrote in an email, adding that all of the money would be spent on projects in "majority low- and moderate-income" communities under its plan.

The matter could end up in court, with either HUD asking the U.S. Attorney General's office to sue Texas, or Texas suing the federal government. Texas, which leads the U.S. for variety and frequency of natural disasters. Studies show natural disasters across the country are increasing with climate change, and low-income communities often bear the brunt of the destruction. Protracted litigation to avoid protecting the most vulnerable Texans will only cost taxpayers more and prevent disaster dollars from reaching communities that need them most.

A man checks his vehicle at the intersection of Pearland and South Sam Houston Parkways, Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2020, in Houston, following flooding from Tropical Storm Beta.

Good government policy should dictate that federal disaster aid goes to the people and communities with the greatest need. We urge the General Land Office to work with HUD to negotiate a settlement agreement that ensures our most vulnerable Texans are protected. As we saw in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, disaster preparedness, including capable drainage systems and modern emergency communications equipment, can mean the difference between life and death. Texas needs its Land Office to work with the federal government to make sure people most at risk get the most protection.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

From: [OOG News Alerts](#)
Subject: Morning News Clips 6.1.22
Date: Wednesday, June 1, 2022 8:29:30 AM

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

Morning News Clips 6/1/2022

- [Texas Take](#)
- [Texas Tribune: The Brief](#)
- [Politico Playbook](#)

Greg Abbott News

KXAN – Daniel Marin: [Gov. Abbott Mum On Calls For Special Session In Wake Of Uvalde \[Web\]](#)

The Hill – Monique Beals: [Abbott Issues Disaster Declaration In Uvalde \[Web\]](#)

KSAT – Mary Claire Patton: [Greg Abbott Defends Century-Old Law That Allowed 18-Year-Olds To Buy Muskets In Wake Of Uvalde Shooting \[Web\]](#)

Dallas Morning News – [Texas Gov. Greg Abbott Has Received \\$8 Million From Accident Lawsuit \[Web\]](#)

State News

KENS – [Texas Business Donates Custom-Designed Caskets For Victims Of Uvalde Shooting \[Web\]](#)

Texas Tribune – Alexa Ura: [Uvalde Buries 10-Year-Old Amerie Jo Garza, The First Of Many Funerals To Come \[Web\]](#)

Houston Chronicle – St. John Barned-Smith: [Why Was The Head Of A Six-Person Force For Uvalde Cisd In Charge Of The Mass Shooting Response? \[Web\]](#)

Dallas Morning News – Catherine Marfin: [Man Arrested After Fatal Shooting Of Security Guard In South Dallas \[Web\]](#)

Education

Dallas Morning News – Teri Webster: [Richardson ISD Internship Leads To Jobs For Students With Disabilities \[Web\]](#)

The Texan – Isaiah Mitchell: [American Federation of Teachers Endorsees Lose In State Board of Education Primary Runoffs \[Web\]](#)

Energy

-

Houston Chronicle – Kyra Buckley: [Permian Basin Oil Production Predicted To Outpace Most Oil-Producing Nations This Year \[Web\]](#)

Business/Economy

-

KVUE – [Georgetown, Texas, Is The Fastest-Growing City In The US \[Web\]](#)

-

2nd Amendment Rights

-

Texas Tribune – Patrick Svitek: [After Uvalde School Shooting, Beto O’Rourke Renews Calls To Ban Assault Weapons \[Web\]](#)

Texas Tribune – Brian Lopez: [Gun Ownership Is Ingrained In Uvalde’s Culture. Some Here Are Rethinking How It Should Be Regulated. \[Web\]](#)

Criminal Justice

-

Washington Examiner – Cami Mondeaux: [School Police Chief Faulted In Shooting Response Sworn In As Uvalde City Councilman \[Web\]](#)

National News

-

Austin American Statesman – Chuck Lindell: [US Supreme Court Blocks Texas From Enforcing New Social Media Law \[Web\]](#)

Opinion/Editorial

-

Houston Chronicle – [Editorial: Enough Thoughts And Prayers. Abbott Must Call A Special Session To Address Gun Violence. \[Web\]](#)

-

#

Greg Abbott News

Gov. Abbott Mum On Calls For Special Session In Wake Of Uvalde

By Daniel Marin

KXAN

Days after Democratic state lawmakers and at least one Republican called on Gov. Greg Abbott to call an emergency special legislative session in the wake of the Uvalde school shooting tragedy, it remained unclear Tuesday whether he plans to do so.

A spokesperson for Abbott's office directed KXAN to the governor's comments last Friday in which he said "all options are on the table" when asked about a special session.

The Texas Legislature is set to meet next January; however, the governor can call a 30-day special session to address emergency items.

Texas state senator interrupts Gov. Abbott's press conference calling for special session
The Texas Senate Democratic Caucus sent Abbott a letter on Saturday, asking for the immediate passage of laws that would raise the minimum age to purchase any firearm to 21, require universal background checks, implement "red flag" laws, and regulate ownership of high capacity magazines.

During his remarks Friday, Abbott said legislation would be passed following the Uvalde massacre but did not offer details. He said other laws would be reviewed.

"For example, I do fully expect to have every law that we passed in the aftermath of the Santa Fe shooting to be completely revisited," the governor said.

After the Santa Fe High School shooting in, the Governor in 2019 signed a series of bills including SB 11 which beefed up requirements for school emergency operation plans and required districts to develop behavioral threat assessment teams to spot problems ahead of time.

The changes were the result of roundtable discussions that included both gun rights groups and gun reform advocates.

Nicole Golden, executive director of Texas Gun Sense which advocates for gun violence prevention, said during the roundtable talks, the governor initially expressed interest in some firearm reforms including red flag laws, but nothing really came it.

Golden said this time feels different, adding she has "faith in the method of chipping away at a problem" like gun violence.

“Even the biggest problems require a ‘chipping away’ strategy,” she told KXAN. “You have to invest in playing the long game.”

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Abbott Issues Disaster Declaration In Uvalde

By Monique Beals

The Hill

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) on Tuesday issued a disaster declaration in the town of Uvalde in an effort to expedite the response to last week’s elementary school shooting that left 19 children and two adults dead.

The declaration “will accelerate all available state and local resources to assist the Uvalde community, as well as suspend regulations that would prevent, hinder, or delay necessary action in coping with the aftermath of the tragic shooting,” according to the governor’s office.

More specifically, it will continue to allow the Texas Division of Emergency Management to use all its resources to respond to the shooting, including providing a temporary facility to serve as a “family resource center” for those “seeking mental health services and other resources.”

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission is also working alongside local mental health providers to support people in Uvalde.

“The community of Uvalde has been left devastated by last week’s senseless act of violence at Robb Elementary School and should not have to encounter any difficulty in receiving the support needed to heal,” Abbott said in a statement on Tuesday.

Since the shooting, Abbott has been criticized by some, including former Rep. Beto O’Rourke, his Democratic opponent in November’s gubernatorial election, for his hard-line stance on guns.

On Sunday, Abbott visited a memorial site at Robb Elementary School and was greeted by a booing crowd.

“We need change! We need change, governor!” one onlooker shouted.

O’Rourke confronted Abbott at a press conference last week, saying, “You are doing nothing.”

“You said this was not predictable, this was totally predictable, and you choose not to do anything,” he added.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Greg Abbott Defends Century-Old Law That Allowed 18-Year-Olds To Buy Muskets In Wake Of Uvalde Shooting

By Mary Claire Patton

KSAT

“Ever since Texas has been a state, an 18-year-old has been able to buy a long gun. It’s only in the last decade or two when we had school shootings... So for a century and a half, 18-year-olds could buy rifles and we didn’t have school shootings, but we do now. Maybe we’re focusing our attention on the wrong thing.”

Those are the words of Texas Gov. Greg Abbott just days after an 18-year-old high school student massacred 19 students and two teachers at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde.

Abbott has been in the hot seat for his record on gun laws following the shooting.

He has doubled down on his stance that mass shootings are not an issue of access to guns but instead mental health — even though Abbott slashed \$211 million from the state’s mental health commission a month before the shooting.

But this particular quote has stood out to some observers as a gaping omission or misleading, particularly in the context that an 18-year-old gunman legally purchased two assault rifles that he used in the Uvalde shooting.

That’s because the timing of an uptick in mass shootings also coincides with the expiration of the Recreational Firearms Use Protection Act, sometimes referred to as the assault weapons ban, according to a data investigation from Financial Times.

Data shows that the number of victims per mass shooting tripled after the ban expired.

The so-called assault weapons ban, which expired in 2004, prohibited certain semi-automatic weapons — like AR-style rifles — from being manufactured or sold to civilians and also banned magazines that could hold more than 10 rounds.

There were several loopholes, including allowing the sale of semi-automatic rifles that were manufactured before the ban went into effect in 1994, but researchers have found that deaths associated with mass shootings were reduced, and grew rapidly once it expired.

Abbott made no mention of the assault weapons ban during his comments.

History of assault rifles

Texas became a state in 1845 — when weapons like the Henry 1860 Rifle and rifle-muskets were being manufactured.

It wasn’t until the 1960s that the U.S. military selected Colt to manufacture automatic rifles, which became standard issue for U.S. troops in the Vietnam War. Those weapons became known as the M-16.

“Armed with that success, Colt ramped up production of a semiautomatic version of the M-16 that it sold to law enforcement and the public, marketed as the AR-15,” according to NPR.

Colt’s patent for the AR-15 expired in the 1970s and other manufacturers started to make similar weapons. They were popularized in the decades that followed.

AR-15 style rifles like the one used in the Uvalde massacre have been involved in 11 major

mass shootings since 2012, according to Yahoo. Two of those mass shootings were in Texas — Sutherland Springs in 2017 and Midland/Odessa in Aug. 2019.

Assault rifles have been referred to as the “weapon of choice” for mass shooters in reports from CBS and Rolling Stone.

They fire ammunition at up to three times the speed of sound, which is capable of liquefying bones.

They are easy to get, simple to shoot and can hold a large number of rounds in each magazine. Ammunition for the assault weapons, which were designed for the battlefield, is also relatively cheap.

A blog post from the National Rifle Association, which has been taken down, states that an estimated 8 million AR-15 style rifles are in circulation in the U.S. The pro-gun organization has said the weapon is so popular that “AR” could be short for “America’s Rifle.”

In Texas, 18-year-olds can purchase rifles but not handguns (21 is the minimum age for pistol purchases).

Abbott, Texas has loosened gun restrictions for years
Abbott, and Texas leaders, have a steep history of loosening gun laws as opposed to imposing restrictions. Most recently, House Bill 1927, which was passed last year, allows Texans 21 and over to carry handguns — openly or concealed — without obtaining a state-issued license, so long they are not excluded from possessing a firearm by another federal or state law.

Abbott said he “absolutely” expects laws to come after the tragedy. “There will be laws in multiple different subject areas.”

He still refused to attribute the shooting to an issue of gun control.

“Let’s be clear about a couple things, that show about these back background checks. Everyone wants to seize upon a particular strategy and say ‘well that’s the golden strategy right there.’ Look at what happened in the Santa Fe shooting - a background check had no relevancy whatsoever because the killer took the gun from his parents,” Abbott said. “Look at what happened in the shooting in Sutherland Springs. There was a background check that was done. It was done in a flawed way that allowed the killer to get a gun. So anyone who suggests ‘well maybe we should focus on background checks as opposed to mental health’ I suggest to you is a mistake.”

Sen. Roland Gutierrez, D-San Antonio, sent a letter to Abbott following his statements Friday and noted that in the past 10 years, Texas has suffered more mass shootings than any other state.

Gutierrez called for Abbott to call a special legislative session to address gun violence in the wake of the massacre and had a list of Texas Senate Democratic Caucus demands that included raising the minimum age to purchase a firearm to 21 and requiring universal background checks for all firearm sales.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott Has Received \$8 Million From Accident Lawsuit

Dallas Morning News

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott has received \$8 million so far from the settlement of a lawsuit over the 1984 accident that put him in a wheelchair.

Abbott, 64, was the state's attorney general in 2013 and running for his first term as governor when he decided to voluntarily release copies of the September 1986 agreement to the media. He's now running for a third term against Democrat Beto O'Rourke.

He was 26 at the time of the incident when he went for an afternoon jog on a windy day through River Oaks in Houston. A limb snapped off a large oak tree as he was passing under it, crushing his spine and damaging his kidneys.

Abbott sued the homeowner and tree care company and won a settlement, which shows tax-free annuities in graduated payments. The payments began with a \$300,000 check in 1986. They include both monthly payments that will continue for the rest of his life and lump sums that are deposited every three years until the final one this year.

In 2016, during his first term as governor, he received \$450,000. The next payment came during his second term — \$500,000 in 2019 — and the final one of \$740,020 is scheduled for Nov. 1, 2022. That would increase the total to nearly \$9 million, without adjusting for inflation.

The monthly payments began at \$5,000 in November 1986 and increase at 4% per year, compounded annually. They are currently more than \$20,000 a month.

As governor, Abbott is paid \$153,750 per year.

Abbott has disputed criticism that such a settlement could not be achieved today because of legislation he helped champion 10 years ago that imposed limits on lawsuit awards.

He argues that anyone in similar circumstances could reach the same type of settlement today.

Under the law, punitive damages — meant to punish gross negligence or bad faith — have been capped at \$750,000. It still allows payments for medical costs, potential lost wages, economic damages and noneconomic losses, such as pain and suffering and loss of enjoyment of life.

Matt Hirsch, a spokesman for the Abbott campaign in 2013, said then that Abbott did not seek punitive damages in his lawsuit.

“Noneconomic damages that General Abbott sought include injuries resulting in physical pain, mental anguish, physical impairment, and reduced capacity to work and earn money,” Hirsch said, adding that Abbott also sought damages for doctor, hospital, therapy and pharmaceutical bills.

The campaign did not release copies of the actual lawsuit, which would include pleadings and requests for damages.

Hirsch said Abbott has worked to ensure that the injury does not hold him back. It has given him a greater appreciation for his family, faith and for time, he said.

“He genuinely believes his life has been fuller and better after the accident,” Hirsch said. “He follows an oversimplified motto: ‘You never know when a tree is going to fall on you.’”

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

State News

-

Texas Business Donates Custom-Designed Caskets For Victims Of Uvalde Shooting *KENS*

A business out of Edna, Texas, in southeast Texas, has created caskets for the 19 child victims of the Uvalde school shooting last Tuesday.

Trey Ganem, who owns SoulShine Industries, posted on the business's Facebook page over the weekend that the caskets were being delivered.

The business wrote on the post: "Caskets arrived early this morning!! We are rocking and rolling with the help of so many!! Thank you to everyone who has stepped up to help us and to help the families of Uvalde! We will be tagging and posting a proper thank you to all who have helped soon. Thank you all from the crew here at SoulShine Industries! Continue to pray for the families and all involved."

This comes after a post on Wednesday where Ganem said he was asked to help with the caskets.

Ganem spoke to KENS 5 about the process of creating the caskets, and how he talked to each family about their kids, learning their interests to personalize the caskets.

"It hurts me to be able to do 19 kids in three days," he said. "It's unreal."

He described how each casket he creates, he gets emotionally attached to. He's made hundreds of them over the years as owner of Soulshine Industries.

"I'm teared up now talking about it. It's a very passionate job and not everybody can do it," he said.

His passion for helping families started after his friend passed away. He wanted to create caskets that tell stories of loved ones: things that represented them and things they've loved. He's created caskets with designs like Superman, Transformers, Scooby Doo and Cinderella.

“It starts the healing process, and they start talking about what they love to do and bringing up stories, and they stand around our caskets for hours talking about their loved ones before we deliver it, and who does that?” Ganem said.

After the Uvalde school shooting, Ganem said the funeral director called him. Without hesitation, he agreed to work on the victims' caskets.

"First stop I made was one of the officers -- his wife was one of the teachers. I stopped at their home and it was heart breaking for me to talk to her husband and her daughter. But, that was the start of the whole day for me," he said.

Working on 19 caskets at once — Ganem admitted it has been challenging, both emotionally and physically. But, the community has stepped up. Friends were delivering the caskets, and people showed up from all over Texas to sand them.

"We paint the hardware, we paint the bars, match the colors of the design to the top; it's not just a wrap," Ganem said.

He and his son worked around the clock with no sleep to personalize, and hand paint each one of the caskets.

"It brings a smile to my face because what the families have told me, and what we put on the caskets, TikTok is one of the number one logos; they want a TikTok. They love TikTok," he said. "We did a dinosaur holding a flashlight and a pickle. These are the things the families are telling us and we're like, 'Do what?' And I'm like, 'Did I get that right?' And they're laughing, but that's what they loved," Ganem said.

He said that one of the students, wanted to be a marine biologist, so he customized their casket with whales and dolphins.

Another loved flowers, glitter, slime and llamas.

"It's about trying to bring some light in this dark time and that's what we're doing," Ganem said.

The company has previously made custom-designed caskets for the victims of the Sutherland Springs shooting, the Las Vegas mass shooting and for Vanessa Guillen.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Uvalde Buries 10-Year-Old Amerie Jo Garza, The First Of Many Funerals To Come

Alexa Ura

Texas Tribune

She had three names joined like charms on a bracelet.

Amerie Jo Garza was laid to rest Tuesday before the eyes of God, her broken family, a shattered town and a shamed nation. It was three weeks to the day after her 10th birthday.

On a sunny Tuesday afternoon, her funeral Mass at this small town's Catholic church began a procession of grief that will stretch across two weeks as services are held for 18 of her classmates and two of their teachers killed at Robb Elementary a week ago.

The mourning will include at least two joint funerals and services for two sets of cousins because the slain children were often family as well as classmates.

Amerie's body arrived Tuesday afternoon at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, a 114-year-old parish in a quiet neighborhood about a mile from the elementary school. Its sanctuary backs into a broad canopy of old oak trees offering shade to a statue of the Virgin Mary. She stares out at just one of the many memorials around town for those lost at Robb — 21 framed pictures hanging from a metal barricade with stuffed animals and flowers for all the children.

Mourners began arriving as early as an hour-and-a-half before the start of Mass, some wearing black but many dressed in shades of lilac and lavender — Amerie's favorite color. Media were kept across the street.

A silver hearse pulled up to the church shortly before 2 p.m., and Amerie's family followed in a matching car. Six pallbearers wearing white gloves with pink flowers pinned to their white button-up shirts carried the casket — gray with a hint of lilac — through the church's wooden doors, past two flower pots in which stems of lavender echoed the tribute of purple.

Some of her family walked ahead, donning delicate corsages. Dozens of others followed, spilling out of the church as officials worked to make space among wooden pews for all who had gathered.

After the Mass, Amerie's procession made the short drive to Hillcrest Memorial Cemetery, where mourners stepped through gaps in the hedge of sage bushes that line the grounds toward the spot that would become her gravesite. A few hundred had gathered, enveloping her family around the casket for a short burial ceremony. Then her body was lowered into the ground.

When most of the mourners had dispersed, her family released a bouquet of white dove-shaped balloons to the wind.

In the days since the shooting, Amerie's loved ones — like families of the other children — remembered her not for the last day of her life, but for everything that came before.

Amerie had been kind but sassy, her family describing her as a little diva with a heart of gold. She had loved and been loved, smiling slyly in photos embracing her parents and doting on her little brother Zayne from the start.

She dreamed of channeling her creative energy into becoming an art teacher. The day after her death, her mother, Kimberly Garcia, posted a picture of Amerie holding up a certificate in recognition of joining the A-B honor roll. "You did not deserve this my sweet baby girl," her mother wrote. "Mommy needs you, Amerie I can't do this life without you."

Amerie was also brave and stood up for others.

As her family received mourners at a funeral home Monday, the Treviño family visited the town square where white crosses around a fountain have become a memorial visited daily by anguished locals and out-of-towners who make the solemn trek to pay their respects.

The assortment of daisies, mums and roses left in front of the cross bearing Amerie's name was stacked so high that the pyramid threatened to topple over the border of white prayer candles enclosing the tribute.

David Treviño, his wife and 11-year-old daughter held vigil Monday before Amerie's

memorial, the young girl's body shaking with sobs as she rested her head on her mother's shoulder.

Standing tall for her age, the 11-year-old had faced severe bullying from some of the other children at Robb Elementary, Treviño said. Where the family had struggled to find help to shield her, Amerie stepped in to wrap her in her protection.

"She would stick up for her for the bullies to stop picking on her," said Treviño who was also Amerie's cousin. "[My daughter] is taking it really hard. She would protect her from the bullies."

The day before Amerie's funeral, a visitation including an evening rosary was held at the funeral home across the street from Robb Elementary. Some mourners wore purple there, too. Others carried bunches of purple hydrangeas.

Some were strangers who stopped by simply to say a prayer for her. Others wore shirts with photos of Amerie smiling at all who passed them on their way in.

Even in death, Amerie continued giving to others. The children who attended early in the day appeared to each walk out clutching brown teddy bears.

The Hillcrest Memorial Funeral Home, which neighbors Robb Elementary and had in the past had brought stacks of pizza for students to celebrate the last day of school, last Tuesday sheltered children who fled for their lives across Geraldine Street to reach the building's doors amid the shooting.

At the end of this school year, the funeral home's staff is helping prepare the bodies of the slain children. They helped families choose coffins that seemed unfathomably small. They printed out prayer cards with dates that barely spanned a decade of life. They set up recitations of the rosary so parents could offer their children's souls as they prayed for their eternal rest alongside God.

From the funeral home, families and mourners can see the back door the shooter used to slip inside the school. A row of open windows through which children escaped also faces the funeral home, the printed curtains that adorned one classroom window fluttering with the breeze.

To begin washing away the horror, there have been countless gestures of sweetness over the past days.

Clinging to her cross at a memorial, balloons marked the 10th birthday Ellie Garcia would've reached on Saturday. A purple softball mitt with pink stitches was left atop a stack of flowers for Eliahna Torres, who wore the number four on the softball field.

At Uvalde's second funeral home, loved ones Monday remembered 10-year-old Maite Yuleana Rodriguez on the first of two days of visitation. Maite had long ago set out to become a marine biologist, and her preference for the color green was apparent in her affinity for lime-green Converse shoes.

As the sun finally dipped enough to offer them some shade, a pair of boys took turns juggling

a soccer ball outside the funeral home. They sported lime-green shoes.

The overlap of visitations for Amerie and Maite captured the relentless march of grief that will follow — one child being buried while another family holds visitation while another prays the rosary and on and on.

As Amerie's body was being lowered into the ground, the Garcia family was beginning to receive mourners at a visitation for Irma Garcia, one of the teachers who died in the shooting, and her husband Joe who suddenly died just days after losing his high school sweetheart.

This week alone there will be 11 funerals. Maite's funeral service will take place Tuesday night.

All the while, a shiny purple bow will adorn the black mailbox outside a home just down the street from the Hillcrest funeral home.

The house belongs to another devastated Robb family, waiting its turn to bury the child who never came home.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Why Was The Head Of A Six-Person Force For Uvalde Cisd In Charge Of The Mass Shooting Response?

By St. John Barned-Smith
Texas Tribune

Uvalde police officers, Texas state troopers and members of the U.S. Border Patrol's elite BORTAC squad all responded to the massacre at Robb Elementary a week ago. All were apparently brought to a standstill under the command of Uvalde CISD Police Chief Pete Arredondo, who officials say believed the shooter was no longer a risk to people in the school.

But why was the school police chief, who oversaw, by far, the smallest law-enforcement agency that responded, in charge of the situation response in the first place?

When it comes to who's in charge, a department's size doesn't matter. In mass casualty events in which multiple agencies respond, the highest ranking officer from the agency that has jurisdiction over an emergency usually assumes control.

"People watch too much TV. They think whenever the FBI walks in, they take over," said Galveston County Sheriff Henry Trocheset, whose department responded to the Santa Fe massacre four years ago. "You have the jurisdiction."

Because the shooting occurred on school property, Arrendondo — the top officer at the school's small police department — would have been in charge of coordinating the response, handling communications and making decisions about how to stop the shooter.

Law enforcement's nearly hour-long delay in entering the joined fourth-grade classrooms and confronting the 18-year-old shooter who murdered 19 children and two teachers has been widely criticized. The days following the disaster have only added to the confusion, with reports that Border Patrol agents who arrived at the scene challenged the decision to wait;

ultimately they entered the classroom and shot the gunman, killing him. Most of the updates about the case, meanwhile, have come from the Department of Public Safety.

Last week, for example, DPS Commander Steven McCraw explained that officers waited for more heavily armed reinforcements from the BORTAC squad before they finally confronted the gunman. The delay was based on the erroneous assumption that the situation had turned from an active shooting to a barricaded suspect.

Public safety agencies across the United States use the “National Incident Command System” to respond to emergencies, said Harris County Fire Marshal Laurie Christensen. The federal government created the system after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, when police, fire, and EMS agencies struggled to work together to respond to the disaster.

The goal, she said, was to create a “nationwide systematic approach, a national standard — a set of principles meant for all threats, hazards and events.”

“It was scaleable, flexible, and adaptable,” she said, meaning police or fire departments could use it for everything from a car fire on a city street to a mass casualty event such as a mass shooting.

In particularly challenging situations, it’s not uncommon for agencies to create a “unified command,” in which authority over the incident is shared by leaders of multiple agencies.

There is protocol for a transfer of command from the local commander to someone on scene with more experience or resources who was better equipped to handle the situation, law enforcement officials said.

During the 2017 Santa Fe massacre, officers from the small Santa Fe ISD Police Department found themselves under fire. The gunman shot former officer John Barnes in the elbow, causing hemorrhaging that nearly killed him.

Former Assistant Chief Gary Forward recalled feverishly working to staunch Barnes’ bleeding.

Then-Chief Walter Braun oversaw the operation initially, he recalled, but soon, “it really became a joint thing, with the chief and the FBI, the Galveston County Sheriff’s office, and DPS — it was a joint operation to manage the whole scene.”

“After the thing started to mushroom, and the kid (accused in the shooting) was taken into custody, that whole incident command structure broadened exponentially,” he continued.

Arredondo apparently chose to maintain command as the minutes ticked by and pressure mounted.

“He was incident commander in charge,” said Charles McClelland, former Houston police chief. “It doesn’t mean it was wrong he was in charge — he just made a bad decision.”

It wouldn’t be unusual for a school district police force to retain command and request additional resources, experts said. The local officers would live close by, would know the area.

On the other hand, the local chief doesn't have to retain command. He or she can turn it over to another agency with more expertise — or create a “unified command,” with agencies coordinating with each other directly.

Arredondo could have given control to the Uvalde Police Department — the school lay in their jurisdiction. Or he could have turned it over to DPS, which has law enforcement authority across the entire state. Or even to BORTAC operators, who are the Border Patrol's most highly trained agents.

The key, experts explained, is that the best qualified person should be in command. That might not be the highest ranking person. It could be a deputy chief who has expertise needed for the incident.

“One thing interesting about incident command — one thing that's taught, understood, is that you're very likely to have your boss reporting to you,” one former emergency operations manager told the Chronicle.

Some who have been involved in such incidents said it was thus surprising that the school chief didn't pass the command to people with more expertise and training.

McClelland said that while it made sense for the local school chief to be commander initially — “his people were first on scene, it was on the school campus” — he said that in complex and rapidly evolving scenes it sometimes makes sense for a commander with more experience to assume command. He recalled a shooting on the campus of Texas Southern University in 2015. His officers told him TSU officials said they were capable of handling it, a claim he shot down. His officers would handle the investigation, he said. It was a murder, at a location well within his jurisdiction. And he believed his officers were better equipped to handle it.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Education

-

Richardson ISD Internship Leads To Jobs For Students With Disabilities

By Teri Webster

Dallas Morning News

Eight Richardson ISD seniors are one step closer to achieving their life goals after completing a one-year internship at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital Dallas.

The internships are part of Project SEARCH, a national program that provides training and real-life work experience to students with disabilities, the hospital said in an announcement.

The interns rotate three times throughout the year across about 20 departments, ranging from nursing to the phlebotomy lab and security. The students are assigned a mentor who offer support and help develop their career paths.

Marcy Hancock, Richardson ISD's Project SEARCH instructor, said in a prepared statement that in addition to gaining knowledge, the students learned how to find their voice to advocate for themselves and what they want for their future.

“They all had something that they really needed to work on, and they all have just progressed tremendously,” Hancock said.

Forty-four students were accepted over the first four years of the Texas Health Dallas program, which is a joint effort with Richardson ISD, the Texas Workforce Commission and Quest Employment Services, Richardson ISD said in an announcement.

All of those students have found jobs, including 21 who are employed at the hospital.

This year, six of the eight interns have already found jobs and interviews are underway for the other participants.

Texas Health Dallas held a graduation ceremony for the interns on May 19, during which they also received their high school diplomas.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

American Federation Of Teachers Endorsees Lose In State Board Of Education Primary Runoffs

By Isaiah Mitchell

The Texan

Buoyed by a trend of heightened political attention, redistricting has made 2022 a particularly active year for State Board of Education (SBOE) races. Six of the 15 current members will be replaced by the time the board convenes after the November election.

Four of the March 1 primary elections — three Democratic races, one Republican — went to runoffs, held May 24.

The primary elections have been quieter for Democrat SBOE incumbents than Republicans. Both incumbent members ousted in the primaries were Republicans: Sue Melton-Malone (R-District 14) and Jay Johnson (R-15), who lost decisively on March 1.

Meanwhile, all three incumbent members that decided to step down voluntarily instead of running for reelection were Democrats: Georgina Pérez (D-District 1), Ruben Cortez (D-District 2), and Lawrence Allen (D-District 4).

All three Democratic primaries for these districts went to runoff elections, along with the Republican primary for District 13, which is currently held by Aicha Davis (D-District 13).

Women’s and Gender Studies professor Melissa Ortega won the Democratic primary runoff for District 1 with 57 percent of the vote, defeating Laura Marquez. Ortega had placed first in the March 1 primary and was endorsed by the incumbent Pérez, who built a reputation as the SBOE’s staunchest opponent to charter school expansion. Ortega will face Michael “Travis” Stevens in the general election.

Unlike Pérez in District 1, Cortez did not dub a successor in District 2. Former Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD Board trustee Victor Perez defeated retired educator Pete Garcia with 56 percent of the vote. He will face Republican LJ Francis in the general election.

Out of all the districts in the SBOE, District 2 is the likeliest to flip parties, encompassing a voting population that is 52 percent Democratic according to voting data from the past two election cycles.

Houston-based District 4 had a crowded primary that narrowed to a runoff between attorney Staci Childs and teacher Coretta Mallet-Fontenot. Childs won the runoff with 58 percent of the vote. District 4 does not have a Republican candidate on the ballot.

Notably, all of the candidates that lost in the May 24 Democratic runoffs were endorsed by the Texas chapter of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), a prominent teachers' union. Ortega was the only victor to boast an endorsement by a major teachers' union, the Texas State Teachers' Association.

Like other associations, the AFT regularly lobbies for political goals. However, the group took a new spot in the political limelight last year when emails obtained by conservative group Americans for Public Trust revealed the AFT directly influenced the COVID-19 mitigation guidelines developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), including the masking of children. The CDC recommendation for near-universal masking in schools outlasted masking recommendations in all other public areas.

Kathryn Monette won the Republican primary runoff for District 13 with 65 percent of the vote, the largest victory margin of any SBOE runoff race in either party. Endorsed by several grassroots conservative groups as well as the Texas Home School Coalition, Monette was more outspoken about social issues like critical race theory than her opponent A. Denise Russell.

Monette will face the incumbent Davis in November. Davis will likely keep the seat since the North Texas district leans strongly Democratic.

-
[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Energy

Permian Basin Oil Production Predicted To Outpace Most Oil-Producing Nations This Year

By Kyra Buckley
Houston Chronicle

The country's most prolific oil and gas basin is expected to not just outpace other U.S. basins in production this year, but is forecast to produce more oil and gas than any other country except Saudi Arabia and Russia.

The Permian Basin in West Texas and New Mexico has experienced explosive growth in the last decade, and Norwegian research firm Rystad Energy predicts that daily output will grow by 1 million barrels to 5.6 million barrels this year and to 6.5 million barrels per day next year.

"The Permian has become the hot spot for US oil production thanks to significant resources, low breakeven costs and high oil content," said Espen Erlingsen, head of upstream research at Rystad Energy. "This trend is only likely to continue as global oil markets struggle with

supply constraints and the demand for oil shows little sign of easing.”

Oil prices have surged to more than \$120 per barrel since the beginning of the year as economies recover from the pandemic and the fallout from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine squeezed an already tight global supply. West Texas Intermediate, the U.S. benchmark, settled 40 cents lower on Tuesday at \$114.67.

As crude's run-up pushed gasoline prices to record highs, U.S. officials called for more domestic oil and gas production. However, Rystad notes the increase in production is unlikely related to calls for more output as public companies instead look to increase shareholder returns. Most companies were already planning to expand production this year, and few have drastically altered those plans.

It does signal a shift, however, from only a dozen years ago when the Permian produced about 1 million barrels per day total, well behind countries like Norway, Canada and Brazil, according to Rystad. Since then, investment in the Permian has grown – boosted by innovations in drilling technology – and now outpaces other oil-producing nation except for Saudi Arabia and Russia.

The forecast comes on the heels of two other Rystad Energy reports predicting production growth in a slice of the Permian and investment growth in the industry as a whole. Rystad predicted this month that the Permian’s Delaware Basin will hit record levels of production with an increase of about 990,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day.

Investment in the Permian also is expected to increase. In the Permian’s Delaware Basin investment could go up as much as 40 percent from last year to more than \$25 billion in 2022, according to Rystad.

Since 2016 companies operating in what are called tight or shale basins have moved resources out of places like the Bakken and Eagle Ford and reallocated them in the Permian. In 2016 the Permian’s two largest basins, the Midland and Delaware, garnered around \$20 billion in investment. This year it’s expected to total more than \$48 billion.

Other U.S. basins are set for growth as well this year, and outside the Permian Rystad expects other key oil and gas producing areas in the U.S. to see total growth of more than 1 million barrels per day, the most since 2019.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Business/Economy

-

Georgetown, Texas, Is The Fastest-Growing City In The US

KVUE

Click article to watch [video](#).

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

nd

2 Amendment Rights

After Uvalde School Shooting, Beto O'Rourke Renews Calls To Ban Assault Weapons

By Patrick Svitek

Texas Tribune

After the massacre in Uvalde, Beto O'Rourke is again picking up the mantle of an issue that has been front-and-center in his recent political career — and just as central to Republican attacks against him: gun control.

After the 2019 mass shooting at a Walmart in his El Paso hometown, O'Rourke famously called for a mandatory buyback program for assault weapons, proclaiming, "Hell yes," he wanted to take those firearms. He was running in the 2020 presidential primary at the time, and while he has not renounced his support for that proposal, in his bid for governor he has focused his on other, less contentious ideas to curb gun violence, such as universal background checks.

Throughout his campaign, he has said civilians should not have such weapons.

But last week, while visiting Uvalde, O'Rourke was newly assertive about the topic, advocating for a ban while speaking to reporters outside of Gov. Greg Abbott's own news conference.

"It is insane that we allow an 18-year-old to go in and buy an AR-15. What the hell did we think he was gonna do with that?" O'Rourke said Wednesday in an emotional and angry exchange with reporters in Uvalde that was evocative of his comments to the media following the El Paso shooting.

"Right there, if you want a solution, stop selling AR-15s in the state of Texas," O'Rourke added, standing outside of Uvalde High School.

On Wednesday in Dallas, O'Rourke is set to hold his first campaign town hall since the shooting, followed by similar events in Austin and San Antonio. They are expected to focus on "protecting Texas kids" and how Abbott has allegedly failed to do so on more than just gun violence. For example, O'Rourke has also accused Abbott of neglecting Texas children when it comes to the state's long-beleaguered foster care system.

Abbott's campaign declined to comment for this story, saying the governor was focused on the state response to the Uvalde shooting.

But prior to the tragedy in Uvalde, Abbott had been relentlessly attacking O'Rourke over his "Hell yes" comment, even before he launched his campaign for governor. His campaign has called O'Rourke an "anti-gun extremist."

When O'Rourke began his gubernatorial campaign last year, he told reporters he was not backing away from his support for the buyback proposal. But he has not actively campaigned on it, and in at least one instance — during a February campaign stop in Tyler — O'Rourke distanced himself from the idea, saying he is "not interested in taking anything from anyone."

Instead, O'Rourke's current platform on the issue centers on his opposition to the law that

Abbott signed last year allowing permitless carry of handguns, which polls show is unpopular. In addition to universal background checks, O'Rourke has also campaigned on "red flag" and safe-storage laws.

Still, when questioned about assault weapons on the campaign trail, O'Rourke often says he does not believe civilians should have them. He reiterated that during a veterans town hall in Killeen the day before the Uvalde shooting, where an audience member asked O'Rourke about his stance on AR-15s and said he thought O'Rourke had "changed or softened your stance on that."

"My position on this is consistent, and I know that not everyone here is gonna agree with me," O'Rourke said. "I don't think any civilian should own an AR-15 or AK-47."

O'Rourke steered clear of the buyback idea in the rest of his answer, pivoting to universal background checks, safe-storage laws and his opposition to permitless carry.

O'Rourke's campaign recently edited a section of its website on guns to strengthen his position against assault weapons. The section had said as recently as April 1 that he wants to "reduce" the amount of those weapons on the street. It now says, "I don't believe any civilian should own an AR-15 or AK-47." A campaign spokesperson said the language change was "part of a routine update to our website in the spring that included aligning the campaign's issue page with how Beto consistently talks" about topics on the campaign trail. A video that was on the same page before and after the change featured O'Rourke saying he does not believe civilians should carry assault weapons.

O'Rourke already sought to channel the anger of Texans who want gun control when he disrupted a news conference Wednesday in Uvalde, telling Abbott that he was "doing nothing" to stop the violence. And two days later, he spoke at a counter-rally outside the National Rifle Association convention in Houston, inviting NRA members to join him in preventing gun violence but saying that the "time ... is now."

While Abbott has largely ignored O'Rourke in public comments since the shooting, other Republican leaders have not held their tongues. Uvalde Mayor Don McLaughlin called O'Rourke a "sick son of a bitch" as O'Rourke interrupted the news conference, where McLaughlin was among those flanking Abbott.

O'Rourke "made a total ass of himself" at the news conference, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick said Saturday on Fox News. "He put himself above these families."

Abbott has put political activities on hold since it came out last week that he stopped by a campaign fundraiser in East Texas in the hours after the Uvalde shooting. He has not addressed O'Rourke directly since the massacre but has resisted gun control as a response to it.

Abbott canceled an in-person appearance at the NRA convention, opting instead for a video message while he returned to Uvalde on Friday. O'Rourke had called on Abbott to withdraw from the conference.

Texas voters are not as opposed to gun restrictions as their leaders are. Pollsters at the University of Texas at Austin have asked voters nine times since 2015 whether they believe

the state's gun laws should be more or less strict, and each time a plurality or majority has expressed support for more stringent laws.

When O'Rourke was running for president in fall 2019, the same pollsters found that 59% of Texas voters support a "nationwide ban on semi-automatic weapons."

There has not been much polling in Texas on the buyback proposal. But a September 2019 survey from the Dallas Morning News and University of Texas at Tyler found nearly half of voters — 49% — supported a "mandatory buyback program to turn in all assault weapons for payment." Twenty-nine percent opposed the idea, while 18% were neutral and 5% were not sure.

Regardless of the polling, Republicans see O'Rourke's support of the buybacks as a political winner for themselves, at least when it comes to energizing their base. On the campaign trail, Abbott jokes about how often voters can expect to see O'Rourke's "Hell yes" comment replayed in Abbott's campaign commercials this fall.

"In October, you're gonna say, 'Man, if I have to see that freakin' ad again ... I'm gonna shoot Abbott myself,'" the governor said during an April appearance in San Antonio.

O'Rourke's supporters say he is channeling the raw anger that many Texans feel in the wake of the school shooting in Uvalde.

"I think he speaks for a lot of Texans right now," said Nancy Thompson, an Austin mother who is the founder of Mothers Against Greg Abbott. "I think he came on pretty strong and he's speaking up, and even though he's a candidate, he's a Texan, he's a citizen and I think he speaks for a lot of us who have kids, including himself."

Thompson added that O'Rourke has been campaigning on gun policies that enjoy broad support, but that "no matter what Beto O'Rourke says, the far right, the Republicans, are always going to take his positions and his words out of context."

Liz Hanks, the Texas chapter lead for Moms Demand Action, said O'Rourke has been "doing all the things I want him to be doing" since the Uvalde shooting. She said her organization sees broad support for proposals like universal background checks and "red flag" laws, while acknowledging that laws targeting assault weapons may not be as realistic in Texas.

"People can feel however they feel about it, but I think we can make a lot more progress on these other issues," Hanks said. "Let's focus on these things first."

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Gun Ownership Is Ingrained In Uvalde's Culture. Some Here Are Rethinking How It Should Be Regulated.

By Brian Lopez
Texas Tribune

For most of his life, Ricky Freitag has been a hunter. From shooting his first hog when he was 10 years old to now teaching his own 10-year-old how to handle a firearm, it's a tradition etched into his family.

His father and grandfather, who was a state game warden, introduced him to the sport. His father-in-law is an avid hunter, and Freitag often tags along with him. Freitag's grandparents lived on a ranch, which made it easy to go hunting and learn how to use a gun.

In this South Texas town, many young boys grow up dreaming of that perfect shot.

"That's always been the culture here," Freitag, 31, said. "When I shot my first animal, it was just a surreal experience."

Longtime Uvalde residents say the city is a hunting mecca and the love for guns goes right along with it. For the last 40 years, the town has held its annual Hunters Roundup event, which brings thousands of hunters together to talk game, eat food and raffle guns.

Uvalde — a mostly Latino city of about 15,000 residents between San Antonio and the border with Mexico — is an attractive location for hunters. Ranches, lush with wildlife like white-tailed deer, surround the city. Celebrities like singer-songwriter Ted Nugent hunt around town. Freitag himself hunts on a ranch about 8 miles out.

But after a shooter used an AR-style rifle to kill 21 people at Uvalde's Robb Elementary School last week in what has become the state's deadliest school shooting, some residents are rethinking what gun ownership means. Many here still believe firmly in their right to bear arms, but they are now saying they would be supportive of raising the age limit to attain weapons like the AR-15 or banning the weapon altogether. Others question whether these measures would be effective in preventing similar tragedies — but said they would still support them.

It remains to be seen how lawmakers will act in the wake of last week's tragedy, but for now, Republican state leaders are signaling they will reject stricter gun control measures once again and instead try to steer the conversation toward offering mental health resources and arming teachers.

Texas Democrats, on the other hand, have already called for a special session to pass sweeping gun reform, which would include raising the minimum age to purchase a gun from 18 to 21; requiring universal background checks for all firearm sales; implementing "red flag" laws to allow the temporary removal of firearms from those who pose imminent danger; requiring a waiting period after purchasing a gun; and regulating civilian ownership of high-capacity magazines.

Gov. Greg Abbott has said none of the laws passed in the last session, which greatly expanded gun access, allowed the shooter to attain his guns. Abbott has said looking at the mental health resources that the state offers and increasing them is a priority.

Beto O'Rourke, who is running against Abbott in November, is a big proponent of passing the type of legislation that the state's Democrats have laid out.

In Uvalde, where guns are often used for home protection or hunting, opinions differ on what new gun laws would look like in the aftermath of the shooting.

Before the shooting, most of her safety concerns had little to do with gun violence and more with drug and human smuggling, she said. The town is located roughly 75 miles from the

U.S.-Mexico border and has recently seen an increase in police chases involving smugglers, local authorities have said.

But even then, there is no need for military-style assault rifles to be sold in Uvalde, she said.

“There’s no war here,” Contreras said. “Why even sell those guns? I don’t think that was right for [the gun store] to be selling those big, big guns.”

Appetite for a middle ground

Hunting and gun ownership holds a sentimental value in the Freitag family. Some of Freitag’s guns were passed down to him from his grandfather, he said.

From an early age Freitag was taught that guns aren’t a toy — they’re something you have to respect.

Freitag has obtained all the correct licenses and taken shooting classes. He has always followed all gun safety and etiquette rules, like keeping his barrel down, never pointing a weapon at people and even picking up the shells after shooting. Freitag hopes to instill that respect and knowledge to his son.

“Me growing up and actually having the opportunity to [hunt] — that’s something that I can maybe pass on to my kids,” he said.

Freitag owns about 50 guns, ranging from hunting rifles to AR-15s, the same military-style weapon the gunman used in last week’s shooting. He said it’s easier to hunt wild pigs with that weapon.

While he understands why some people are calling to ban AR-15s, he and others would rather support legislation that raises the age when a person can buy one to 21.

“It’s fun and that’s what we use it for,” he said. “I know there’s the argument ‘Why do people need that gun?’ Nobody needs anything. That’s just our right to buy and do what we choose to do with them.”

Other than using guns for sport, Freitag usually carries a handgun as he goes about his day. His job in Uvalde is to tow cars and he says he needs the protection. Sometimes people get angry when he takes someone’s vehicle. Sometimes he’s working outside the city limits at 3 a.m. and he doesn’t know who or what he’ll come across when it’s pitch dark. While he’s out at those times, his wife also keeps a gun handy.

Alex Covarrubias, a resident of Uvalde for more than 25 years, also has his own gun at home for protection. But before last week’s shooting, he never had really thought about the kinds of weapons that are available to people once they turn 18. Now he’s also calling for a change in the age limit to buy high-powered rifles that can cause so much harm in a matter of seconds.

Authorities say the gunman in last week’s shooting picked up a rifle at a nearby gun store shortly after his 18th birthday. That should’ve been a warning sign, Covarrubias said.

“Taking out a rifle on the first buy — it should have been a red flag right there,” he said. “It’s too big of a gun for here.”

Authorities also say the shooter bought 375 rounds of 5.56-caliber ammunition about a week before the shooting, which should've been another warning, Covarrubias said.

On the day of the shooting, it was found that the gunman had brought over 1,600 rounds of ammunition with him.

Freitag said the last time he bought ammunition was a couple years ago; he only buys about 100 rounds whenever he needs a refill, he said. He agreed that the amount of ammo the shooter bought was unusual and should've been a red flag.

A longtime Uvalde resident, who asked The Texas Tribune not to use her name because she wants to teach in the local district and worried that her comments could risk her job search, said she doesn't own a gun but has always lived in households that have them. She once dated someone who didn't own a gun; she never felt quite safe when she was with him, she said.

But even though she is a strong believer in the right to bear arms, she said she doesn't understand why guns can't be further regulated. Instead, discussion about guns is black or white without any room for nuance.

"We sell drugs, we sell alcohol, we sell cigarettes and everybody has the right to them," she said. "But they do harm people, they do cause death, so we have regulations. And the same should be for guns."

Freitag's father-in-law, Rene Nolasco, 68, said he doesn't think banning military-style assault rifles is the answer. He has one of his own, which he uses to shoot targets in an isolated range. He would be OK with raising the age limit to buy an assault rifle but doesn't believe it will stop anything. Nor will banning AR-15 style guns.

Despite laws and policies, bad people will find ways to do harm, said Nolasco, whose brother is the county sheriff.

Nolasco also equated owning an assault rifle to owning a sports car: People don't need sports cars to get around, but they like the way it feels to drive them.

"It's just fun," Nolasco said about shooting an assault rifle. "I know what kind of power my AR-15 has and I know how to use it."

Freitag believes part of the solution should be mandatory gun safety education, just like he received when he was growing up.

But while he agrees that some changes might be needed, he hopes they don't hamper gun enthusiasts' rights to bear weapons.

"I'd hate for it to jeopardize avid gun carriers like us who abide by the laws and mean no harm to anyone," Freitag said.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-
Man Arrested After Fatal Shooting Of Security Guard In South Dallas

By Catherine Marfin
Dallas Morning News

A man is behind bars after police say he fatally shot a 38-year-old security guard on a South Dallas street in April.

Anthony Dewayne Brown, 50, faces a murder charge in the death of Karl Arthur Hollins Jr. It's unclear whether he has an attorney.

The evening of April 7, officers were called to a shooting in the 3400 block of Harmon Street, near Robert B. Cullum Boulevard, and found Hollins in the street with a gunshot wound. He was taken to a hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

Several witnesses stopped to help Hollins before police arrived. Investigators learned that Hollins had been walking in the area wearing his security guard uniform and gun, police wrote in an arrest-warrant affidavit.

Police did not identify Hollins' employer.

Before the shooting, Hollins approached the gunman, later identified as Brown, and they "had an exchange of words," police wrote in the affidavit. Hollins was seen going toward Brown in an "aggressive manner" as Brown tried to get away, police allege.

Brown then pulled out a handgun and shot Hollins before fleeing in a truck, police said.

Several anonymous tips were submitted during the investigation, police wrote in the affidavit, leading them to Brown.

Detectives tried calling Brown and eventually obtained a search warrant for his cellphone records. The records showed Brown in the area at the time of the shooting and then leaving after Hollins was shot, the affidavit says.

Brown is being held in the Dallas County jail, with bail set at \$250,000. Jail records show he is on probation for using or possessing fraudulent identification.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Criminal Justice

-

School Police Chief Faulted In Shooting Response Sworn In As Uvalde City Councilman

By Cami Mondeaux
Washington Examiner

The police official facing a firestorm over a slow law enforcement response during a deadly mass shooting at a Texas elementary school last week was sworn in as a city councilman Tuesday.

Pete Arredondo, the chief of police for the Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District, took on the new position Tuesday night along with the other newly elected city council

members — but without the pomp and circumstance. The law enforcement official was elected a few weeks ago, but city officials announced Monday that they would forgo the swearing-in ceremony in light of the funerals taking place this week.

“Uvalde City Council members were sworn in today as per the City Charter,” Uvalde Mayor Don McLaughlin said in a statement. “Out of respect for the families who buried their children today, and who are planning to bury their children in the next few days, no ceremony was held.”

The announcement about the swearing-in came just hours after it was reported that the Uvalde Police Department and the school district police force had stopped cooperating with state investigations into the shooting at Robb Elementary School and law enforcement's response to the attack. Travis Considine, a spokesman for the Texas Department of Public Safety, said the departments "have been cooperating with investigators" but added that "[Arredondo] did an initial interview but has not responded to a request for a followup interview that was made two days ago."

The decision to stop cooperating with DPS happened after the department's director, Steven McCraw, held a news conference Friday and said the delayed police entry into the classroom where the gunman was barricaded was “the wrong decision” and contrary to protocol, sources told ABC News.

Arredondo has been identified as the official who coordinated the response to the shooting. Reports of law enforcement being told not to engage during critical minutes of the assault, as well as videos of desperate parents begging police standing outside the school to go and do something, have fueled calls for accountability.

McLaughlin acknowledged these frustrations Tuesday, noting that the investigation is ongoing and that he trusts DPS and police will “leave no stone unturned.”

Republican Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick said state officials were "not told the truth" about the police response, but McLaughlin asserted this was not true in a statement Monday. However, the mayor seemed to walk back those comments later Tuesday.

“Our parents deserve answers,” he said. “Our emotions are raw and hearts are broken, and words are sometimes exchanged because of those emotions. I want Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick to know that I misunderstood statements I thought he had said. ... I ask everyone to pray for us, the citizens of Uvalde, as we grieve and live through the pain and the healing process.”

Information presented by Texas officials has changed drastically over the past week as the investigations continue, though it now appears it took up to an hour Tuesday before federal agents took matters into their own hands and killed the shooter in defiance of orders not to proceed.

Nineteen children and two teachers were killed in the attack, and several more were wounded. The gunman has been identified as an 18-year-old who officials say legally purchased two AR-style rifles and hundreds of rounds of ammunition.

The Washington Examiner contacted McLaughlin's office for comment but did not receive a response.

Public records show Arrendondo completed an active shooter training course as recently as December, NBC News reported. Investigations into the shooting and police response continue, with the Justice Department announcing a critical incident review Sunday.

Uvalde, a town of roughly 16,000 people, is situated between San Antonio and Del Rio, just dozens of miles away from the U.S.-Mexico border. State Sen. Roland Gutierrez, a Democrat whose district includes Uvalde, told MSNBC on Monday that there was "failure at every level" of the response to the shooting and that to blame one person is "a little bit irresponsible."

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

National News

-

US Supreme Court Blocks Texas From Enforcing New Social Media Law

By Chuck Lindell

Austin American Statesman

The U.S. Supreme Court issued an order Tuesday afternoon that temporarily blocked Texas from enforcing a new law that lets users sue Facebook, Twitter and other large social media companies if they are blocked from the platforms or their posts are removed.

The court provided no reasons for its action, the latest legal complication for the law known as House Bill 20, although four justices opposed the order.

Texas Republicans pushed HB 20 last year in the Legislature, arguing that it was needed to counter social media platforms that improperly target conservative leaders and their messages.

But after two tech industry groups sued, U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman issued an injunction blocking the law from taking effect on Dec. 2, saying it would have interfered with the platforms' editorial discretion and their First Amendment right to moderate third-party content.

Texas appealed, and the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals backed the state last month by allowing HB 20 to be enforced while its judges weighed the law's constitutionality.

The tech groups filed an emergency petition asking the Supreme Court to block the law while the lower court continued working, leading to Tuesday's ruling.

"We are relieved that the First Amendment, open internet, and the users who rely on it remain protected from Texas' unconstitutional overreach," said Chris Marchese, a lawyer for NetChoice, which sued to overturn the law with the Computer and Communications Industry Association.

Allowing Texas to enforce HB 20, opponents argued, would hurt the platforms' ability to administer content standards that protect users against spam, foreign propaganda, pornography and hate speech.

"This ruling means that private American companies will have an opportunity to be heard in court before they are forced to disseminate vile, abusive or extremist content under this Texas law," said Computer and Communications Industry Association President Matt Schruers.

The law applies only to social media companies with at least 50 million users a month after GOP lawmakers voted down Democratic attempts to impose a lower threshold to include Parler, Gab and other sites popular with conservatives.

Texas argues that the large platforms are "common carrier" public forums, subjecting them to state regulation to ensure free and unobstructed access without fear of viewpoint discrimination. The state also rejects arguments that HB 20 requires platforms to host any particular message, saying the law prohibits actions against users based on their viewpoint.

But the tech groups, in an emergency filing with the Supreme Court, urged justices to protect free speech rights from "political posturing" by Texas leaders.

Writing in dissent, Justice Samuel Alito — joined by Justices Clarence Thomas and Neil Gorsuch — said he would have allowed Texas to continue enforcing HB 20, noting that the 5th Circuit Court reached the same decision after hearing oral arguments and reading legal briefs in the case.

"I would not disturb the Court of Appeals' informed judgment," Alito wrote.

Liberal Justice Elena Kagan said, without elaborating, that she also would have sided with Texas.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Opinion/Editorial

-

Editorial: Enough Thoughts And Prayers. Abbott Must Call A Special Session To Address Gun Violence.

Houston Chronicle

There was a brief moment three years ago in Texas when leaders in both parties were so sickened by the deadly toll mass shootings were taking here that they appeared willing to finally do something to slow the awful parade of death. After two shootings in the late summer of 2019 took 31 lives in El Paso and in and around Odessa, even gun rights diehards Gov. Greg Abbott and Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick were discussing modest gun reform.

After it was reported that the shooter in Odessa had purchased his rifle through a private-party to circumvent a background check, Abbott urged lawmakers to make it easier for private sellers to voluntarily run such checks. Patrick went farther, saying he was "willing to take an arrow" from the gun lobby to pursue legislation making the checks mandatory for private-party sales.

Alas, we know the ending to that infuriating saga.

Neither those changes, nor any of the many other calls for sensible gun reform, were made.

And unless Abbott changes course now — and does what he refused to do in 2019 — none of the changes demanded in the wake of last week’s terrible murders in Uvalde will happen, either.

Abbott must order a special session of the Legislature this summer. Once gathered, lawmakers can debate a wide range of fixes that might help prevent another school shooting. Waiting till 2023 should simply be out of the question.

Waiting is what happened last time. After the shootings in 2019, Abbott rebuffed lawmakers’ call for a special session. Instead, he created a bipartisan commission charged with exploring every aspect of how to make Texas safer from mass shooters. The House and Senate named interim committees to hold hearings across Texas, too. But by the time lawmakers got to Austin in 2021, Texas was facing another crisis — COVID-19 — and the reforms went nowhere.

Still reeling from the carnage in El Paso, the delegation from far West Texas introduced no fewer than 20 bills. They were ignored, too.

Instead, what the session passed — and what Abbott proudly signed — was the permitless carry bill allowing anyone who can legally own a firearm to tote it virtually anywhere.

It was a staggering feat of cognitive dissonance: Rather than enact a single law to prevent dangerous people from purchasing a gun, Abbott, Patrick, and the Legislature backslid toward extremism, empowering an armed citizenry without any safety or proficiency training.

With burials already underway in Uvalde, it’s time to put an end to this madness.

Yes, there are still answers to be had — especially about what exactly happened at the school last week when law enforcement officers appeared to be idled for more than an hour, with the children left helpless in the school. Abbott has pledged to see that those answers are found and shared. That’s a good start. So is word from the U.S. Department of Justice that it is also investigating.

But basic accountability is no substitute for legislative action. Texans are fed up with hollow promises, feckless commissions, splashy roundtables and toothless reports. They want to send their children to school without the bone-chilling fear they will be killed. . They want to know: How many mass shootings will it take for the Legislature to enact meaningful change to our gun laws?

“Every gun owner that I know tells me it is crazy to have those types of weapons in the hands of an 18-year-old, including Republican constituents,” state Sen. Roland Gutierrez, a Democrat who represents Uvalde, told the editorial board. “Abbott could go fix it with his signature and change the age from 18 to 21.”

That may be overstating the matter a bit — it will take lawmakers in both chambers to support legislation, before the governor can sign it — but Gutierrez is right that Abbott alone has the power to bring lawmakers together now to make that change.

Republicans should remember Patrick’s brief openness three years ago to expanded background checks and go to Austin with open minds.

If they want ideas of where to start, Gutierrez and other Democrats are ready to help start the debate over what needs to change in Uvalde's wake.

They want to raise the minimum age to buy firearms to 21. They want a 10-day waiting period for gun purchases. And they want Texas to adopt "red flag" laws that allow temporary removal of firearms from those who are an imminent danger to themselves or others. That's something even Abbott wanted to consider after the Santa Fe High School shooting in 2018.

The details of how to apply minimum-age standards — to all guns or just certain kinds, for instance — are worth debating. Think the 10-day waiting period is too long, or not long enough? That ought to be considered, too. Are there other ideas that might make our children safer from shooters that don't involve guns? Let's talk about that.

Or more importantly, let's give lawmakers a forum to talk about it — and then to act on their findings.

That's why Abbott must call the special session.

The next school year starts in 75 days, which means we are mere months away from another potential mass shooting on a school campus. We've heard too many thoughts and prayers after mass shootings to take any comfort in mere statements of grief. It's time for Abbott to call lawmakers back to Austin to do their jobs.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

From: [OOG News Alerts](#)
Subject: Morning News Clips 6.9.22
Date: Thursday, June 9, 2022 7:59:57 AM
Attachments: [Morning News Clips 6.9.22.pdf](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

Morning News Clips 6/9/2022

- [Texas Take](#)

- [Texas Tribune: The Brief](#)

- [Politico Playbook](#)

Greg Abbott News

Fox News Channel – Paul Best: [Texas Gov. Abbott Directs Health Officials To 'Provide Behavioral Health Services To Every Child In Uvalde'](#) [Web]

KVUE-TV – Hannah Ortega: [A Deep Dive Into The 17 School Safety-Related Bills Gov. Greg Abbott Has Signed Since 2018](#) [Web]

Administration News

Politico – Meredith Lee: [As Universal School Meals Program Nears End, Biden Eyes Other Ways To Get Food To School Kids](#) [Web]

CNN – Donald Judd: [Biden Administration Lays Out Its Plan For Covid-19 Vaccinations For Children Under 5](#) [Web]

Texas Legislature

- *Dallas Morning News* – Philip Jankowski: [Texas House Committee Begins Uvalde Shooting Investigation](#) [Web]

State News

Dallas Morning News – Kelli Smith: [Woman Dies After Dallas Police, Paramedics Restrain Her During Disturbance Call](#) [Web]

Education

Dallas Morning News – Corbett Smith: [Texas Teachers Worry About School Shootings, Which May Determine Whether They Return](#) [Web]

Energy

-

Dallas Morning News – Jack C. Piazza: [Gas Prices In Texas Are Edging Ever So Close To The \\$5 A Gallon Mark \[Web\]](#)

Fox Business Channel – Breck Dumas and Connell McShane: [Texas Under Threat Of Rolling Blackouts Amid Heatwave \[Web\]](#)

-

Transportation

KTVT-TV – Alexis Wainwright: [Texas Trucking Association: We Will See More Empty Store Shelves \[Web\]](#)

KBTX-TV – Donnie Tuggle: [Proposed \\$10 Vehicle Registration Fee To Help Ease Congested Brazos County Roads \[Web\]](#)

-

2nd Amendment Rights

-

Dallas Morning News – Todd J. Gillman: [House OKs 21-Year Minimum For AR-15s And Bans On Large Ammo Clips And Bump Stocks \[Web\]](#)

National News

-

Texas Tribune – Jaden Edison: [Feds Warn That Uvalde Massacre, Impending Abortion Ruling And Midterm Elections Could Spur More Acts Of Violence \[Web\]](#)

Texas Tribune – Abby Livingston: [U.S. House's Jan. 6 Committee Will Begin Laying Out Evidence Thursday, But It's Not Yet Known If Any Texans Will Testify \[Web\]](#)

-

#

Greg Abbott News

Texas Gov. Abbott Directs Health Officials To 'Provide Behavioral Health Services To Every Child In Uvalde'

By Paul Best

Fox News Channel

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott directed the Health and Human Services Commission on Wednesday to provide behavior health services to every child in Uvalde in the wake of last month's massacre at Robb Elementary School that left 19 children and two adults dead.

Uvalde, a tight-knit town of about 16,000, is still reeling from the shooting as devastated families lay their loved ones to rest.

A banner hangs at a memorial outside Robb Elementary School on Friday, June 3.

"As these families begin to rebuild their lives, it is essential that the children of Uvalde have access to mental health treatment," Abbott wrote in the letter to Texas Health and Human Services Commission Commissioner Cecile Young.

"I am asking that you use all available resources to work with families to provide behavioral health services to every child in Uvalde who desires support."

Organizations and individuals across the private and public sectors have pitched in to help the Uvalde community recover.

The federal government has been offering "every available" resource through its School Emergency Response to Violence program to provide assistance on the ground, Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said.

"I spent the formative part of my career in a Connecticut elementary school. I will never forget the ripple effect of fear and heartbreak that spread among students and teachers in the aftermath of the horrific Sandy Hook shooting," Cardona said the day after the shooting.

A 2020 study by Stanford University researchers found that antidepressant use increased 21.4% among adolescents who lived near schools where mass shootings took place.

Kacey Johnson, who hid beneath a table during the Columbine shooting in 1999 that left 13 people dead, previously discussed the lasting trauma that comes from surviving a school shooting.

"It is a hard to life to step into. [N]obody wants to be in the 'school shooting club.' [Y]ou are just thrown in without asking. Everything changes, and your old normal can never exist again," Johnson told Fox News Digital.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

A Deep Dive Into The 17 School Safety-Related Bills Gov. Greg Abbott Has Signed Since 2018

By Hannah Ortega
KVUE-TV

Editor's note: This article will be updated throughout the week as this series airs.

On May 24, Robb Elementary School in Uvalde became the site of the deadliest school shooting in Texas history.

In news conferences following the tragedy, Gov. Greg Abbott mentioned several times the 17 school safety-related bills he signed after the 2018 shooting at Santa Fe High School in Santa Fe, Texas.

This week, we'll take a look at each of these bills.

Senate Bill 372

Senate Bill 372 changed the rules for security in charter schools to give them the same security options as public schools. Before this bill became law, charter schools could only have security through the School Marshal program.

But SB 372 allowed charter schools to employ private security personnel and commission peace officers. It also allowed them to enter into contracts with local law enforcement for school resource officers.

Senate Bill 2432

Senate Bill 2432 deals with threats from students. It requires administrators to send students who verbally threaten a school employee with bodily injury to a disciplinary alternative education program. Before this bill was law, students were only sent to alternative programs if they committed assault that caused bodily injury, so this bill added harassment.

Senate Bill 11

This bill ordered the Texas Education Agency commissioner to create safety-promoting rules for school buildings. It also implemented mandatory grief and trauma training for teachers, safety audits every three years and the Texas Child Mental Health Consortium.

Senate Bill 1707

With Senate Bill 1707, school boards are permitted to form contracts with local law enforcement. These boards must then outline law enforcement's duties, which cannot include routine discipline or administrative assignments.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Administration News

-

As Universal School Meals Program Nears End, Biden Eyes Other Ways To Get Food To School Kids

By Meredith Lee
Politico

Biden officials are working on a smaller effort to help schools buy select food products as the universal free school meals program it launched during the Covid-19 pandemic approaches its expiration date, according to two people familiar with the plans.

Administration officials are exploring using about \$1 billion from an Agriculture Department fund to help schools purchase U.S. commodities for their meal programs. USDA did something similar last December, as districts struggled to find consistent sources of food amid ongoing supply chain disruptions from the pandemic.

A USDA official not authorized to speak publicly on the matter confirmed the department intends to deploy the funds later this month, but final arrangements are still underway.

“USDA is looking at every tool at its disposal to ease the burden the pandemic has caused on school districts, but the magnitude of this problem requires Congressional action,” a department spokesperson said in a statement. “School districts and American families need relief and Congress can provide that relief.”

Biden officials are scrambling to come up with even a small amount of money for school meals, after Congress failed to extend the current school meal waivers universal it approved in the early months of Covid-19. Those waivers not only enabled schools to provide free meals to every student, regardless of income, which cut down on paperwork, but they allowed schools officials to buy any available food for school meals, regardless of federal nutrition requirements and without financial penalty. The waivers, however, expire on June 30. And administration officials acknowledge the impact will be huge, even if they release an additional \$1 billion or so in funds to buy more food.

School meal funding, like other government assistance offered during the pandemic, has been at the center of a political battle between Democrats and Republicans. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and most Republicans in Congress oppose any move to extend the funding, citing the significant cost — roughly \$11 billion. Democrats and the White House were caught flat-footed by their opposition this spring, and have been scrambling in the months since to find an alternative before the expiration date.

A group of senators, led by Agriculture Committee Chair Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.), are still hoping to reach an agreement to fund a full extension of the waivers. Stabenow again pushed for an extension on the Senate floor Wednesday, but lamented that only two Republicans currently support such a move — Sens. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Susan Collins of Maine. Stabenow is, however, talking with Republican Sen. John Boozman (Ark.), the top Republican on the Agriculture Committee, to try to reach some agreement, according to two people.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack also personally pressed McConnell and other Republican Senators during a hearing late last month to reconsider their opposition to the extension.

When McConnell argued that the Biden administration was to blame for families struggling under high inflation, Vilsack replied, “It’s why we asked for a continuation for one more year of universal free school meals.”

Vilsack told reporters after the hearing that he had spoken about the waivers with Boozman and Sen. John Hoeven of North Dakota, but the effort to extend the funding “didn’t work out because [congressional] leaders made a decision not to allow it to work out.” He said he was still “hopeful” Congress extends the waivers, but he promised USDA would seek out alternatives, even if they couldn’t fund a full fix.

Once the pandemic-era waivers end, schools will be financially penalized if they don’t serve the right meal options or meet specific nutrition requirements, said Jillien Meier, director of partnerships and campaign strategies at the anti-hunger group No Kid Hungry. The waivers give schools the ability to substitute whatever foods they can find as they grapple with severe supply chain issues for school food supplies and steep consumer costs.

Anti-hunger advocates argue the waivers held off the worst of the expected rise in food insecurity during the pandemic. And they warn that the loss of the funding beginning in July will abruptly increase hunger for millions of Americans that had relied on the program. Some food vendors have already begun canceling school orders before the waivers expire, partially because of high food costs.

“We expected childhood food insecurity to skyrocket throughout the pandemic, but it stayed largely unchanged,” said Meier. “We fully attribute that to the school meal waivers.”

“Now we’re just going to undo all of that,” Meier said.

Republicans disagree with the way the Biden administration has used emergency pandemic authorities to increase federal nutrition programs.

“This is another example of my colleagues trying to take an emergency pandemic — the exemptions — and turn them into permanent changes that last forever,” Sen. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.) said in March.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

- Biden Administration Lays Out Its Plan For Covid-19 Vaccinations For Children Under 5

Donald Judd

CNN

The White House has announced a highly anticipated Covid-19 vaccine rollout plan for children under 5.

The administration “has made 10 million vaccine doses available for states, Tribes, territories, community health centers, federal pharmacy partners, and others to pre-order,” according to a White House fact sheet shared with CNN Wednesday. It is partnering with those entities to ship and distribute vaccines across the country following next week’s meeting of the FDA’s vaccine advisers – who will review data on these vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna – and expected authorization from the full FDA.

The first vaccinations could start “as early as the week of June 20th —with the program ramping up over time as more doses are delivered and more appointments become available,”

according to the fact sheet. CNN previously reported Covid-19 vaccination shots for the youngest Americans could begin as soon as June 21.

FDA vaccine advisers are scheduled to meet next week to discuss authorizing emergency use of Moderna's Covid-19 vaccine for children 6 months through 5 years of age and Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine for children 6 months through 4 years of age, and pending those decisions, the CDC will make final recommendations about the vaccines.

The administration estimates that 85% of children under the age of 5 live within five miles of a potential vaccination site at this time, though they're anticipating most parents seeking a vaccination for young children will do so at their pediatrician's or primary care provider's office.

Per a senior administration official, however, additional vaccine clinics and sites will be set up at easy-to-access locations for parents, including pharmacies, schools, children's hospitals, diaper banks, community health centers, clinics, museums, libraries and organizations serving minority communities across the country.

Jurisdictions across the country have been able to pre-order Covid-19 vaccine doses for children under 5 since last week – in that time, of the initial 5 million doses available for pre-order pending FDA authorization, the administration has received requests for 2.3 million vaccine doses, including 1.45 million doses of Pfizer and 850,000 doses of Moderna.

Still, the official suggested they anticipate an uptick in orders from jurisdictions over time.

“Our experience has been that people are slow to order, and this has been true across each of the times we've opened up ordering, so I wouldn't focus on those early numbers,” the official told reporters on a call Wednesday. “Our experience is that the longer the ordering stays open, the more likely the states come forward, so some of this is a matter of letting them know the ordering is available, and that they can begin that process.”

To spread awareness, the administration will partner with the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, which it estimates serves over 6 million people in the US, including almost half of all infants; with Head Start Programs through the Administration for Children and Families at the Department of Health and Human Services, which it estimates services approximately 1 million families; with Department of Housing and Urban Development programs, which it estimates serves more than 800,000 children under 5; and with Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which serves millions of children under 5, among others.

They'll also partner with community organizations, including “What to Expect,” a platform serving mothers and expectant mothers, to author a series of blog posts to dispel vaccine misinformation.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Texas Legislature

-

House Committee Begins Uvalde Shooting Investigation

By Philip Jankowski
Dallas Morning News

A key legislative committee investigating the Uvalde school shooting will hold its first meeting Thursday in Austin.

Law enforcement officials, including high-ranking leadership from the Texas Department of Public Safety, are expected to testify behind closed doors at the first meeting of the House investigative committee into the May 24 Robb Elementary School shooting.

The committee is expected to meet multiple times with plans to prepare a preliminary report on the mass shooting by the end of the month. The report could be used to guide lawmakers' legislative response to the shooting.

The investigative committee, made up of two Republicans and a Democrat, is separate from the review committees Gov. Greg Abbott requested last week. House Speaker Dade Phelan has granted the committee the power to subpoena witnesses and evidence in the review of police response to the shooting that left 19 schoolchildren and two teachers dead, as well as 17 injured.

The investigative committee came about after Abbott fumed over being "misled" about the police response to the shooting. The head of the Texas Department of Public Safety, Steve McCraw, has said it was "the wrong decision" to keep officers at bay for more than an hour while the 18-year-old gunman remained barricaded in a classroom.

The commander of the response, Uvalde schools' police Chief Pedro "Pete" Arredondo, has been a focal point of criticism while officials' account of the shooting has been plagued with misinformation and new information that call into question Arredondo's decisions as the scene commander.

Arredondo has disappeared from public view in the aftermath. It was unclear whether the committee will call on Arredondo to testify.

No further hearings have been scheduled beyond Thursday's hearing. The governor's requested committees have not yet held any hearings as well.

Lubbock Republican Rep. Dustin Burrows is chairing the committee. El Paso Democratic Rep. Joe Moody and former Texas Supreme Court Judge Eva Guzman, who unsuccessfully ran for the Republican nomination for attorney general this year, are also on the committee.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

State News

-

Woman Dies After Dallas Police, Paramedics Restrain Her During Disturbance Call By Kelli Smith
Dallas Morning News

A 47-year-old woman died in late May after she was handcuffed and restrained by Dallas

police officers and Dallas Fire-Rescue officials in Far East Dallas, police announced Wednesday.

The footage released by police shows that officers and Dallas Fire-Rescue officials pinned down LaDamon Hall, handcuffed her and took her to the hospital with a spit hood over her head as she yelled and fought against them. She fell unresponsive just before arriving at the hospital.

Hall's autopsy report was still pending Wednesday.

Asked why Dallas police waited 13 days to tell the public about her death, police spokeswoman Kristin Lowman said the "family needed an opportunity to review the video" and that relatives met with detectives late last week.

The department's general order says that such a video must be released within 72 hours of the incident. Lowman said the policy is either within 72 hours or "at the discretion of the police chief and notification of the police oversight committee."

Dallas police oversight monitor Tonya McClary could not immediately be reached for comment.

Dallas Fire-Rescue spokesman Jason Evans said his department was aware of the incident and was reviewing the matter internally.

In the introduction to a 38-minute video released Wednesday, Dallas police Deputy Chief Terrence Rhodes said an employee called 911 on May 26 about a disturbance at a business in the 12000 block of Garland Road and that Hall appeared to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Two officers — Jon Leach and Alan Hovis — arrived at 12:49 p.m., and two others — Benjamin Lambourne and Brandon Pryor — came later.

The body-camera footage starts with an officer approaching Hall and asking "What's going on today?"

After a short back-and-forth where Hall said she feels OK, an officer asks if she needs an ambulance. She shakes her head but appears to say yes.

A short time later, an officer who has walked away returns to Hall, who is lying facedown on the ground as three Fire-Rescue officials stand next to her. One appears to say Hall got mad and pushed them.

Hall appears to be crying and says something about being killed. "No, we're not going to let anyone kill you," the Fire-Rescue official says. "We want to check you out. Can we take you to the hospital?"

Hall begins to wail and rolls over onto her back. She later yanks off her wig and an officer tells her to calm down.

Hall, visibly distressed, begins to speak unintelligibly. She then gets up and walks away while taking off her clothes. An officer grabs her arms as she's pulling her skirt over her head, and she yells.

The officer pulls her arm to the ground and she screams. Another officer kneels on her back as she's pinned to the ground.

"You hurt me [expletive]," she yells.

An officer tells others they were trying to take Hall under arrest and stop her from running off and "getting naked." Hall can be heard screaming as officials lift her onto a stretcher and place a spit hood over her head, then place her in the ambulance.

"You got a few minutes, calm down before we get to the hospital so they don't have to tie you back up like that," an officer says.

"Try to breathe, OK?" he says a moment later, and Hall yells out more.

Hall falls silent about 30 minutes into the footage. About 40 seconds later, the officer says he's not sure what's going on and says "Can you talk to me?" multiple times.

"Want to get that off of her?" the officer says, referencing the spit hood. The paramedic begins to rub Hall's chest as he and the officer ask if Hall can hear them.

The paramedic begins to pump Hall's chest as the ambulance stops at Baylor University Medical Center near the end of the video. A paramedic asks the officer "to holler at the nurses," and the officer runs inside.

Hall was pronounced dead at 2:05 p.m., Rhodes said.

Police are investigating the death.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Education

-

Texas Teachers Worry About School Shootings, Which May Determine Whether They Return

By Corbett Smith

Dallas Morning News

Nine out of 10 Texas school employees worry about a shooting happening at their campus, according to survey results released Wednesday by an educators union.

That's a clear sign that they're "deeply concerned that something like Uvalde can happen in their district and on their campus" said Zeph Capo, president of the Texas chapter of the American Federation of Teachers.

The survey, conducted just days after the mass shooting at Robb Elementary School, also signaled that educators want more robust gun laws and not to be armed as the last line of defense, Capo said at a press conference announcing the results.

Katrina Rasmussen, a Dallas ISD teacher and Texas AFT member, expressed frustration that lawmakers haven't made substantive changes to lessen gun violence and keep schools safer.

Rasmussen said her campus has had multiple instances of guns being found as well as shots being fired at school.

"Our governor's solution to the escalating violence has been consistent: more guns and fewer restrictions," she said. "It is painfully, gut-wrenchingly clear, that more guns equals more violence."

In the aftermath of Uvalde, Gov. Greg Abbott has taken a handful of steps in response, including demanding school-based police officers to receive more active shooter training; asking for in-person, random intruder detection audits at campuses; and requesting that the Legislature convene special committees to develop "recommendations on school safety, mental health, social media, police training, firearm safety, and more."

Texas "must reassess the twin issues of school safety and mass violence," Abbott said in his letter calling for the special committees. "As leaders, we must come together at this time to provide solutions to protect all Texans."

The 4,676 respondents who worked either in K-12 or higher education institutions overwhelmingly supported a wide range of gun control efforts, with:

- 99% backing comprehensive background checks;
- 98% wanting "red-flag" laws that could prevent those going through extreme emotional or mental health issues from obtaining a gun;
- 96% endorsing raising the legal age for gun purchases; and
- 83% supporting a ban on "assault weapons."

The survey also touched on the debate surrounding arming teachers, something that Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton promoted days after the tragedy.

Nearly 77% of respondents who worked in schools said they did not want to be armed nor did they want to be expected to intercept a gunman.

"If our interventions hinge on a teacher gunning down an intruder in our classroom, we have already failed," Rasmussen said.

The Uvalde shooting, and the safety concerns that have spun from it, is yet another blow to teacher morale in the state, organizers stressed. Over 42% of respondents said that the state's most recent school shooting may affect their decision to return to the classroom in the fall.

Concerns surrounding school safety could potentially "intensify an already existing crisis" in teacher and staff retention, said Nicole Hill, the union's lead digital organizer.

A November 2021 survey from Texas AFT found 66% of respondents considered leaving their jobs within the past year. That union represents more than 66,000 teachers and other educational professionals.

The impact of gun violence on students is pervasive and long-lasting, said Sarah Lerner, a teacher at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla. — the site of a 2018

shooting that left 17 students and staff dead and 17 wounded.

Lerner, a co-founder of the nonprofit coalition Teachers Unify To End Gun Violence, called on lawmakers to “stop being beholden” to the National Rifle Association and do something to keep people safe in schools.

“When something like this happens ... lawmakers like to offer their thoughts and prayers,” she said. “Well, I don’t need your thoughts and prayers. I appreciate you thinking about us and praying for us. But I need action. I need policy. And I need change.”

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Energy

-

Gas Prices In Texas Are Edging Ever So Close To The \$5 A Gallon Mark

By Jack C. Piazza

Dallas Morning News

Texas is inching ever so close to joining 16 other states where average prices now exceed \$5 for a gallon of unleaded gas.

As of Wednesday, the average across Texas checked in at a record \$4.62 -- up 36 cents just since Memorial Day weekend’s unofficial start of the summer driving season and almost \$2 more than this time last year, according to AAA Texas.

Nationally, the average hit \$4.96.

Some gas stations in Dallas-Fort Worth are already flirting with the \$5 mark. A Shell station off U.S. 75 near the entrance to Texas Instruments stood at \$4.99 a gallon on Tuesday. Prices varied as much as 60 cents across North Texas on Wednesday, with the average standing at \$4.70.

How high will prices have to go to change how often we drive? Some are there now.

“I want to avoid it as much as I can,” said Jason Mullen, 49, of Mesquite, who spent \$140 filling up his pickup truck at the \$4.99-a-gallon Shell station in Dallas. He said he’s giving up an annual road trip to Colorado because of this year’s elevated prices.

Mullen isn’t alone. Danquez Smith, a North Crowley resident and CEO of A-1 Cleaning, has also made changes to his travel, taking toll roads to minimize his time on the highway.

Gas purchases made up 7.8% of Americans’ credit and debit spending in the week that included Memorial Day, according to a Bank of America analysis. That was up from 6.4% during February.

For those earning \$50,000 or less, gas now accounts for nearly 10% of what they’re spending each week, the Bank of America data showed.

Analysts aren’t convinced that consumers are altering their habits, though.

“I think Americans will still hit the road,” said Patrick De Haan, an oil and refined products analyst for GasBuddy.

There hasn’t been a widespread decrease in gas consumption, De Haan said, and a large reason for that is likely because many Americans are still eager to hit the road on pandemic-delayed trips. It could lead to shorter trips, but De Haan doesn’t see summer vacation plans taking a hit from the high cost of a fill-up.

Ricardo Flores of Plano is one of the many Americans who fit De Haan’s projection. Despite price increases, Flores said he’s so excited to travel again that he plans to stick with his summer plans. He said he’s adjusting in other ways, like eating at home more frequently.

“These prices always give us a hard time,” said Flores, as he stopped for gas on Tuesday.

With predictions of \$6 a gallon gas by August, everyone who drives just wants to know when prices will peak.

“No one knows where the ceiling is,” AAA Texas spokesman Daniel Armbruster said. “What goes up will eventually come down. The big question is when will global supply and demand get back in line.”

A culmination of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, labor shortages across the country, refineries lacking capacity and relatively price-resistant demand for gas due to two years of little travel makes it difficult to predict.

The Energy Information Administration released new numbers Wednesday that showed an increase from 92.6% to 94.2% in oil refinery capacity over the past week, the largest increase in the last four weeks.

On top of that, De Haan said politics is discouraging oil companies from making large exploration investments. As tempting as it sounds to just drill more oil, it’s not a light switch solution. Geological surveys must be taken, wells drilled and extracted oil refined and transported. And that’s not even considering that it may take several tries to drill in a spot that ends up being oil-rich.

“The optics are not good surrounding the president’s attempts to stifle oil and gas, and I think that’s coming back to bite him now,” De Haan said.

Add in the approaching hurricane season, which could bring new supply problems if storms block production or damage refineries close to the Gulf of Mexico, De Haan said.

Armbruster said there may be some relief after Labor Day when leisure travel is reduced, but oil market volatility also can be influenced by global issues, such as whether the European Union joins the United States in banning all imports of Russian oil.

“I still think it’s pretty likely we’ll get [to \$5 per gallon nationally],” De Haan said.

Until the run stops, Armbruster recommends reducing gas waste through driving practices such as using cruise control when safe, not accelerating rapidly, driving the speed limit,

lightening vehicle loads and keeping cars well-maintained.

"The bottom line is gas prices are going to be more expensive for at least through the summer," Armbruster said.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Texas Under Threat Of Rolling Blackouts Amid Heatwave

By Breck Dumas and Connell McShane

Fox Business Channel

A dangerous heatwave with temperatures upwards of 100 degrees is causing a surge in demand for energy in Texas, putting pressure on the Lone Star State's power grid and sparking concerns from residents and experts alike that rolling blackouts could be on the way.

"We've seen (the power grid) go down before, you know, for heat as well as for cold, and it's warmer now," one Austin-area resident told FOX Business this week. "I don't see it getting any better."

"I think there's a lot of infrastructure issues that need to be addressed," another Texan said, adding that residents like him will have "a lot less to worry about" when that happens.

The U.S. and Texas flags fly in front of high voltage transmission towers on February 21, 2021, in Houston, Texas. (Photo by Justin Sullivan/Getty Images / Getty Images)

The grid has gone down before, and residents are nervous recalling the deadly winter storm in 2021 that buckled the state's power grid for days, leaving millions without power and costing more than 200 lives.

Adding to concerns of another shutdown, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) – which manages the majority of the state's power grid – asked Texas residents last month to conserve power amid "record demand" after six power plants were tripped offline.

But Texas' top energy official says there is no need to worry.

"I can absolutely guarantee the lights are going to stay on in Texas because of the landmark legislation the Texas legislature passed in 2021," said Peter Lake of the Texas Public Utility Commission.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott speaks during the Houston Region Business Coalition's monthly meeting on October 27, 2021, in Houston, Texas. (Brandon Bell/Getty Images / Getty Images)

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott signed two bills into law last June aimed at strengthening the state's power grid.

"During the winter storm, too many Texans were left without heat or power for days on end, and I immediately made reforming ERCOT and weatherizing the power system emergency items," Abbott said in a press release at the time. "We promised not to leave session until we fixed these problems, and I am proud to say that we kept that promise."

Yet, some experts remained skeptical. Rice University Professor Daniel Cohan told FOX 4 that Texas could still face days-long blackouts in the future, saying the legislation "didn't go far enough to ensure supply is fully protected against extreme events."

Others say time will tell.

"Am I concerned about blackouts this week? No, not really," said Beth Garza, the former ERCOT IMM chief. "What will become problematic is as we have this long slog day after day of 100-degree temperatures, that will increase the risk."

-
[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Transportation

Texas Trucking Association: We Will See More Empty Store Shelves

By Alexis Wainwright
KTVT-TV

The Texas Trucking Association said with all the challenges they're facing right now, we will see more empty store shelves.

"It adds to the challenge for anyone to be successful in this industry," President of Texas Trucking Association, John Esparza said.

There is concern as diesel prices continue to go up.

Esparza said it's putting a lot of pressure on truck drivers and trucking companies.

"These days, fuel and tires is getting up there, if not getting more expensive for trucking companies," Esparza said. "If you're an independent operator imagine, you know, having your greatest expenses aren't yourself in terms of what you need to make a living."

It's the perfect storm for the trucking industry, he said they already are still dealing with a truck driver shortage. This means people will be paying more for their products.

"At the end of the day what it means to you and me and your audiences out there is, that it's going to cost more for the things that we need," Esparza said. "Whether it's at the grocery store, or at the retail facility, right to anything that's delivered to you at your door step."

He said in every aspect of life, whether you're traveling or sitting at home, you need trucks to roll. Without them, things come to a stop.

"Even where we have those wonderful partners that we have to help bring us our freight and our goods, trucks are always going to be involved in the first mile and last mile," Esparza said.

Esparaza said they are preparing to start Christmas shipments this Summer because of all the supply chain issues. He said they're hopeful for the future but don't expect any relief until 2023.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Proposed \$10 Vehicle Registration Fee To Help Ease Congested Brazos County Roads

By Donnie Tuggle

KBTX

It's no secret that traffic congestion on Brazos County roads is a pain for drivers. A potential solution to the problem could cost less than .84 cents a month.

The Brazos County Regional Mobility Authority is recommending a fee of \$10 to help fund transportation projects in the county.

The fee would be added to the annual vehicle registration of those that have vehicles registered in Brazos County.

The referendum is expected to be on November's General Election ballot. If voters approve the \$10 fee could be imposed starting in February 2023.

Brazos County Regional Mobility Authority chairperson Barry Moore says the fee is a small price to pay to help ease congestion and improve roads in the county.

"Every year congestion gets worse by about five percent. Those are numbers from the Texas Transportation Institute which we're fortunate to have in this county," Moore said. "If we do nothing we can expect that will keep going."

According to the Brazos County Tax Assessors Office, just over 160,000 vehicles are registered in the county. At \$10 per vehicle, the county could generate \$1.6 million.

Brazos County Tax Assessor Kristeen Roe says it's unclear at the moment which type of vehicles the \$10 fee will be imposed on.

"The question is, is that going to incorporate trailers or not. Specifically to me farm trailers," said Roe. "I haven't got that answer right now but that's something that I'm going to go to the state and ask."

Brazos County Commissioners and local leaders expressed their support for the registration fee back in November 2020.

"I think it's an excellent opportunity for us to improve transportation in Brazos County and I support it wholeheartedly," said Raney, (R) - District 14.

The RMA has expressed three initial projects of interest. The Easter Inner Loop would begin on Highway 6 and loop outwards around Highway 21 near Coulter Field, FM1179 SH30, and loop back to Highway 6 near William D. Fitch Parkway.

The RMA would also like to make improvements to SH21/SH 47 near the RELIS Campus and Arrington Road where it intersects with William D. Fitch Parkway.

Moore says for around .83 cents a month the fee is one of the best solutions to help invest back

in the roads while leveraging local resources.

“We’ve got to do something,” said Moore. “This is a way we can use funds that come from this community from vehicle registrations to leverage to get funds from TxDOT, from the federal government, and from other places that we might not be able to get otherwise.”

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

2nd Amendment Rights

-

House OKs 21-Year Minimum For AR-15s And Bans On Large Ammo Clips And Bump Stocks

By Todd J. Gillman

Dallas Morning News

Over vehement Republican objections, the House approved a set of gun control proposals Wednesday night that Democrats say would avert massacres like the mass murder at an Uvalde elementary school.

The package would raise from 18 to 21 the age to buy semi-automatic guns like the AR-15 used in Uvalde. It would outlaw ammunition magazines that hold more than 10 rounds. And it would ban bump stocks, a device that allows near-continuous firing. Then-President Donald Trump issued a ban by executive order after a sniper used one to kill 58 concertgoers in Las Vegas in 2017.

“It’s too easy for dangerous people to get dangerous weapons in this country,” said Rep. Joaquin Castro, D-San Antonio. “Somebody who’s 18 can’t buy beer or cigarettes. But they can go into a gun store and buy two AR-15s and go kill 20 people.”

The vote was 223-204.

During a long afternoon of testy debate, House Republicans made little effort to defend the legality and availability of bump stocks or high-capacity magazines. Instead, they asserted that Democrats’ “Protecting Our Kids Act” violates constitutional rights while ignoring obvious solutions like hardening schools and adding armed guards, even at a small-town elementary school like the one west of San Antonio where a gunman killed 19 children and two teachers on May 24.

“We think nothing of it when we see an armed guard at a bank. ... Yet when we suggest that we should use the same force and resolve to stop someone from killing our children, the left goes berserk,” said Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Calif.

Democratic lawmakers broke into applause after the final vote on a bill that also mandates secure storage of guns to keep them away from kids, and cracks down on straw buyers and gun trafficking.

On Thursday, the House plans to vote on a red flag law that would allow confiscation of guns from individuals deemed an “extreme risk” to themselves or others.

But the measures face dim prospects in the 50-50 Senate, where at least 10 Republicans would have to agree.

Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, the lead Republican negotiator in Senate gun talks since Uvalde, has ruled out raising the age to buy guns or any other steps seen as rolling back gun rights. He has been open to adding juvenile records to the federal background check databases, to keep guns away from dangerous teens.

“The answer is not to destroy the Second Amendment,” said Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio, the top Republican on the Judiciary Committee, leading the GOP side in the House debate. “These bills would say when you can buy a firearm, what kind of firearm you can get and where and how you have to store that firearm in your own darn home.”

As for the red flag law, he added, “Someone who doesn’t like you can file a complaint” and within 24 hours, guns can be taken away without sufficient due process.

Rep. Steve Chabot, R-Ohio, offered a stunning statistic: More children under age 11 died in the Uvalde attack in one hour than have died in Texas all year from COVID-19.

But rather than unconstitutional restrictions, he said, Congress should devote \$100 billion in unspent education funds to putting metal detectors in schools, training and hiring retired police officers and others to patrol schools, and treating students with mental health issues.

“What’s next? Armed churches? Armed movie theaters?” retorted Rep. James Langevin, D-R.I.

Rep. Louie Gohmert, a Tyler Republican who ran unsuccessfully for Texas attorney general earlier this year, accused Democrats of “desensitizing” people to murder by supporting abortion rights and said they’re ignoring social decay, violent video games and movies, mental illness, drug abuse and other root causes of gun violence.

“Maybe if we heard more prayers from leaders of this country instead of taking God’s name in vain, we wouldn’t have the mass killings,” he said.

“Tyrants disarm the people they intend to oppress,” warned Rep. Chip Roy, R-Austin.

Later in the debate, Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, D-Houston, brandished a poster with photos of the 21 Uvalde victims.

“Ask the mothers and fathers of these babies. The Second Amendment is not absolute,” she said, recalling that Ronald Reagan agreed there is no constitutional right to own an AK-47. “Where is your responsibility and courage?”

One Democrat after another accused Republicans of shirking their duty to protect children for fear of antagonizing the powerful gun lobby.

“Your political survival is totally insignificant compared to the survival of our children,” said Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Colleagues focused on the damage an assault-style weapon can do, and the youth of many

mass murderers.

“A person shot with an AR-15 looks like a grenade exploded in their body,” said Rep. Ted Lieu, D-Calif., a military veteran. “In Uvalde, Texas, little kids were decapitated and had their faces blown off. A person under 21 cannot buy a Budweiser. We should not let a person under 21 buy an AR-15 weapon of war.”

At one point, Rep. James McGovern, D-Mass., pointed out that Texas Parks and Wildlife bars duck hunters from using shotguns that hold more than three shells.

“In order to protect the duck population in Texas, shotguns cannot hold more than three shells,” he said. “Imagine if our Republican friends could muster the same courage to protect America’s children.”

The killers in Uvalde and Buffalo, N.Y., where 10 people were shot dead 10 days earlier, were 18. Gunmen who hadn’t yet turned 21 killed 13 people at Columbine High School in 1999 in Littleton, Colo.; 28 people at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn. in 2012; and 17 people at a Parkland, Fla., high school in 2018.

“Children — and that’s what they are — should not be buying AR-15s before they’re 21,” argued Rep. Steve Cohen, D-Tenn. “It’s been proven scientifically that the male brain has not developed to a certain point to be trusted at that time with ... weapons of war.”

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

National News

-

Feds Warn That Uvalde Massacre, Impending Abortion Ruling And Midterm Elections Could Spur More Acts Of Violence

By Jaden Edison

Texas Tribune

The Department of Homeland Security has issued a warning about a potential increase in extremist violence fueled by recent mass shootings, including the massacre in Uvalde last month; an expected Supreme Court ruling on abortion rights; and November’s midterm elections.

“In the coming months, we expect the threat environment to become more dynamic as several high-profile events could be exploited to justify acts of violence against a range of possible targets,” DHS said in a bulletin released early Wednesday.

The warning comes in the aftermath of an 18-year-old gunman killing 19 students and two teachers at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde. Just weeks before, a white supremacist in Buffalo, New York, walked into a neighborhood grocery store and killed 10 people, most of whom were older Black residents.

Officials said future targets of extremist violence could include more people of color and religious minorities, government personnel and members of the press. The department also said it is working with the FBI and other government agencies to share timely information and

provide “tools and resources” to federal, state, local and tribal entities.

In 2022, the U.S. has seen more than 250 mass shootings — events in which four or more people were killed — according to the Gun Violence Archive. Since the Uvalde massacre, the deadliest school shooting in the state’s history, Texas Republican officials have expressed little interest in implementing stricter gun laws. In April 2021, 59% of Texans surveyed in a poll by the University of Texas at Tyler and The Dallas Morning News said they disagreed that elected officials were doing enough to prevent mass shootings. Only 38% of respondents agreed.

At some point this month, the Supreme Court is expected to issue a decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, a ruling that could potentially overturn *Roe v. Wade* and leave Texans without abortion access.

The agency said the threat is expected to last until Nov. 30.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

U.S. House’s Jan. 6 Committee Will Begin Laying Out Evidence Thursday, But It’s Not Yet Known If Any Texans Will Testify

By Abby Livingston
Texas Tribune

The U.S. House select committee investigating the U.S. Capitol insurrection on Jan. 6, 2021, will begin publicly presenting evidence about the violent riot and its precipitating events at 7 p.m. Central time Thursday.

The select committee “will present previously unseen material documenting January 6th, receive witness testimony, preview additional hearings, and provide the American people a summary of its findings about the coordinated, multi-step effort to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election and prevent the transfer of power,” according to a news release.

The committee has yet to release a list of witnesses who will be testifying in the live hearings, so it remains unknown if any will go before the panel.

The committee has subpoenaed several allies of former President Donald Trump with Texas ties: Ali Alexander, who grew up in Tarrant County; Austin-based conspiracy theorist Alex Jones; longtime Dallas conservative fixture Katrina Pierson; retired Army Col. Phil Waldron of Central Texas; and former Trump fundraiser and native Austinite Caroline Wren.

No Texans serve on this panel, which is rare given the state’s House delegation is the second-largest in the country.

That the initial hearing will take place during prime-time television — rather than the typical middle-of-the-day nature of most Congressional hearings — indicates investigators’ hopes to make their presentation before as many Americans as possible.

Alexander, who led the “Stop the Steal” movement and attended the rally before the riot, testified before the committee behind closed doors in December. He also turned over thousands of communication records with Republican members of Congress and members of

Trump's inner circle.

Jones testified as well, repeatedly pleading the Fifth Amendment. In 2021, he said on his show he "was invited by the White House on about Jan. 3 to 'lead the march' to the Capitol, and that he paid nearly \$500,000, mostly donated, to help organize the event on the Ellipse," referring to the park south of the White House, according to The Washington Post.

Waldron, a retired U.S. Army colonel, spent the lead-up to the Capitol attack briefing lawmakers on how to overturn the 2020 election. The PowerPoint presentation outlining that plan eventually wound up in the possession of then-White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows.

Pierson testified before the committee, Politico reported earlier this year. On Jan. 6, 2021, Pierson was backstage at the morning rally and was involved with the lineup of speakers, according to The Washington Post. At one point, she became involved in a backstage dispute with Wren that escalated to the point that law enforcement was called to intervene.

Wren also testified, telling MSNBC in March that she had no choice on the matter.

"It was either to cooperate with them or to be held in contempt of Congress and face a \$100,000 fine and potentially a year in jail, which you've seen happen to a few individuals," she said.

Wren is a longtime GOP fundraiser and was closely aligned during the Trump reelection campaign with Kimberly Guilfoyle, a conservative activist and girlfriend of Donald Trump Jr.

Wren's name was listed on a National Park Service permit as a "VIP advisor" for the rally near the White House on the morning of the insurrection.

U.S. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy initially named U.S. Rep. Troy Nehls, a Richmond Republican and former law enforcement officer, to serve on the committee last summer. But after, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi objected to two non-Texas Republicans serving on the panel. She had no objection to Nehls, but McCarthy pulled the entire GOP slate from serving on the committee.

Instead, two frequent critics of former President Donald Trump, U.S. Reps. Liz Cheney of Wyoming and Adam Kinzinger of Illinois, joined with the Democrats to continue on with the investigation. Nehls unleashed criticism of the committee earlier this week.

"These January 6th Committee's hearings are a waste of Congress's time and the taxpayers' money," he wrote on Twitter earlier this week. "The truth is January 6th should never have happened.

"If the committee truly cared about January 6th, then they would investigate the negligent leadership of the Capitol Police ... instead of trying to injure President Trump ahead of 2024," he wrote on Twitter earlier this week. "Capitol Police had the intelligence and they refused to act on it, but that's not the SHAM committee's concern."

Nehls helped barricade a door to the House floor during the mob attack, but he also has a contentious history with the U.S. Capitol Police.

While no Texas members are serving on the panel, several current and former state officials have surfaced in parallel investigations.

U.S. Rep. Ronny Jackson, an Amarillo Republican, recently surfaced in a group text chain among the Oathkeepers, a paramilitary group that led the violence of that day. In that conversation, Oathkeepers discussed during the riot Jackson's location and need for their security. A Jackson spokesperson said the freshman congressman has never had contact with those involved in the text conversation.

U.S. Rep. Louie Gohmert, a Tyler Republican, made comments in the days leading up to the attack that law enforcement officials feared had the potential to encourage violence.

Former Texas Gov. Rick Perry's phone number surfaced in a tranche of texts to the phone of former Trump chief of staff Mark Meadows. In the days between Election Day and the television networks calling the 2020 election for President Joe Biden, messages sent from Perry's phone encouraged three state legislatures to ignore the will of the voters and send Trump electors to the Electoral College. A Perry spokesperson denied to CNN that Perry authored those texts.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

From: [OOG News Alerts](#)
Subject: Morning News Clips 6.24.22
Date: Friday, June 24, 2022 8:33:33 AM
Attachments: [Morning News Clips 6.24.22.pdf](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

Morning News Clips 6/24/2022

- [Texas Take](#)

- [Texas Tribune: The Brief](#)

- [Politico Playbook](#)

Greg Abbott News

Fort Worth Star-Telegram – Eleanor Dearman: [Fact Check: Texas Governor Greg Abbott, Beto O’Rourke On Gun Laws, Firearm Violence \[Web\]](#)

Houston Chronicle – Jeremy Wallace: [Gov. Greg Abbott Spending Early And Big On Spanish-Language Ads Against Beto O’Rourke \[Web\]](#)

Administration News

NBC News – Tyler Kingkade: [Biden Admin Proposes Sweeping Changes To Title IX To Undo Trump-Era Rules \[Web\]](#)

Fox Business – Paul Best: [Biden Administration Canceling \\$6 Billion In Student Loan Debt For 200,000 Borrower \[Web\]](#)

Fox News Channel – Adam Shaw: [Republicans Call For Biden To Push Mexican President To Combat Fentanyl Smuggling \[Web\]](#)

State News

Dallas Morning News – Philip Jankowski: [Law Enforcement Give Texas House Insight On Uvalde Shooting Response \[Web\]](#)

KSAT – Emily Schmalstieg: [Boerne Wins Three 2022 Texas Travel Awards \[Web\]](#)

Education

Dallas Morning News – Valeria Olivares: [Forney ISD Bans Hoodies, Dresses For Older Students In Updated Dress Code \[Web\]](#)

Energy

- *Dallas Morning News* – Aria Jones and Hojun Choi: [Fuel Demand In Texas Nears Pre-Pandemic Levels Despite Rising Prices \[Web\]](#)

Business/Economy

- *Federal Reserve Bank Of Dallas* – Laila Assanie and Keighton Hines: [Texas Economy Retains Strength Despite Weakening Outlooks \[Web\]](#)

Immigration/Border Security

- *KXAS* – Elliot Spagat: [Border Patrol Paroles Migrants To Avoid Massive Overcrowding \[Web\]](#)

- *Fox News Channel* – Bill Melugin: [Hundreds Of Migrants Seen Wandering On Side Of Road In Texas Amid Illegal Immigration Surge \[Web\]](#)

Military/Veterans

- *State of Reform* – Boram Kim: [Texas Conducts Awareness Campaign For Veterans Struggling With PTSD \[Web\]](#)

2nd Amendment Rights

- *Dallas Morning News* – Joseph Morton: [U.S. Senate OKs Landmark Gun Violence Bill In Wake Of Uvalde Massacre, House Vote Up Next \[Web\]](#)

Newsmax – Nicole Wells: [Texas AG Paxton To Newsmax: 'Passing A Red Flag Law Is Largely Ineffective' \[Web\]](#)

Criminal Justice

- *KERA News* – Paul Flahive: [Texas' Juvenile Justice Department Could Be On The Chopping Block \[Web\]](#)

National News

- *Bloomberg* – Eric Martin: [US Poised to Escalate Claim Mexico Violated Free-Trade Pact \[Web\]](#)

Houston Chronicle – Benjamin Wermund: [Texas Rep. Louie Gohmert Sought Pardon From Trump After Jan. 6 Riot, Committee Says](#) [Web]

Opinion/Editorial

-

Washington Examiner – Conn Carrol: [Biden Can't Make The Border Crisis Go Away By Ignoring It](#) [Web]

-

#

Greg Abbott News

Fact check: Texas Governor Greg Abbott, Beto O’Rourke On Gun Laws, Firearm Violence

By Eleanor Dearman

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and Democratic nominee for governor Beto O’Rourke are sharing their plans to address gun violence following the shooting at a Uvalde elementary school. As they’ve responded, both candidates have made statements about gun laws and gun violence that have made us wonder: Is that true?

Responding to school shootings is likely be a focus of the state in the months to come, including on the campaign trail for governor as the November general election nears. Here are a few of the statements Abbott and O’Rourke have made so far about guns and gun violence in the state.

ABBOTT: TEXAS GUN LAWS NOT RELATED TO UVALDE SHOOTING

“Let’s be clear about one thing, none of the laws that I signed this past session had any intersection with this crime at all. No law that I signed allowed him to get a gun — the gun that he did get.” — May 27 news conference in Uvalde True.

None of the bills signed by Abbott in 2021 appeared to have affected the gunman's ability to purchase the rifle used in the shooting, according to a Star-Telegram review of gun laws passed.

The state's permitless carry law, one of two dozen laws Abbott signed related to weapons, wasn't relevant in this particular case. Texans have long been able to buy long guns at 18 and carry them openly. The legal age to buy a handgun in Texas is generally 21. The Legislature also rejected proposed laws that may have made it harder for the gunman to access a firearm. For instance, a bill filed by Rep. Lina Ortega would have raised the age to buy an assault-style firearm to 21. The bill didn't get a committee hearing.

ABBOTT: 18-YEAR-OLDS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ABLE TO BUY LONG GUNS

"It's my understanding that ever since Texas has been a state, an 18-year-old has had the ability to buy a long gun, a rifle, and since that time it seems like it's only been in the past decade or two that we've had school shootings." — May 27 news conference in Uvalde Get unlimited digital access

True and false: The 18-year-old age limit on long gun purchases has been in place since 1973. Before that, there wasn't an age restriction on buying long guns, according to historic Texas laws cited by Abbott's office and an interview with historian Brennan Rivas, who studies the state's gun laws. Texas did prohibit the selling of pistols to minors, per a 1897 law. The landscape of gun technology has changed. "When we talk about rifles throughout most of American history, we're not talking about AR-15s," Rivas said. "We're talking about a traditional weapon that, up until these assault-type weapons, was made out of wood and metal. ... We're talking about weapons that were relatively slow to shoot. Heavy and cumbersome to wield." School shootings have long been a part of American history.

The first documented school shooting at a primary or secondary school in the U.S. was in Louisville on Nov. 2, 1853, when a teacher was shot at a schoolhouse, according to the Washington Post. The first known mass shooting involving students was in St. Mary's Parochial School in Newburgh, New York, in April 1891, according to K-12 Academics. A shooting at the University of Texas at Austin in August 1966, when a gunman opened fire from the UT tower, is one of the most well-known modern mass shootings.

ABBOTT: GUNMAN BROKE LAW BEFORE PULLING TRIGGER

"In Uvalde, the gunman committed a felony under Texas law before he even pulled the trigger. It's a felony to possess a firearm on school premises, but that did not stop him." — Prerecorded remarks at the NRA convention on May 27 True.

It's generally a third-degree felony to have a firearm on "physical premises of a school or educational institution, any grounds or building on which an activity sponsored by a school or educational institution is being conducted." It's a class B misdemeanor to "display a firearm or other deadly weapon in a public place in a manner calculated to alarm." It's also a class C misdemeanor to trespass on school grounds.

O'ROUKE: SIX MAJOR MASS SHOOTINGS DURING ABBOTT'S TENURE While Abbott was governor, there have been "six major mass shootings in the state of Texas." — Dallas town hall on June 1. True.

Groups that track mass shootings define “mass shootings” different ways. O’Rourke used a article that relies on a Mother Jones database defining a mass shooting as single attack in which three or more victims were killed in a public place. The mass shootings since Abbott took office in 2015: Robb Elementary School shooting in Uvalde on May 24 Midland-Odessa shooting spree on Aug. 31, 2019 El Paso Walmart shooting on Aug. 3, 2019 Santa Fe High School shooting on May 18, 2018 First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs shooting on Nov. 5, 2017 Shooting of Dallas police officers on July 7, 2016 O’ROURKE: THERE HAVE BEEN 21 SCHOOL

SHOOTINGS IN TEXAS THIS YEAR “There were 21 school shootings in the state of Texas in the year 2022, thus far on the first date of June.” — Dallas town hall on June 1 False:

The Gun Violence Archive recorded four school shootings at secondary and elementary schools as of June 1. The Gun Violence Archive defines a school shooting as “an incident with death or injury that occurs on school property when students, faculty and/or staff are on the premises.” The definition includes any instance of gunfire where someone was shot or killed, even if it was unintentional. O’ROURKE: GUN VIOLENCE

IS LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH FOR KIDS, TEENS

“Gun violence is now the leading cause of death in the state of Texas for kids and teens” — Austin town hall on June 3 True: According to the CDC, there were 483 firearm-related deaths in Texas in 2020 for kids and teenagers ages 1 through 19, the most recent figures available. The next leading cause of death was motor vehicle traffic incidents.

O’ROURKE: TEXAS CAN’T INTERVENE IF SOMEONE SAYS THEY’RE PLANNING ATTACK

Texas has no red flag law or extreme risk protective order option, then continues “if someone is saying that they are going to kill somebody, that they have a dream of murdering their classmates, there is nothing right now legally that we can do to intervene.” — Austin rally on June 1 True and False: Texas does not have what’s often called a “red flag” law, which generally allows a family member or law enforcement to petition a court to temporarily have a person’s guns removed if they’re determined to be a threat to themselves or others. There are other ways to intervene if someone meets the threshold for psychiatric commitment or a criminal conviction, said Ari Freilich, the state policy director for Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, but to meet either requires a lot of evidence.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Gov. Greg Abbott Spending Early And Big On Spanish-Language Ads Against Beto O’Rourke

By Jeremy Wallace
Houston Chronicle

Gov. Greg Abbott’s campaign is already moving to lock down nearly \$3 million of mostly Spanish-language campaign ads aimed at winning over Hispanic voters.

The spending is a continuation of Abbott’s repeated declaration that he aims to increase his vote share among Hispanic voters following a string of GOP successes along the Texas

border.

Former President Donald Trump in 2020 won some counties along the Texas border that hadn't voted Republican in 100 years; a Republican woman from Hidalgo County, Mayra Flores, just won a congressional seat long held by Democrats in a special election; and a high-profile Democrat in the Texas Legislature, Ryan Guillen, recently switched his party become a Republican.

"Republicans have made historic gains in Hispanic majority districts across the Lone Star State over the last year, and this media pre-buy is going to continue that momentum," Abbott said.

Abbott is facing Democrat Beto O'Rourke in the November general election as he seeks a third term as governor.

Abbott has said in the past he's won about 45 percent of the Hispanic vote in past elections, but this year is determined to get over 50 percent of that vote.

"I will get more than half of the Hispanic vote," Abbott said in a campaign speech in San Antonio in April.

Public polling shows that could be a stretch. A Quinnipiac University poll released last week showed Abbott leading O'Rourke in the race for governor by 5 percentage points, but O'Rourke was winning 50 percent of Hispanic voters, compared to 41 percent for Abbott.

Abbott has honed his message to Texas Latinos around the state's booming job market, warning that Democratic policies threaten the high-paying oil industry.

The new ads won't just be aimed at Texas border communities this fall. Abbott's campaign intends to put the money also into Houston, San Antonio and other areas aimed at Hispanic communities.

The spending is expected to include broadcast, cable, radio and digital platforms.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Administration News

-
Biden Admin Proposes Sweeping Changes To Title IX To Undo Trump-Era Rules By
Tyler Kingkade
NBC News

The Biden administration proposed sweeping changes Thursday to federal rules under the gender equity law Title IX that would revoke Trump administration mandates surrounding sexual misconduct that advocates for assault survivors said discriminated against victims.

The new regulation would also extend Title IX's prohibition on discrimination based on sex to sexual orientation and gender identity, giving landmark protections to transgender students. The current Title IX regulation does not address the rights of transgender students.

The proposed rules are likely to kick off a heated battle over the obligations of schools to address sexual misconduct, the balance between the rights of victims and accused students, and the rights of transgender students.

"Our proposed changes would fully protect students from all forms of sex discrimination, instead of limiting some protections to sexual harassment alone, and make clear those protections include discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity," Education Secretary Miguel Cardona told reporters Thursday.

The proposed rules would keep some Trump-era mandates, such as provisions ordering schools to presume accused students to be innocent until grievance procedures end and to continue to permit informal resolutions of sexual misconduct complaints if both accuser and the accused agree.

They would also allow schools to use a clear-and-convincing-evidence standard of proof — which generally means about 75 percent certain — to determine whether accused students violated sexual misconduct rules, but only if the schools also use it in other discrimination cases, like those involving racial harassment. Otherwise, schools must use the preponderance-of-the-evidence standard, or about 51 percent certain, the same threshold used in most civil lawsuits.

The proposal departs from the current regulation in a number of ways, however, including that live hearings would no longer be required in college sexual misconduct cases, cross-examination would not be required in hearings, and schools would be allowed to investigate and punish assaults that take place off-campus. The proposed rules would also allow investigators to decide the outcomes of cases but require that all Title IX coordinators, investigators and decision-makers not have conflicts of interest or biases for or against complainants or respondents.

The Biden administration's proposal would also allow schools to investigate and sanction sexual misconduct without formal complaints.

The public will be able to submit comments on the proposal for the next 60 days. The Education Department will then need to address each point in writing before the regulation can be finalized. The process is likely to take several months, if not longer, to finalize.

But if Republicans retake majorities in the House and the Senate, lawmakers could use the Congressional Review Act to vote within 60 legislative days to overturn major regulations issued by federal agencies.

"We're always concerned that students rights are fully protected in school every day, and so we are moving as quickly as we can to make sure that those rights are fully protected," a senior department official said.

Title IX, an element of the Education Amendments of 1972, prohibits discrimination based on sex in any school that takes federal funding — which is nearly all of them. Federal courts have held that the law requires schools to address sexual misconduct allegations.

The Obama administration ramped up enforcement of Title IX in response to an increase in activism from college sexual assault survivors who said schools were giving slap-on-the-wrist

punishments to assailants and failing to support victims.

Conservative organizations, civil liberties groups and some law professors objected to the policies, complaining that they failed to safeguard due process in campus investigations.

The Trump administration subsequently spent much of its tenure building a Title IX regulation, implemented in 2020, that prescribed steps schools must take in responding to sexual assault allegations and tightened the definition of sexual harassment.

The regulation said schools were not allowed to open Title IX cases if alleged assaults happened off-campus, required colleges to hold hearings to determine the guilt of accused students and limited what could be considered in tribunals, among many other provisions. The rules were overwhelmingly opposed by sexual assault survivor advocacy groups, civil rights organizations and trade groups for K-12 schools and colleges.

The Biden administration has said it is using the 2020 Supreme Court decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County*, which held that employees cannot be discriminated against in workplaces because they are gay or transgender, to guide its approach to LGBTQ rights in education settings.

Cementing discrimination against transgender students as a violation of Title IX has drawn in a host of new activist groups, many of which sprouted up over the past two years in a wave of battles within K-12 schools over race and gender.

The Human Rights Campaign, an advocacy group for LGBTQ people, said including sexual orientation and gender identity in Thursday's proposed regulation is a "good first step" toward protecting a "vulnerable population that is all too often preyed upon."

"It is especially important, given the attacks on transgender youth across the country," Sarah Warbelow, the Human Rights Campaign's legal director, said in a statement.

In April, 27 conservative activist groups sent a letter to Cardona expressing concern that the Education Department's plans for new Title IX regulations would erode due process protections for accused students and that extending protections for gender identity "would rob girls and women of equal athletic opportunities."

The proposed regulation would not address who is allowed to join male or female athletic teams. A senior Education Department official said the department expects to propose separate rules regarding athletics, but the official could not say when.

Cardona said, "The department recognizes that standards for students participating in male and female athletic teams are evolving in real time."

Over 200 civil rights groups sent their own letter this month urging the Education Department to make good on the administration's promise to issue new Title IX rules, arguing that sexual assault survivors and LGBTQ and pregnant students are in dire need of protection and that the current regulation has deterred students from reporting abuse allegations.

"There are students who won't go through the process, who are too afraid to go through the process, who don't trust the process," said Adele Kimmel, a victims' rights attorney for the

nonprofit group Public Justice, one of the groups to sign the letter.

The existing regulation imposed by the Trump administration has been a “nightmare” for schools to adhere to, as well, said Jackie Wernz, an Illinois-based attorney who advises schools on civil rights laws and federal mandates. The requirements for misconduct investigations are overly prescriptive, she said, and they often conflict with state laws and union agreements.

“It puts schools in a Catch-22, in that they have to figure out which law they want to violate,” Wernz said.

The Trump administration also scrapped a requirement that Title IX cases be resolved within 60 days, mandating instead that they be completed in a reasonable amount of time. The new proposal would keep the same standard but add that schools must establish reasonably prompt time frames for major stages of grievance procedures.

Elizabeth Abdnour, a Michigan-based attorney who represents students in Title IX cases, said she has had many instances in which schools took more than a year to resolve investigations.

“There’s no way to challenge that when the rule just says the timeline has to be reasonable,” Abdnour said.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Biden Administration Canceling \$6 Billion In Student Loan Debt For 200,000 Borrower

By Paul Best

Fox Business

The Biden administration reached a deal this week to cancel \$6 billion in federal student loan debt for about 200,000 borrowers who attended mostly for-profit colleges.

The agreement covers more than 150 schools, including DeVry University, the University of Phoenix, and the recently defunct ITT Technical Institute.

Another 68,000 borrowers who did not attend eligible colleges will have their applications for relief fast tracked under the deal.

The lawsuit was originally filed in 2019 and argued that the Department of Education intentionally stalled the borrower defense process, which is how people apply for relief if they believe a college they attended made false advertising claims.

Eileen Connor, the director of the Project on Predatory Student Lending, which represented the plaintiffs, celebrated the "momentous proposed settlement" on Thursday.

"It will not only help secure billions of dollars in debt cancellation for defrauded students, but charts a borrower defense process that is fair, just, and efficient for future borrowers," she said in a statement.

A hearing for a judge to give the final sign-off on the deal is scheduled for July 28.

The deal comes weeks after the Biden administration announced that it would cancel about \$5.8 billion in debt for anyone who attended a Corinthian School.

Since the first days of the Biden administration, the progressive wing of the Democratic Party has been pushing the president to cancel \$50,000 of student loan debt for every borrower.

Biden has so far resisted those calls, but the Washington Post reported last month that the White House is considering canceling up to \$10,000 in student debt for every borrower who makes less than \$150,000 annually, or \$300,000 combined for married couples.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Republicans Call For Biden To Push Mexican President To Combat Fentanyl Smuggling

By Adam Shaw

Fox News Channel

With Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador heading to the White House next month to meet with President Biden, Republicans are calling for combating the flow of fentanyl into the United States to be at the top of the agenda.

Lopez Obrador skipped the Summit of the Americas earlier this month, saying instead he will travel to the White House in July to meet with President Biden.

Republicans think fentanyl should be Biden's first topic of conversation.

"If I were looking at an agenda that I think would be appropriate for that meeting, fentanyl would be at the very top of the list," Sen. Bill Hagerty, R-Tenn., said in an interview with Fox News Digital. "Human trafficking would come right after that — border security and national security issues that we share with Mexico."

Republicans are calling on President Biden to push the president of Mexico on the issue of cartels bringing fentanyl into the U.S. when the two meet next month.

Republicans are calling on President Biden to push the president of Mexico on the issue of cartels bringing fentanyl into the U.S. when the two meet next month. (AP/Reuters)

"It would be the first thing I would bring up," added Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas. "And I wouldn't be talking about much else besides, 'What are you going to do for the United States of America with respect to knocking the knees out from under cartels and stopping the flow of, not just fentanyl, but the illegal traffic and human traffic coming into the United States, which is emboldening the cartels and allowing them to bring fentanyl in?' We have dead Americans directly as a consequence of what Mexico is allowing [the cartels] to do."

Seizures at the southern border of the drug, which is 50-100 times more potent than morphine and can be fatal in tiny amounts, have soared in recent years. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) seized 10,586 pounds of the drug in FY 2021. That is up from 4,558 pounds seized in FY 2020 and 2,633 pounds seized in FY 2019.

As of May, the CBP has seized more than 7,000 lbs of the drug in fiscal 2022, suggesting it is on track to exceed last year's massive numbers. While the seizures of the drug reflect success

in apprehending the drug by agents, it also raises the possibility that — amid a massive surge in activity at the border since President Biden took office — a large amount is also getting past agents.

While it's unclear how much fentanyl is getting into the U.S., the number of deaths related to the drug is increasing. The Drug Enforcement Administration warned earlier this year of a "nationwide spike" in fentanyl-related overdoses.

The agency cited Centers for Disease Control and Prevention statistics that, in a 12-month period ending in October, there were more than 105,000 drug overdoses, 66% of which were related to fentanyl and other synthetic opioids.

"Fentanyl is killing Americans at an unprecedented rate," DEA Administrator Anne Milgram said in a statement.

Officials say the drug, which often kills by being laced into another drug without the user knowing, is now primarily brought in through the land border with Mexico after being produced with precursors from China.

However, so far this year, the topic does not appear to have been raised in talks between President Biden and the Mexican leader. The pair spoke virtually in April, and it did not come up then, according to a readout of the call, which said supply chains, trade, infrastructure and tools to manage "regional migration surges" were all on the agenda.

A direct reference to either cartels of drug smuggling was missing from the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration at the Summit of the Americas earlier this month. In related announced commitments, which included a slew of funding and migration-related commitments by the U.S., there was no Mexican commitment to cracking down on the cartels or smuggling of fentanyl into the U.S.

Fox News Digital reached out to the White House about whether the topic will come up in the July meeting but did not receive a response.

Rep. John Katko, the ranking member on the House Homeland Security Committee, told Fox News Digital in a statement that the U.S. "will not get a handle on the fentanyl pouring into the country unless Mexico comes to the table."

"Right now, China is selling precursor chemicals and pill presses to the Mexican cartels who are making synthetic opioids in droves, while raking in millions of dollars a month," he said. "This is why I am calling on President Biden to address this public health emergency when he meets (Lopez Obrador) at the White House next month.

Katko noted Mexico's involvement in the North American Drug Dialogue meeting, which he called a "critical venue for collaboration and dialogue on how to address the significant trafficking of drugs across the Mexico border."

"I'd advise President Biden to highlight how Mexico's involvement would be mutually beneficial to both countries," he said. "The volatility caused by the cartels on the Mexico side of the border will have long-term, detrimental impacts on the stability of Mexico as a country. Additionally, Mexico must do more to seal its southern border and stop making it so easy for

migrants to travel through their country and to the U.S. southern border."

Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody, who has been sounding the alarm about the effects of fentanyl in the Sunshine State, also told Fox News Digital that Biden should use the meeting to push Lopez Obrador for assistance.

"While President Biden will rarely mention fentanyl — because then he would have to acknowledge his abject failure to secure the U.S.-Mexico border as well as the fact that his policies are emboldening the violent drug cartels smuggling record amounts of opioids into our country — he should at least take advantage of this opportunity to demand assistance from President Obrador in dismantling the cartels and snuffing out the synthetic opioid labs in his country that are killing hundreds of Americans, even children, every day," Moody said.

Hagerty said law enforcement officials in Tennessee are telling him that they are seeing an increased number of overdoses and deaths related to fentanyl, and he accused the administration of wanting to ignore the problem entirely.

"I've been trying to raise it constantly, and I have never heard the word fentanyl come from Joe Biden's mouth. He and the White House want to ignore one of the biggest catastrophes associated with the collapse of our southern border," he said, calling the border situation "the greatest national security crisis that faces us today."

Republicans have proposed a number of measures that the U.S. can take to push back against the cartels. Roy has been calling for years for both the Biden and Trump administrations to put the cartels on the Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) list.

Rep. Lauren Boebert, R-Colo., and Rep. Lance Gooden, R-Texas, have both introduced bills to declare fentanyl a weapon of mass destruction.

Roy said that designating the cartels as FTOs would achieve multiple goals.

"One, to elevate them in the consciousness of the American people that they're our enemy, and they need to be destroyed," Roy said. "Two, to give our law enforcement personnel and our government the tools and the power that is necessary to cut off their finances, to then go after American people who are providing them material support — if you're an American citizen helping a cartel member, then you need to go to jail — and do the things that are necessary to knock their knees out from under them."

Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, has called for putting the drug cartels on the Foreign Terrorist Organizations list.

Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, has called for putting the drug cartels on the Foreign Terrorist Organizations list. (Tom Williams/CQ-Roll Call, Inc)

Roy said the U.S. needs to stop "coddling" Mexico, accusing officials of being "on pins and needles" with their neighbors to the south. His message to Mexico was blunt: "How about you get your s--- together and stop letting cartels run your country?"

Mexico has faced criticism for its policies regarding cartels and drug smuggling from the U.S. Earlier this year, the bipartisan Commission on Combating Synthetic Opioid Trafficking warned that the policies of the Mexican government have not been successful in tackling the

challenge of fentanyl trafficking, which it says has shown to be a more profitable alternative than heroin for Mexican traffickers.

"The Mexican government, in part out of self-preservation and in part because the trafficking problem transcends current law enforcement capacity, recently adopted a 'hugs not bullets' approach to managing the transnational criminal groups," the report said. "However, such approaches have not been able to address trafficking issues, and further efforts will be needed."

However, Hagerty, who has held meetings with top officials in the region, told Fox that the Mexicans are also frustrated by the situation, with the foreign minister telling Hagerty that the border crisis was making Mexico weaker and the cartels stronger.

"They've got now a massive security problem at their southern border. They have people coming through in caravans. They don't know who they are," he said. "Foreign Minister Ebrard was very clear with me that this situation has been precipitated by our White House, has also precipitated a massive national security problem for them. They don't like it. And, every day, they're getting weaker in terms of their relative ability to deal with the cartels."

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

State News

-

Law Enforcement Give Texas House Insight On Uvalde Shooting Response

By Philip Jankowski

Dallas Morning News

A joint committee in the Texas House heard hours of testimony from law enforcement officials Thursday with expert insight into mistakes made in responding to the Uvalde school shooting, with one lawman saying "police officers should have taken bullets and not the children."

The police response to the shooting has remained under fire with several law enforcement leaders in Texas publicly stating that the Uvalde schools' police chief's decision to hold police back from confronting the shooter cost lives.

Testimony from police chiefs and sheriffs comes amid a week of hearings at the Capitol regarding the May 24 Robb Elementary School shooting that left 19 children and two teachers dead.

"That day in Uvalde, the law enforcement community failed you," said North Richland Hills Police Chief Jimmy Perdue, president of the Texas Police Chiefs Association. "We must do better. I'm sorry that our failure caused the incident to occur the way it did."

In the aftermath, Uvalde Independent School District Police Chief Pete Arredondo has been considered the officer who was in charge of the police response to the shooting. Arredondo was one of the first officers at the scene, entering Robb Elementary School three minutes after the shooter entered the west entrance of the school.

Perdue and other police chiefs, including San Marcos police Chief Stan Standridge, an

instructor at active shooter training center ALERRT at Texas State University, described the fluid nature of command in an active threat situation.

They said scene command is generally headed by the first officer on scene, with deference given to the local jurisdiction. Arredondo was one of 11 officers in the school in the early stages of the attack and was the ranking officer. At the instant of entering the school, the focus should have been on isolating, distracting and neutralizing the threat, Standridge said.

“At some point somebody has to pump the brakes outside and say, ‘Headquarters, I’m assuming forward command. I need fire and EMS and I need the superintendent now,’” Standridge said. “That didn’t happen.”

Uvalde schools Superintendent Hal Harrell placed Arredondo on administrative leave Wednesday. Arredondo has been under pressure to resign from the school district police department and to step down from the Uvalde City Council, which he was elected to on May 7.

The police chiefs and sheriffs who testified before a joint committee meeting of the House Homeland Security and Public Safety Committee and the Youth Health and Safety, Select Committee acknowledged the breakdown in the command response to the Uvalde school shooting.

“Bottom line is, there is no doubt the Sheriff’s Association believes that police officers should have taken bullets and not the children,” said Chambers County Sheriff Brian Hawthorne, legislative chairman for the Sheriffs’ Association of Texas. “There is a failure in what took place.”

House Speaker Dade Phelan ordered the joint committee to examine the shooting at the request of Gov. Greg Abbott. Phelan has also convened a three-person panel investigating the shooting behind closed doors.

The hearing opened with testimony from Jasmine Cazares, who will be a senior at Uvalde High School next year. Cazares’ sister Jacklyn Jaylen Cazares, 9, and cousin of Annabell Guadalupe Rodriguez, 10, were killed in the May 24 shooting.

“There should be no reason this murderer should have had access to a firearm,” Cazares said. “Days after turning 18, he bought an AR-15, hundreds of rounds of ammunition.”

Cazares said more background checks are needed to protect communities like Uvalde and prevent another massacre.

“I’m here to honor Jackie, her friends, their families, my family and my community,” she said. “You can honor them too by passing gun safety legislation.”

Cazares’ testimony was contrasted by Suzanna Hupp, a former member of the Texas House whose parents were killed in the 1991 mass shooting at the Luby’s cafeteria in Killeen. Hupp told the committee that the Legislature should do away with gun-free zones.

“Get rid of gun-free zones,” she said. “Let teachers protect themselves.”

Hupp was instrumental in the passage of laws permitting concealed carry in Texas and has remained an advocate of the Second Amendment.

In Texas, unauthorized individuals can be charged with a crime for carrying a firearm on a K-12 school campus. Other places where it is a crime to carry a firearm include bars, jails, hospitals and most sporting events.

Federal restrictions on firearms in schools are also in place.

Democrats have been leading calls for new gun restrictions in the wake of the Uvalde massacre. On Thursday, the House Democratic Caucus sent a letter to Abbott demanding the governor to call a special session.

“The people of Texas want action and want it now,” House Democratic Caucus Chair Chris Turner, D-Grand Prairie, said. “Gov. Abbott is the only person who has the power to deliver on immediate action.

Abbott spokeswoman Renae Eze said the governor has taken immediate action through executive orders, directives to the Texas Education Agency and disaster declarations. Eze said the Legislature is working through the special committees to find solutions.

“These House Democrats should work with their colleagues, rather than holding press conferences to promote themselves,” Eze said in an email statement.

Democrats have been calling for Texas to raise the age of purchase of semi-automatic rifles like the AR-15 used in the shooting from 18 to 21. Democrats have also called for red flag laws, something the governor considered in the aftermath of Santa Fe High School shooting in 2018.

However, most of the emphasis from Republicans has been a focus on police best practices and hardening schools.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Boerne Wins Three 2022 Texas Travel Awards

By Emily Schmalstieg

KSAT

Three local Boerne businesses were awarded titles at the 2022 Texas Travel Awards.

The Texas travel awards, meant to highlight the top travel attractions across the state, are given every year by Open Sky Media, the umbrella corporation of San Antonio Magazine, Austin Monthly, and Texas Music Magazine.

The awarded businesses were Dickens on Main, a holiday village market, which won best community event. Art al Fresco, a walkable art gallery incorporated throughout the city, won the Best Public Art title. The Hill Country Mile, which hosts many shops and restaurants, won Best Shopping District.

“We are delighted that Boerne has been recognized in these categories. It’s really great to see

the efforts of the City, Visit Boerne, and our local business owners being recognized at the state level,” said Danny Zinche, Assistant City Manager.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Education

-

Forney ISD Bans Hoodies, Dresses For Older Students In Updated Dress Code

By Valeria Olivares

Dallas Morning News

Forney ISD has banned all hooded clothing across its 18 schools along with dresses and skirts among its older students.

The district, located about 25 miles east of Dallas, will also prohibit t-shirts and denim pants, among other specifications for next school year. Skirts can only be worn by students in prekindergarten through fourth grade.

The dress code updates are part of the district’s push to impart “workforce skills” for the students’ future, FISD Superintendent Justin Terry said in a video. But some students are already pushing back against the new guidelines.

The district currently has about 15,000 students enrolled, spokesperson Kristin Zastoupil said.

In the video, Terry said officials were excited to “reset this bar” with the help of parents, community members and others “as we work together to take our schools, our classrooms, back for the future of our kids to have a safe, enjoyable and exciting learning environment.”

A petition created this week against the dress code has already garnered more than 3,400 signatures, asking people to “join the fight against these unfair policies.”

“I feel all female students are being denied the freedom to dress as young ladies,” one petitioner wrote.

In the same district video announcing the changes, a young student shares how she wants to be a teacher when she grows up.

“Every profession has a dress code, whether it’s scrubs, a welding helmet or a chef’s apron,” the girl said. “The way I dress plays an important role in professionalism and safety, both in the classroom and on the job site.”

Dress codes are implemented to “improve student self-esteem, bridge socio-economic differences among students, and promote positive behavior, thereby enhancing school safety and improving the learning environment,” according to the district’s website.

Students who don’t follow the dress code can face on-campus suspension for the remainder of the day, until the issue is corrected or until a parent or designated adult brings them an acceptable change of clothes to school.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Energy

Fuel Demand In Texas Nears Pre-Pandemic Levels Despite Rising Prices

By Aria Jones and Hojun Choi

Dallas Morning News

Even as gasoline prices reach record highs in Texas and across the country, data show that demand for the fuel is rising quickly to meet pre-pandemic levels.

Economists don't see the price of fuel dropping any time soon, with demand rising faster than supply. There's no quick fix, even the president's idea to stop collecting federal fuel taxes won't likely have a lasting effect. And as Texans reel from the price surge, problems can be dire for those who are already struggling financially.

"I am stressed," said Jasmine Camarena, a carhop at Keller's Drive-In on Northwest Highway, who was taking orders next to hot engines in nearly 100-degree heat on Thursday. She goes to work hoping she'll make enough tips to get back home to Arlington. "I don't know what to do because I used to be fine," she said.

Demand for fuel in Texas has fully recovered from the pandemic lows. Last year, the state collected \$2.7 billion from the 20-cents-per-gallon fuel tax on gasoline, nearly at the 2019 level of \$2.8 billion. And diesel taxes show that Texans are consuming more gallons, with the state collecting \$983 million in 2021, up from \$952 million in 2019. And so far this year, from January to May, the state has collected even more revenue from fuel taxes than it did during the same period last year.

And that's despite a significant rise in fuel prices. Back in 2019, regular gasoline cost about \$2.50 per gallon in the U.S., according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. The regular retail conventional gasoline price for May this year was \$4.076 per gallon.

Economist Bernard Weinstein attributed the high demand to population growth in the state, and added that the demand is likely to continue to grow as more people move to Texas.

"I think what may have surprised people is how quickly demand recovered," Weinstein said. "But that's a reflection of how quickly the economy recovered from the pandemic."

Demand for transportation fuel, even if the economy goes through a mild recession, is not likely to drop, Weinstein said.

"If we had like 8 percent or 10 percent unemployment rate like after when COVID first hit, yes — that would depress demand," he said. "But if we're talking about a mild recession, I don't think we're going to see much of a drop in transportation fuel consumption, at least not in the state of Texas."

If Congress approves a three-month federal fuel tax suspension, as proposed by the Biden Administration, consumers would see a slight drop in price at the gas pumps. But that decrease would be short-lived and might make the problem worse, according to Bruce Bullock, director

of the Maguire Energy Institute at Southern Methodist University.

“I think it would be kind of an about one-month sugar high,” Bullock said. “You feel great in the sense that you’ve got about 20 cents less at the pump, but it wouldn’t be too long before the impacts of that would dissolve.”

He added: “This federal tax holiday that they’re talking about would be a monumental mistake.”

Lowering the price (18.4 cents per gallon for regular and 24.4 cents per gallon for diesel) would likely increase demand, triggering prices to rise again in a short amount of time. Plus, the fuel tax suspension would be similar to a tax cut, and while it would put more money into the economy, it could contribute to more inflation, he said.

“It’s fiscal policy and it increases overall demand in the economy, which is what has got us into this inflationary cycle that we’re in now, so it’s likely to contribute to it,” he said.

He said he thinks the proposed tax suspension is largely politically driven.

“It’s merely a matter of trying to make it look like they’re doing something about it, when in reality the solutions are longer term,” Bullock said.

Stress on everyday consumers

Douglas Davis was consolidating his errands Thursday morning, stopping by the post office and grocery store near Casa Linda. He said that’s how he’s dealing with the high gas prices.

“I’m not happy, but I understand why they’re high,” Davis said. “People complain about it, but it’s a whole lot of effort to get a gallon of gas out of the ground compared to a gallon of milk.”

Davis said blame for the price falls on a number of people, including Congress and oil companies.

“Everybody tries to blame the president, but it’s not just one guy’s problem,” Davis said.

Audra Chavis was stopping by the post office and said she has two cars in her household. She said the gas prices her family is facing to fill up are frustrating.

If prices continue to rise, she said her family may have to make some concessions.

“Anything that the government can do to help us would definitely be beneficial now, just because the price of everything is going up,” Chavis said. “It does affect families and you have to decide what’s important to you.”

Tillie Burgin, executive director of Mission Arlington, a nonprofit that offers services and resources to those who are struggling financially, said the group has seen an increase in the number of people seeking help with fuel and transportation. Some of the people the organization works with are in the middle of trying to find a job, or starting a new one. Transportation could make the difference between living out of their cars or finding a more permanent living situation, Burgin said.

Mission Arlington can sometimes help with gift cards so people can fill their tanks, and the nonprofit offers bicycles so people can go to work. In the past couple months, the nonprofit has given out two to three bicycles a day. Last year they only provided one to two bicycles per week.

“On occasions, we’ll help by taking somebody down and putting gas in their car, but it’s short lived because they’re going to come right back to the same situation,” she said.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Business/Economy

Texas Economy Retains Strength Despite Weakening Outlooks

By Laila Assanie and Keighton Hines
Federal Reserve Bank Of Dallas

Texas’ economic expansion remained solid in May, though the pace of growth decelerated. Employment gains continued to be robust. Manufacturing output growth accelerated, but revenue growth in services slowed. Enduring supply-chain disruptions and labor shortages are still pushing up input costs. Firms, particularly in the service sector, noted a diminished ability to pass on higher costs to customers.

Conditions in the housing market weakened notably, with home sales falling, though prices remained at record highs. Outlook optimism waned and uncertainty spiked amid expectations of an impending slowdown, with persistent inflation and higher interest rates.

Texas employment expanded an annualized 6.2 percent in May, greater than April’s 5.2 percent increase and above the U.S. rate of 3.1 percent. Job growth was mostly broad based, apart from the oil and gas and education and health services sectors. The Texas unemployment rate dipped to 4.2 percent in May but remained above the U.S. figure (3.6 percent), in part due to stronger labor force growth in the state.

Year to date through May, Texas payrolls increased an annualized 5.6 percent (298,400 jobs), with gains in nearly all sectors outpacing those in the U.S. (Chart 1). Over the five-month period, growth was strongest in the energy sector (19.1 percent), buoyed by high oil and gas prices.

Chart 1: Texas Job Growth in January Exceeds State's 2 Percent Long-Run Average

Expansion in the state’s two largest employment sectors—trade, transportation and utilities, and professional and business services—was vigorous, exceeding 5.0 percent. The sectors together account for more than a third of the state’s employment. The Dallas Fed forecast is for 4.0 percent Texas job growth in 2022, suggesting that the rate of expansion will slow in coming months from its current robust pace.

The labor market remains tight. Texas firms continue to report difficulty hiring, and job postings remain well above prepandemic levels. However, Texas initial claims for unemployment insurance have gradually risen since early April and, as of the week ended

June 11, had largely returned to levels last seen in early March 2020 at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Growth in Services Decelerates; Manufacturing Mixed

Results from the Dallas Fed's Texas Business Outlook Surveys (TBOS) indicate that expansion in the state's service sector slowed notably in May. Factory output growth strengthened while demand eased. The new orders and growth rate of orders indexes fell to two-year lows, indicating slowing production expansion ahead.

In May, the sentiment-based general business activity index for manufacturing turned negative for the first time since July 2020. The service sector index dropped to a near-zero reading, meaning service firms were roughly split in their evaluation of whether economic activity deteriorated or improved over the past month. Outlooks weakened for both sectors, uncertainty rose and expectations for production and revenue expansion six months ahead (year-end 2022) were less optimistic.

Supply-Chain Bottlenecks Endure

Supply-chain challenges remain widespread, especially among firms sourcing internationally, in part due to added stress from the Ukraine–Russia conflict and COVID-19 lockdowns in China. According to May's TBOS, 65 percent of firms were experiencing supply-chain issues—the same share as in February. Texas firms with international supply chains were more exposed to disruptions—87 percent with foreign suppliers were experiencing disruptions, compared with 42 percent of firms with only domestic suppliers.

The expected timeline for supply-chain normalization continues to lengthen. Among firms encountering supply-chain interruptions in May, only a quarter expect conditions to return to normal within the next six months and 37 percent expect it will take more than a year.

In June 2021, nearly half of firms thought these supply issues would resolve within six months and only 13 percent indicated it would take more than a year. A weighted average of the TBOS respondents' expectations of supply-chain resolution reveals that the timeline for normalization has extended from 7.4 months in June 2021 to 9.6 months in May 2022 (Chart 2).

Chart 2: Supply Chain Disruptions Continue Among Manufacturing Companies

Expectations for supply-chain normalization have deteriorated among large firms more so than for small ones, a comparison of current TBOS results with those in February 2022 shows. Small firms (fewer than 100 employees) were more optimistic in May about the timeline for normalization—31 percent said they expect supply chains to normalize within six months, compared with 19 percent of large firms (more than 100 employees). In February, 33 percent of small firms and 28 percent of large firms expected supply issues to be resolved in less than six months.

Prices pressures remain elevated, with input and selling prices at or near record highs. But cost pass-through has become more difficult for businesses, particularly for small firms and companies in the service sector.

Only 24.6 percent of all respondents passed most or all of their higher costs on to customers via price increases, according to the May TBOS, down from 35.2 percent in December. Most firms passing on higher costs did so by raising prices this year (85 percent), though 29 percent

plan to increase prices next year as well.

Large firms had more latitude—about 30 percent said they could pass through most or all of their increased costs, compared with 21 percent of small firms.

By industry, cost pass-through was weakest in the service sector, particularly in professional and technical services and in education and health services (Chart 3). Respondents in the education and health sector attribute this to fixed tuition rates and Medicare and insurance reimbursements. Conversely, manufacturers and wholesalers reported the greatest capacity to pass through costs. According to anecdotal commentary from these businesses, customers recognize supply-chain constraints and input-cost increases and are thus more accepting of price hikes.

Chart 3: Price Growth Picks Up in February, Hovers Around Record Highs

Hot Housing Market Cools Down

The housing market appears to have reached an inflection point, with the recent spike in mortgage rates and record-high prices damping demand. Texas existing-home sales fell 2.2 percent in March on a month-over-month basis and were flat in April. Weekly data from Redfin, a national real estate brokerage, indicate that sales continued trending down through mid-June (Chart 4).

Chart 4: Growth of Wages, Benefits Eased in February, Remaining Elevated

New homebuyer traffic has been disappointing, cancellations are up, conversions are taking longer and waiting lists are shrinking. Incentives are being reintroduced to stimulate sales, particularly mortgage-rate buydowns, rate locks and closing costs. Some builders are also releasing homes earlier in the building cycle to enable clients to lock in rates.

The slowing is most pronounced among entry-level buyers, though high rates are starting to hit other segments as well, such as investors. Despite the slowing, median home prices continue to rise and set yet another record in April.

The pace of price increases is ebbing, with contacts noting that bids are coming in closer to asking prices, in contrast to the premiums seen before. Most homebuilders say they have held base prices steady in recent weeks. Given mortgage rates approaching 6 percent, home sales and price growth will slow further.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Immigration/Border Security

-

Border Patrol Paroles Migrants To Avoid Massive Overcrowding

By Elliot Spagat

KXAS

The warehouse on a busy but unremarkable strip of auto repair shops and convenience stores draws little attention from passersby.

Inside, hundreds of migrants are eating, charging phones and using temporary bathrooms and showers. Within a few hours, a security guard escorts them to a gravel lot out front, where commercial buses take them from the remote Texas town of Eagle Pass to the San Antonio International Airport for \$40.

The Border Patrol releases up to 1,000 migrants daily at Mission: Border Hope. The nonprofit group outgrew a church and moved to the warehouse in April amid the Biden administration's rapidly expanding practice of releasing migrants on parole, particularly those who are not subject to a pandemic rule that prevents migrants from seeking asylum.

The Border Patrol paroled more than 207,000 migrants who crossed from Mexico from August through May, including 51,132 in May, a 28% increase from April, according to court records. In the previous seven months, it paroled only 11 migrants.

Parole shields migrants from deportation for a set period of time but provides little else. By law, the Homeland Security Department may parole migrants into the United States "only on a case-by-case basis for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit." Parolees can apply for asylum within a year.

The Border Patrol turned to parole because it lacks holding space, according to court filings. It is a low-key but far-reaching change from President Joe Biden's first months in office and from his immediate predecessors, Donald Trump and Barack Obama. When agents couldn't process migrants quickly enough for court appearances last year, thousands languished in custody under a bridge in Texas' Rio Grande Valley. In 2019, cells were so packed that some migrants resorted to standing on toilets.

Migrants released at the warehouse are told to report to immigration authorities in two months at their final destination in the U.S. A handheld device tracks their movements.

"The treatment (by U.S. authorities) was good in comparison with other countries," said Anthony Montilla, 27, of Venezuela. "They didn't treat us like we're thieves."

He arrived with his family after a journey that included walking through Panama's notorious Darien Gap, where bandits raped young girls in front of their parents and dead bodies lay on the jungle floor. After Border Patrol released the family on two months' parole, they headed to a friend's home in Washington, D.C.

Jose Castillo, 43, arrived from Nicaragua with his wife and 14-year-old son, after overcoming fears of drowning in the Rio Grande. They were headed to Miami to live with a cousin. They say opposition to Nicaragua's government made them targets for repression.

The day Castillo spent in Border Patrol custody was "easy," he said, but he would advise others against the trip due to dangers of going hungry or being kidnapped in Mexico.

Mission: Border Hope, which is backed by the United Methodist Church, operates in an area that now rivals Rio Grande Valley as the busiest corridor for illegal crossings. Its services are modest compared to groups in other border cities that provide shelter and transportation to an airport.

It began in 2000 by serving 25 to 50 migrants a week at a previous location, said Valeria

Wheeler, the executive director, who oversees operations with assembly-line efficiency.

On the busiest days, volunteers can't keep pace as they register migrants, buy bus tickets and handle other logistics, Wheeler said. A typical day is 500 migrants but arrivals sometimes reach 1,000.

Boxes of spaghetti sauce, chicken soup and pork and beans are stacked near a makeshift kitchen. Migrants wait in clusters of metal benches and plastic chairs. A voice on a loudspeaker gives instructions to people dropped off in Border Patrol buses and announces when airport-bound commercial buses arrive for ticketed passengers.

The facility encourages migrants to leave quickly to make room for others, but about one in 10 end up sleeping on the concrete floor because they have nowhere to go.

"We are not set up to be a shelter," Wheeler, a former paralegal, said as she walked the windowless building, often interrupted by migrants with questions.

Paroled migrants say they were not screened for asylum or even asked why they came to the U.S. They receive a stapled packet with a blue stamp that says when parole expires.

That contrasts with many others who are expelled without a chance to seek asylum under Title 42 authority, which denies migrants a shot at asylum on grounds of preventing the spread of COVID-19. A federal judge recently ordered it remain in effect over the administration's objections.

Title 42 has been applied unevenly, largely affecting migrants from Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador because Mexico has agreed to take them back.

The head of the Border Patrol's parent agency says migrants picked for parole have their criminal histories checked and generally arrive in families with an address where they will stay in the U.S.

"We're trying to be smart about it, recognizing that there are people that have been carefully vetted but are at much lower risk and would make sense to handle differently from others," Chris Magnus, commissioner of Customs and Border Protection, said in an interview.

Critics say parole encourages more migrants to come and the administration is defying the legal requirement that it be granted on a "case-by-case basis." But Magnus said it is "far more efficient" and about as effective as releasing them after Border Patrol agents prepare notices to appear in immigration court. That time-consuming exercise now falls to Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers when migrants report to them at their final destinations.

The Border Patrol still processes about 25,000 migrants a month for immigration court, which agents say can take more than an hour each. Parole, by comparison, is processed in minutes.

On one recent day, a Honduran woman who was about eight months pregnant was released with a notice to appear in immigration court in Cleveland, where she planned to live with an uncle. Wheeler said doesn't know why some migrants are processed for immigration court and others are paroled -- and her organization doesn't ask.

"Our purpose is to provide safety," she said.

-
[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Hundreds Of Migrants Seen Wandering On Side Of Road In Texas Amid Illegal Immigration Surge

By Bill Melugin

Fox News Channel

Hundreds of migrants suspected to have entered the country illegally were seen Thursday wandering the side of a highway in Eagle Pass, Texas, a small town just east of the Rio Grande on the Mexican border, a video taken by Texas law enforcement showed.

Between August and May Border Patrol officers have paroled more than 207,000 migrants to avoid overcrowding in detention centers, a system started under the Biden administration.

It's unclear if the migrants seen in the video had been paroled.

Hundreds of migrants suspected to have entered the country illegally were seen this week wandering the side of a highway in Eagle Pass, Texas.

By law, the Homeland Security Department may parole migrants "for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit." The Border Patrol says it turned to parole because it lacks holding space and resources are "overwhelmed."

The Border Patrol in Eagle Pass sends around 1,000 migrants every day to a nonprofit called Mission: Border Hope in the town.

The area now rivals the Rio Grande Valley in illegal crossings.

In May, 51,132 migrants were paroled, a 28% increase from April, according to court records.

In the previous seven months before last August, only seven migrants had been paroled.

-
[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Military/Veterans

Texas Conducts Awareness Campaign For Veterans Struggling With PTSD

By Boram Kim

State of Reform

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) has partnered with community organizations to conduct outreach and education to veterans and their families during Veteran Suicide and PTSD Month in June.

HHSC has launched a series of events and resources aimed at raising public awareness and support for veterans suffering from PTSD and behavioral health issues.

State mental health officials said the pandemic and the recent shooting in Uvalde have triggered and exacerbated mental health concerns among community members, especially among these vulnerable veterans.

“The last couple of years have been rough on everybody, a lot of stressors,” said Dr. Blake Harris, a licensed clinical forensic psychologist and the Director of the Veterans Mental Health Department (VMHD) for the Texas Veterans Commission. “The pandemic, how that impacted people’s ability to connect [and work] with others certainly was amplified for folks who have prior trauma exposure to definitely include veterans.

What we’ve seen is [that the pandemic] has been particularly difficult for those folks who are early transitioning—the early transition period from service member to veteran, when they’re reorienting and kind of redefining who they are, finding their new path in life after they’ve completed their service. Finding that opportunity for connectedness and who they are ... was very much stymied by the pandemic and shutdowns.”

The Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) works directly with service members, veterans, and their families to connect them to opportunities, training, and counseling.

TVC provides training and technical assistance to peer service coordinators, community-based partners, and mental health providers. It also coordinates services for justice-involved veterans.

Blake said that while the pandemic has impacted the way members, predominantly older veterans, access PTSD care and services, it has also forced them to adapt to utilizing teletherapy, which has been crucial given the shortage of providers and the challenges of rural access to potentially life-saving connections.

“Leveraging the community partners that are there and making sure they’re skilled up with military cultural competency training, that they know the existing networks like the Military Veteran Peer Network that we have in partnership with those local mental health authorities,” Blake said. “[Community involvement] has been invaluable over the last couple of years to help address the isolation and the distance that have really impacted folks over the last couple of years.”

Through the Statewide Behavioral Health Coordinating Council, the commission works with multiple state agencies that intersect with the mental and behavioral health arenas to improve access to resources and services for veterans suffering from PTSD and depression.

HHSC offers a directory of local mental health authorities who provide crisis services 24 /7 to members. These services include prompt face-to-face crisis assessment, crisis intervention services, crisis follow-up, and relapse prevention.

HHSC also offers a guide that has information on various state-funded crisis services and organizations that can help connect people to resources.

“By increasing the public’s awareness of the tragic health issues facing veterans through campaigns such as Texas Veterans Suicide Prevention and PTSD Awareness Month, lives can be saved,” said George McEntyre, director of Veterans Mental Health Coordination and Programs.

Officials are urging the public to take some time this month to connect with their local military veteran peer network and offer support to veterans in their communities.

“Our peer service coordinators do a great job working with community partners, setting up events, bringing in resources that TVC and other partners leverage so that there may be opportunities to connect some mental health services,” said Blake.

“There [are] opportunities to get trained in suicide prevention [and] lethal means restriction. Make everybody a gatekeeper so that everybody has an opportunity to connect, identify somebody that may be struggling, and then help bridge them to some services.”

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

2nd Amendment Rights

-

U.S. Senate OKs Landmark Gun Violence Bill In Wake Of Uvalde Massacre, House Vote Up Next

By Joseph Morton

Dallas Morning News

The Senate on Thursday night approved a bipartisan bill aimed at addressing the nation’s rampant gun violence.

The 65-33 vote sends the bill to the House, where the Democratic majority is expected to pass it as well.

Sen. John Cornyn played a key role in negotiating the package poised to crack a 30-year legislative logjam on gun policy, a breakthrough flowing directly from a spate of mass shootings that included the horrifying Robb Elementary School massacre in Uvalde that left 19 children and two teachers dead.

Biden released a statement Thursday before the final vote recounting how he visited with families in Uvalde and heard a clear message from them to do something.

“Our kids in schools and our communities will be safer because of this legislation,” Biden said. “I call on Congress to finish the job and get this bill to my desk.”

The bill cleared one obstacle late Thursday from Cornyn’s fellow Texas Republican Sen. Ted Cruz, who sharply criticized the bipartisan deal and offered his own gun violence proposal in its place.

Denied a straight-up floor vote on his bill, Cruz made a procedural motion to block the Cornyn measure and characterized it as a proxy vote on his. Cruz lost that vote 39-58.

The two Texans’ plans have significant thematic overlap as they both aim to bolster school security and mental health treatment, but they also have major differences.

The Cornyn compromise includes federal funding for state-level red flag laws, enhanced

background checks for those under 21 and tighter gun prohibitions for domestic violence offenders.

Cruz's bill has none of those, but does have other provisions unlikely to win support from many Democrats, including prohibitions on the familiar conservative target known as Critical Race Theory.

The weeks since Uvalde have reinforced how Cruz and Cornyn are pursuing divergent political paths even as they try to avoid direct battle with one another.

Cruz is widely expected to launch another presidential run in 2024, a campaign that will depend in large part on his ability to excite the party's most fervent supporters and raise large amounts of money.

Cornyn is viewed as a potential successor to Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, a role that involves taking a broader view and balancing competing interests.

Even as the two men go their own way, they have avoided directly attacking one another.

Cruz framed his opposition to the bipartisan deal as a principled stand against gun-grabbing Democrats, despite the fact that nearly a third of his Republican colleagues were lining up behind the bill.

"The Democrat bill has much smaller funding for cops in schools, much smaller funding for mental health but much more infringement of the Second Amendment rights of law abiding citizens," Cruz said as he urged senators to back his version. "So it's a choice all of us have. Do we want to stop these crimes? Or do we want to play politics?"

Pressed by reporters earlier in the day on Republican support for the bill, Cruz said he thinks his GOP colleagues are making a "mistake" but did not directly go after Cornyn by name.

In his own floor speech, Cornyn for the umpteenth time rejected suggestions that the bipartisan proposal infringes the rights of law-abiding citizens. He said he shot down many Democratic proposals in the negotiations such as bans on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines.

He also highlighted limitations on the gun measures that were included.

Take red flag laws, which allow courts to take guns away from those deemed dangerous to themselves or others.

Sure, the bill has money to support such laws at the state level but it has no national mandate. Those dollars come with due process requirements and equal funding for states that adopt alternate approaches, Cornyn noted.

Yes, the bill has an enhanced review period for gun buyers under 21 but that's a temporary measure as policymakers work to get juvenile records fully incorporated into the federal background checks system used to screen gun buyers.

Individuals who commit domestic violence misdemeanors against serious dating partners

would face a prohibition on purchasing guns, but first-time offenders can get those rights restored after five years with a clean record.

Cornyn said the bill respects the Second Amendment and is likely to save lives.

“So often around here, people do things and say things, not with the intention of actually passing legislation, but with the intention of making a political statement, messaging as it’s sometimes called,” Cornyn said. “That’s not what we’re doing here. We’re not looking to posture or to try to embarrass anybody. We’re trying to find a solution to a very real problem.”

While Cornyn was hammering out a compromise with Senate Democrats, Cruz was writing his proposal with another conservative Republican, Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming. Their plan would devote \$17.5 billion to school safety, which Cruz said would double the number of trained school resource officers.

Another \$10 billion would go to grants for hiring mental health professionals at K-12 schools.

In order to be eligible for those grants, however, the proposal stipulates schools must “not teach Critical Race Theory or include Critical Race Theory in any school program.”

That theory is an academic framework that probes the way policies and laws uphold systemic racism, but it’s not being taught in K-12 schools, at least not in Texas, education leaders say.

Conservative pundits have attacked it as divisive while also conflating it with general teachings on the importance of diversity and inclusion. The inclusion of a Critical Race Theory ban highlights how the Cruz proposal was more suited to making a political statement than garnering enough bipartisan support to become law.

The Cruz bill, which drew praise from the NRA, would spend \$200 million on improving the background check system and require an audit of its records.

It would increase penalties on those convicted of stealing from gun dealers and authorize additional funding for federal prosecutors focused on gun crimes, safe school task forces and child-safety gun locks for handguns.

Asked about his home-state colleague’s proposal, Cornyn did not offer any specific critiques but nodded to the fact that it is unlikely to go anywhere.

“My question would be, ‘Can it pass?’” Cornyn said.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Texas AG Paxton To Newsmax: 'Passing A Red Flag Law Is Largely Ineffective' Nicole Wells
Newsmax

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton told Newsmax on Thursday that "passing a red flag law is largely ineffective" in preventing another Uvalde-type tragedy from happening.

"I certainly don't think that's the right direction to go because what we're talking about is

people that are not going to follow laws," Paxton said during an appearance on Newsmax's "The Chris Salcedo Show." "They're not going to follow murder laws, they're not going to follow gun laws. They will find ways to get guns."

"If you start restricting law-abiding citizens, it just makes it difficult for law-abiding citizens to protect themselves," Paxton added.

The mass shootings last month at a grocery store in Buffalo, that killed 10 people, and at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, that killed 21, including 19 students, sparked a national outcry over gun violence and prompted a bipartisan group of 10 congressional lawmakers to act.

The GOP's lead negotiator in the bipartisan gun talks, Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, was formally rebuked by the Republican Party of Texas on Saturday for his role in crafting the proposed legislation, which includes financial incentives for states to enact "red flag" laws.

"Red flag" laws are also known as Extreme Risk Protection Order laws and they allow courts to temporarily seize firearms from anyone thought to be a danger to themselves or others.

Paxton said he didn't think the gun control legislation was going to be effective in preventing another school shooting.

"I think what is effective is protecting these children at the point of entry, having school administrators and teachers ready to respond," he said.

The Texas Tribune reports that the mayor of Uvalde, Don McLaughlin, accused the state Department of Public Safety on Tuesday of selectively leaking records to the press to make local authorities look bad.

When asked about the situation, Paxton said that while he does not know who's responsible for the leak, he thinks "more questions need to be asked."

"Transparency is what this is all about, and I realize it's tough to be a police officer," he said. "It's tough to make decisions when lives are on the line – when your police officers' lives are on the line and students' lives are on the line – but the reality is that people in this country need to know the truth."

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Criminal Justice

-

Texas' Juvenile Justice Department Could Be On The Chopping Block

By Paul Flahive

KERA News

Sunset Advisory commission met to discuss the fate of the system that the interim director said was "collapsing."

The head of the Texas Juvenile Justice department says without more employees the system will fall apart.

Shandra Carter, interim director of TJJD, was adamant that raises were the best way to stem a massive 71% turnover rate. According to sunset advisors — last week the agency needed 788 staff members for normal programming in its five secure detention centers that dot the state, and they currently have 450.

“We have placed so much strain on the system and asked so much of people that it is collapsing. Even the people who are the most dedicated are unwilling to stick around,” Carter said.

The only way to keep up is to add more people quickly. The agency is requesting a 25% raise in starting pay from around \$36,000 to \$45,000.

Carter was speaking at a hearing of the Sunset Advisory Committee Wednesday.

Sunset staff made a host of recommendations including increasing incentives to divert youth to county facilities, redirecting the governing board, and pushing a more regional approach to juvenile justice as well as additional funding to stabilize staffing.

The hearing was the first to determine if the agency is still necessary for the state; another is scheduled for October. Sunset is an opportunity for radical reform of an agency. Legislators pitched ideas like changing the composition of the governing board to include some nonprofit and private business persons. Currently the 13-person board is composed of judges, and representatives from mental health, juvenile probation, counties, and education.

Another was combining TJJD with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice which oversees the state's prisons and private jail contractors.

“The populations in the adult system in the juvenile system are very different. They have different needs, they have different rights, risks, brain development. So just operationally... we're not really comparing apples to apples,” said Rachel Gandy, with the Sunset Advisory Commission staff in response to multiple questions about combining the two.

Beyond the philosophical — staff determined the cost and logistical challenges would not achieve what the organization needs most, which is stability.

Sexual abuse scandals broke up its predecessor agency the Texas Youth Commission, a decade later, the system has reduced the number of secure detention facilities from 10 to five and cut the number of youth inside in half.

Despite these gains the system is still under tremendous strain from a lack of employees, new allegations of physical and sexual abuse at its facilities, as well as a rotating cast of new leaders at the top of its leadership system. Both the head of its Board and its executive director resigned in the past 4 months.

The Justice Department announced an investigation into the state's five secure youth detention facilities last October.

“Since TJJD's creation, the agency has been caught in a seemingly endless cycle of crises and instability,” reads the report from Sunset staff.

The composition of the youth inside is often more traumatized and violent as well in response to the idea of increased regionalization — serving the kids through county facilities.

The hearing lacked the fireworks of some Sunset commission meetings, including the one immediately prior to TJJD which dealt with the state's environmental regulators.

“Usually it seems to me you'll see some pushback from the agency to Sunset saying ‘Hold it. You're a little out of line — we're actually doing a good job on this — you've quit your preaching and gone to meddlin.’ I think without exception, as I read through the commission's comments, it was a cry for help. Without exception it's ‘we agree with this recommendation.’ They know they are in free fall,” said Travis Clardy, a Republican legislator at the hearing, representing Nacogdoches.

For some nonprofit advocates the recommendations don't go far enough. Texas Appleseed has been pushing for dismantling the state's system and pushing the responsibility onto communities closer to where the kids live. Some pointed out there was broad overlap between the needs of TJJD, the state's foster care system and other areas especially around early mental health intervention resources.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

National News

-

US Poised to Escalate Claim Mexico Violated Free-Trade Pact

By Eric Martin

Bloomberg

The US is preparing to escalate its complaints that Mexico's state-favoring energy policies violate the nations' free-trade agreement, people familiar with the matter said, a move that would risk exacerbating tensions between the countries' governments.

US Trade Representative Katherine Tai's office in recent weeks has been working on a request for formal consultations under the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement and discussing it with other agencies, according to the people, who asked not to be identified without permission to speak publicly. The timing for the request is still being determined, the people said.

A spokesperson for the National Security Council said no decision has been made about a consultation request. The USTR press office declined to comment.

Mexico's peso weakened as much as 0.4% to 20.0893 per dollar late Thursday evening Washington time.

Under USMCA rules, such a request would give Mexico up to 30 days to agree to schedule consultations. If after 75 days no agreement is reached, the US could request that a formal panel hear arguments from the two nations. While that process focuses on getting Mexico to agree to corrective actions, dragged-out conflicts can ultimately lead to the US imposing punitive tariffs on imports from Mexico on the two-year-old trade pact.

An escalation now may risk angering Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador ahead

of a planned visit to Washington in the coming weeks, after he snubbed President Joe Biden's invitation to the regional Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles earlier this month.

Lopez Obrador, known popularly as AMLO, hails from the oil-rich state of Tabasco and is a fierce champion of the national crude and electricity companies. The White House visit was announced two weeks ago on the same day that Lopez Obrador said he would skip the Los Angeles summit because Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua were excluded due to democracy and human-rights concerns.

Mexico's cooperation is also key to addressing a surge in undocumented migration that's a political vulnerability for Biden heading into midterm elections in November.

Lopez Obrador is a longtime critic of an overhaul enacted under his predecessor in 2013-2014 that ended almost eight decades of energy nationalization. Since taking office in late 2018, he's worked to return the state-owned oil and gas producer Petroleos Mexicanos, known as Pemex, and power company CFE to their former glory by adopting policies that hurt private-sector participants in the industry.

The USMCA trade deal, mostly negotiated by the previous Mexican government but ultimately agreed to by Lopez Obrador, sought in part to protect private investors against an unwinding of the energy-industry opening.

Following repeated complaints by dozens of lawmakers, Tai warned in a March letter to her Mexican counterpart, Economy Minister Tatiana Clouthier, about US concerns that shifts in Mexico's energy policy -- including changes in electricity law to favor state-owned power plants over private producers -- violate the USMCA's core obligations.

US energy companies continued to face arbitrary treatment in Mexico, with more than \$10 billion in US investment in the nation put at risk, much of it in renewable energy, Tai said.

Tai said then that she was considering all available options under the USMCA to address the concerns.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Texas Rep. Louie Gohmert Sought Pardon From Trump After Jan. 6 Riot, Committee Says

By Benjamin Wermund

Houston Chronicle

U.S. Rep. Louie Gohmert was one of a handful of Republicans in Congress who asked former President Donald Trump for a pardon after the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, according to testimony shown by the House committee investigating the insurrection.

Witnesses told the committee that the president had considered offering pardons to several individuals, said U.S. Rep. Adam Kinzinger, a Republican on the committee.

Cassidy Hutchison, who served as an aide to former White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows said in recorded testimony shown Thursday that the Tyler Republican was one of the members who had sought a pardon. Others included U.S. Reps. Matt Gaetz of Florida, Mo

Brooks of Alabama, Andy Biggs of Arizona and Scott Perry of Pennsylvania.

‘Their only crime was supporting Donald Trump’: Rep. Louie Gohmert defends Capitol riot suspects

“The only reason I know to ask for a pardon is because you think you’ve committed a crime,” Kinzinger said.

Gohmert did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Tyler Republican was a close ally of Trump’s in seeking to turn over the election results, including suing former Vice President Mike Pence in December, 2020, in an effort to force Pence to reject the results when Congress convened to certify President Joe Biden’s electoral win.

Gohmert also supported Attorney General Ken Paxton’s failed lawsuit to overturn election results in four battleground states. Paxton and his top deputy, First Assistant Attorney General Brent Webster, are both targets of lawsuits by the Texas Bar Association for the “dishonest” attempt to overturn the 2020 presidential election.

And the congressman has been a vocal defender of the Jan. 6 rioters, calling them “political prisoners held hostage by their own government.”

Gohmert announced his retirement from Congress in November and ran an unsuccessful primary challenge against Paxton, drawing 17 percent of the vote in a four-way race.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Opinion/Editorial

-

Biden Can't Make The Border Crisis Go Away By Ignoring It

By Conn Carroll

Washington Examiner

Considering that President Joe Biden has caught and released 1.25 million illegal immigrants into the United States since he was sworn into office, a population roughly the size of Dallas, Congress absolutely should be conducting field hearings at the southern border.

House Democrats finally did hold a hearing at the border this month — almost.

The hearing took place in McAllen, Texas, the city limits of which do touch the Mexican border. But the hearing did not take place on the border, and the Democrats who traveled to Texas for the hearing refused to tour the border with federal or state officials.

Instead, the House Select Committee on Economic Disparity and Fairness in Growth heard testimony about “colonias,” which are unincorporated communities that lack the tax base to support basic services such as roads and running water.

Community leaders asked the committee for \$600 million in infrastructure spending to prevent their homes from flooding. Republicans on the committee didn’t see why more infrastructure

money was needed after Congress just passed a \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill last year. They also wanted to know why Democrats refused to hear any testimony from witnesses about security and sanitation problems being caused by Biden's border crisis.

"We're here at the behest of the Democrats, they chose a select hearing in the field at the border, but they don't want to talk about the border," Rep. Kat Cammack (R-FL) told the Daily Mail on a Republican-led trip to the border. "To our colleagues on the Left, if you care about the kids the way that you claim that you care about the kids, you would be here. That is why I cannot call Biden commander-in-chief. He's the trafficker-in-chief. He is doing the job for the cartels and it has to stop."

While the Republicans were touring the border, a group of 15 migrants, including 12 children and three adults, turned themselves in to Border Patrol. One of the children from El Salvador spoke English and told the Republicans she had been traveling with her cousin, but they were separated on the journey.

She wasn't concerned, though. She knew that the Biden administration policy was to transport migrant children found illegally crossing the border to their intended final destination. She was confident that she and her cousin would soon be reunited at their aunt's house in Tennessee. Hopefully, the other child survived the trip.

Texas Department of Public Safety spokesman Lt. Chris Olivarez also said that his agency estimates the cartels are making \$100 million per week smuggling migrants like this Salvadoran girl to the border.

Given that McAllen is about halfway between Tennessee and El Salvador, maybe the Biden administration should be asking the cartels for half of their smuggling profits.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

From: [OOG News Alerts](#)
Subject: Morning News Clips 6.30.22
Date: Thursday, June 30, 2022 8:25:07 AM
Attachments: [Morning News Clips 6.30.22.pdf](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

Morning News Clips 6/30/2022

- [Texas Take](#)

- [Texas Tribune: The Brief](#)

- [Politico Playbook](#)

Greg Abbott News

San Antonio Express-News – Governor Abbott: [Texas Is Reaching Out To Help Uvalde Heal](#) [Web]

Dallas Morning News – Robert T. Garrett: [Texas Gov. Greg Abbott Orders Truck Inspections At Border After Migrant Deaths](#) [Web]

Administration News

CNN – Virginia Langmaid and Shawna Mizelle,: [Biden Administration Reaches Agreement To Purchase 105 Million Doses Of Pfizer Covid-19 Vaccine](#) [Web]

Slate – Pedro Gerson: [The Biden Administration Is To Blame For The Horrific Deaths Of 51 Migrants In Texas](#) [Web]

Fox News Channel: [Biden Admin. Ripped For 'Flat Out Lie' On Border Security: Every Biden Policy 'Results In Death'](#) [Web]

State News

San Antonio Express-News – Guillermo Contreras: [Fourth Suspect Arrested In Deadly Tractor-Trailer Case](#) [Web]

Breitbart – Ian Hanchett: [Paxton: Biden Dismisses Smuggling Incident with Twice the Death Toll of Uvalde Because He 'Doesn't Care About These People'](#) [Web]

Energy

-
Houston Chronicle— James Osborne: [Texas And EPA Face Off Over Ozone Designation In Permian Basin \[Web\]](#)

The Texan — Brad Johnson: [‘War On Fossil Fuels’ Drives Uncertainty Among Texas Oil And Gas Producers \[Web\]](#)

Business/Economy

-
Dallas Morning News — Mitchell Schnurman: [Dallas-Fort Worth Adds Nearly 295,000 Jobs In The Past Year, Triple Its Typical Pace \[Web\]](#)

-
Houston Chronicle — Marissa Luck: [Chevron's Offer To Pay For Staff To Move To Houston Signals Growing Focus On Texas \[Web\]](#)

-
CBS News —Antony Salvanto, Fred Backus, Jennifer De Pinot, and Kabir Khanna: [Texans View State's Economic Growth As A Good Thing But Feel Pinch Of Higher Prices \[Web\]](#)

Immigration/Border Security

-
Fox News Channel — Adam Shaw: [Durbin Says Migrant Deaths In Texas Could Be 'Uvalde Moment' For Immigration Deal \[Web\]](#)

National News

-
Dallas Morning News — Associated Press: [Jackson To Be Sworn In As Supreme Court Justice Thursday \[Web\]](#)

Texas Tribune — Mike Hixenbaugh, NBC News, and Perla Trevizo: [Congress Investigates Portable Generator Manufacturers Following Carbon Monoxide Deaths In Texas And Other States \[Web\]](#)

-

#

-
-
-
-

Greg Abbott News

Texas Is Reaching Out To Help Uvalde Heal

By Governor Abbott

San Antonio Express-News

The peaceful community of Uvalde has endured horror these past weeks that has shaken every Texan to the core.

We are left processing the shock and grief brought on by the tragedy at Robb Elementary School. Hearts are broken for the innocent lives taken so senselessly and families suddenly bereft of the joy and laughter of their precious children.

Parents are worried about the basic safety and security of their schools. Understandably, people are angry and baffled at the injustice of a disturbed criminal's demented final actions causing such devastation. The faces of the grieving families and stunned residents of Uvalde, with whom Cecilia and I have met, will leave deep and lasting scars on our hearts. I pray each day for the innocent souls taken too soon and for the families who must now carry on incomprehensibly without their loved ones.

While we can never bring back those who were lost, we must come together to support the grief-stricken community as it embarks on the long road of healing. To jump-start that process, I immediately mobilized all available resources to Uvalde.

The state disaster declaration allows Texas and local jurisdictions to provide support that is easily accessible and readily available. State agencies have embedded representatives in Uvalde to provide on-site assistance with benefits such as workers' compensation claims and counseling services for residents.

My public safety office made an initial \$5 million investment establishing a permanent Uvalde Together Resiliency Center to serve as a hub for services, such as crisis counseling and behavioral health care for survivors, first responders and the entire community. In partnership with state agencies, regional mental health authorities led by the Hill Country Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Centers are connecting area residents with mental health services through a 24/7 hotline, which has answered hundreds of calls since late May.

Texans want to help their fellow Texans. They can donate to the Robb School Memorial Fund, established by the First Bank of Uvalde in partnership with our state's OneStar Foundation, to support victims' families, teachers and the broader community. Donations provide immediate

financial support for those impacted and will go a long way in letting Uvalde know they are not alone as they recover.

As the state of Texas activates its full capabilities to lift up Uvalde, we must ensure such tragedies do not happen again. I've directed the Texas District & County Attorneys Association to use the lie-and-try law I signed last session as a new tool to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous individuals. The law makes it a state jail felony to illegally purchase a firearm by falsifying information on a background check form.

Also, the Texas School Safety Center and the Texas Education Agency are implementing heightened standards to make our schools safer when students return in August. Additionally, Texas State University's nationally recognized Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training programs will be provided to school districts across the state.

As for new laws, Texas legislative leaders have formed special committees to examine school safety standards and to develop legislative recommendations on school safety, access to mental health care, social media policies, police training and firearm safety, among other topics. This process empowers the officials who make the law to get right to work addressing all the issues concerning the tragedy in Uvalde.

What is abundantly clear is that mental health is foundational to the security of our schools, public spaces and communities. It is a pervasive issue affecting everyone, whether it's a struggling family member or a neighbor without a network of care and support. We must prioritize providing the resources needed to help Texans suffering from a mental health challenge. Helping an individual in need will not only give them their life back but will also create stronger, safer communities for everyone.

Moments like this tear at the very fabric of a community. But throughout our history, Texans have risen above challenges and together forged a brighter path forward. It is who we are as a people, uniting in our darkest days to make sure our families, neighbors and communities are able to flourish in the great promise that Texas holds.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott Orders Truck Inspections At Border After Migrant Deaths By Robert T. Garrett
Dallas Morning News

Gov. Greg Abbott on Wednesday ordered state police to resume inspecting trucks entering Texas from Mexico after 53 migrants died in a tractor-trailer abandoned near San Antonio.

Abbott continued to blame President Joe Biden, saying the truck carrying Mexican and Central American migrants who died wasn't inspected by Border Patrol agents because that federal agency lacks sufficient manpower.

The death toll among unauthorized immigrants crossing deserts or clambering into the back of trucks as temperatures soar will keep rising if Biden doesn't act, Abbott warned.

"I urge the president, stop the loss of life," said Abbott, a two-term Republican who is up for reelection this year. "You have the ability to stop people from losing their lives if you make it

clear that no one can come across illegally.”

The White House said Tuesday the fact migrants are desperately taking chances by paying coyotes for illicit transportation proves that federal border enforcement is tightening.

On Wednesday, Abbott said he was ordering the Texas Department of Public Safety to create additional truck checkpoints at the Texas-Mexico border and to immediately begin inspecting incoming, semitrailer trucks.

“They will begin targeting trucks like the one that was used when those people perished,” he said, referring to a stifling trailer in San Antonio where dozens of migrants died after being abandoned in the sweltering heat earlier this week.

“Inspections can be a powerful deterrent against cartels smuggling drugs and humans,” DPS spokesman Travis Considine said Wednesday, adding that they won’t occur at points of entry into Texas.

In early April, Abbott ordered an initial round of state truck inspections on international bridges after declaring that the Biden administration had failed the country when it comes to border safety. At the time, the governor said DPS workers inspecting the commercial vehicles would disrupt efforts to smuggle people and drugs across the border.

But the stepped-up safety inspections, which were in addition to other inspections by the federal authorities, increased wait times at the border. Last spring, some truckers interviewed at the crossings said they had to wait two and three days to cross.

Amid negative publicity about rising prices of produce and manufacturing disruptions, Abbott agreed to ease the inspections in return for security commitments from the governors of all four Mexican states that border Texas: Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas. The governors each met with Abbott to publicly explain their ongoing border security efforts.

Abbott continued to say, though, that the inspections might resume if migration increased.

Speaking at a press conference in Eagle Pass on Wednesday, Abbott said there has been a “meaningful rise” in illegal crossings this summer.

Migrant caravans are “disbanding to some extent,” but that doesn’t mean numbers of illegal crossings won’t keep rising, he said.

His April security agreements with Mexican border governors have yielded law enforcement activity on the Mexican side of the border that has helped deter large migrant caravans, Abbott said. He and a state police official spoke of “mirrored activity,” or simultaneous and coordinated actions by law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border.

“The Biden administration still is doing nothing whatsoever to stop them,” he said of caravans and smaller groups of migrants.

The Del Rio sector, which includes Eagle Pass, is “ground zero” for illegal crossings, the governor said.

Texas officials continue to conduct “mass migration rehearsals,” to be ready for caravans, he said.

Also, DPS will form two “strike teams,” each consisting of 20 troopers, to “detect, deter and apprehend” unauthorized immigrants, he said.

“Additional strike teams will be deployed to high traffic crossing areas as needed,” said an Abbott news release.

“The Texas Military Department will be deploying more razor wire along the Rio Grande, adding more miles of fencing and barriers on state and local property, and deploying additional boat teams,” the release said.

The state police and Texas National Guard soldiers will try to block as many low-water crossings as possible, Abbott said.

Abbott suggested more actions are coming.

“Texas is going to take action to do our part to try to reduce the illegal immigration coming into our country,” he said. “We’re going to be adding more resources and stronger strategies to control all the border land that is owned or controlled by state or local governments.”

The state also will continue to press private landowners to let Abbott’s Operation Lone Star come on their land, erect barriers such as fencing or concertina wire, and let state police arrest migrants for trespassing, the governor said.

Including recent fund transfers by Abbott and GOP leaders, Abbott and the Legislature have committed almost \$4 billion in state money to border security in the current two-year budget cycle — a nearly fivefold increase from past state budgets.

Within two months of Biden’s taking office, Abbott began saying the new Democratic president was responsible for a surge in border crossings.

Abbott has used state funds and private donations to pay for buses to transport thousands of asylum-seekers to the nation’s capital, to signal they aren’t welcome in Texas and to try to embarrass Biden.

The sparring intensified after this week’s mass deaths of migrants found in the abandoned semitruck near San Antonio.

“These deaths are on Biden,” the governor said on Twitter. “They are a result of his deadly open border policies. They show the deadly consequences of his refusal to enforce the law.”

Biden, who was in Spain for a NATO summit, fired back.

“Exploiting vulnerable individuals for profit is shameful, as is political grandstanding around tragedy,” he said.

On Wednesday, identification of the victims proceeded slowly because of lack of identification, slow exchanges of fingerprint data and difficulty reaching relatives in remote

villages in Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, The Associated Press reported.

According to the Bexar County Medical Examiner's Office, 40 of the victims were male and 13 were female.

The bodies were discovered Monday afternoon on the outskirts of San Antonio in what is believed to be the nation's deadliest smuggling episode on the U.S.-Mexico border. More than a dozen people were taken to hospitals, including four children. Three people have been arrested.

The truck, which was registered in Alamo, Texas, but had fake plates and logos, was carrying 67 migrants, Francisco Garduño, chief of Mexico's National Immigration Institute, told the AP.

The driver was apprehended after trying to pretend he was one of the migrants, Garduño said. Two other Mexican men also have been detained, he said.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection reported 557 deaths on the southwest border in the 12 months ending Sept. 30, more than double the 247 deaths reported in the previous year and the highest since it began keeping track in 1998, according to the AP.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Administration News

-

Biden Administration Reaches Agreement To Purchase 105 Million Doses Of Pfizer's Covid-19 Vaccine

By Virginia Langmaid and Shawna Mizelle
CNN

The Biden administration has reached an agreement to purchase 105 million doses of Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine, the US Department of Health and Human Services announced Wednesday.

The agreement, set for fall vaccinations, includes "options for up to 300 million doses," the agency said in a news release, and adds up to a \$3.2 billion contract.

The purchase includes both child and adult vaccines, and may be delivered by early fall, the agency said.

"Vaccines have been a game-changer in our fight against COVID-19, allowing people to return to normal activities knowing that vaccines protect from severe illness," HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra said in the news release. "The Biden-Harris Administration is committed to doing everything we can to continue to make vaccines free and widely available to Americans -- and this is an important first step to preparing us for the fall."

This announcement comes after a fight in recent weeks between the Biden administration and Congress over funding future Covid-19 response and mitigation measures.

The White House had requested \$22.5 billion in funding for the administration's Covid-19 response -- money to pay for vaccines, testing, and treatments -- earlier this year. Negotiators

had been able to reach a scaled-back agreement on a \$10 billion package but left Washington for the Easter recess without passing that bill. Congress has been stalled on reaching a deal ever since.

As a result, \$10 billion was reallocated from current Covid-19 response efforts, part of which is being used to fund this new vaccine purchase.

Republican Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah accused the White House of being dishonest about the funding, saying earlier this month that "for the Administration to say they could not purchase these things and then, after several months, divert some funds and then purchase them is unacceptable, and makes our ability to work together and have confidence in what we're being told very much shaken to the core."

Wednesday's announcement also comes a week after vaccinations began in the US for children under 5.

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Dr. Anthony Fauci, a member of the federal Covid-19 response, has warned that the US is likely to face an increase in cases in the fall, and US Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy said on CNN's "New Day" last week that the possibility of another booster shot for the broader population in the fall is under discussion.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

The Biden Administration Is To Blame For The Horrific Deaths Of 51 Migrants In Texas

By Pedro Gerson
Slate

In his classic 2015 book *The Land of Open Graves*, Jason De León shows that “the terrible things that [the] mass of migrating people experience are neither random nor senseless, but rather part of a strategic federal plan ... that ... simultaneously uses and hides behind the viciousness of the Sonoran Desert.” De León does this by demonstrating how the U.S. policy of immigration deterrence has moved people to attempt more and more dangerous crossings, thereby promoting mass death.

This reality could not have been any clearer than it was in the horrifying discovery on Monday of dozens of dead bodies of migrant men and women found in an abandoned semi truck in San Antonio in 100-degree heat. The truth is that the cruelty of our immigration system caused these deaths as much as the smugglers involved—of whom two are apparently in custody. That is to say, Americans of every political stripe are responsible for the deaths of the 51 men and women who asphyxiated to death while suffering from unbearable heat, along with many more similar deaths.

Since De León's book was published, borders around the world, especially the U.S. one, have continuously become more militarized and fortified, and immigration regimes more punitive. However, the need migrants feel to come to the United States has not been affected by these policies. The reality is that deterrence cannot work. People attempting to migrate to the United States overestimate their likelihood of success and underestimate the potential harms they may encounter, if they're even aware of them. Moreover, because the harms they are escaping are so great, their will to leave is too strong to be affected by whatever obstacles of which they

might actually be aware.

Fully internalizing this reality is to comprehend that there is no immigration deterrence policy that will greatly reduce migration and do so without killing human beings. And so the question is not whether countries have a legitimate interest in having some form of migration control, but rather whether those interests justify policies that cause mass death.

Periodically, this reality comes into focus with a particular tragedy that just as quickly recedes into the background of the political grind. Three years ago, the photograph of Óscar Alberto Martínez Ramírez and his 23-month-old daughter, Valeria, drowned in the Rio Grande Valley caused a stir worldwide. It was almost immediately forgotten. One wonders if Monday's tragic events have even clocked with the American public. Despite the death toll—among the highest in modern history in a smuggling case—we can already see that this tragedy is being swallowed by wrangling over immigration policy.

Some politicians, notably Beto O'Rourke and Julián Castro, have correctly pointed out the connection between these deaths and restrictive immigration policies. As Castro tweeted, "Tragedies like what happened in San Antonio ... are going to become more and more common the longer our country keeps Trump-era anti-immigrant, anti-asylee policies in place."

Unfortunately, the official response from the current Democratic administration made no such recognition. The Biden administration took the line that the tragedy was caused by smugglers and that more law enforcement is needed to combat these rings, without acknowledging the role that its own restrictive immigration policies played in the tragedy. The Biden administration, for example, has not ended Title 42, which allows federal border agents to expel the vast majority of migrants seeking to enter the United States, including asylum-seekers.

Furthermore, the administration also has increased the use of immigration detention by 63 percent since Biden took office. Some of that can be attributed to the uptick in immigration after the pandemic, but given the Title 42 expulsions, a lot of that is a policy choice. And, while it is true that detention has not returned to the highs of early 2020, the sustained reliance on it as a policy tool is a strong indication that deterrence is the only game in town. Meanwhile on the legal immigration side, the administration has needlessly wasted various legal visas authorized by Congress, denied more than 60 percent of employer-sponsored visas for individuals living abroad, and not fixed the tremendous backlogs at various agencies.

To a hammer, everything is a nail, I guess, but it is still remarkable that despite all the evidence available, Democratic leaders cannot see that both the existence of smugglers and the deaths of migrants are effects of this country's migration policies.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Biden Admin. Ripped For 'Flat Out Lie' On Border Security: Every Biden Policy 'Results In Death'

Fox News Channel

Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick slammed the Biden administration for lax border policies on "America's Newsroom" Wednesday, calling out press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre's "flat out

lie" that the U.S. southern border is closed and saying the administration has a "culture of death."

LT. GOV. DAN PATRICK: When I hear Jean-Pierre make that statement that the border is closed, I can't say anything other than this: That's just a flat-out lie. She's lying to the American people. Biden still hasn't been to the border. Kamala Harris, it was a joke trip a year ago when she went to El Paso. They have not seen it for themselves, but, you know, they're getting reports from Border Patrol. They know it's wide open. We set a record last month of 239,000. There's another 50 or 60,000 got-aways, people that we can't catch. Then, of course, there are all the people that cross that we don't see. I've been saying, Dana, for years in my speeches, people should not have to come to America in the back of an 18-wheeler and die.

I've been saying that forever. This is an administration that is a culture of death. Every policy that they have results in death, whether it's soldiers in Afghanistan, whether it's people on the street, innocent victims of criminals who are running amok on our streets, whether it's these 51 hapless souls who died, a terrible death, these poor people that died in the back of that truck, or whether it's now a plan by the Biden administration to set up abortion camps so that they can take more babies' lives. Everything this administration touches results in death. And these 51 people who died are on their hands, and Jean-Pierre is just unbelievable. She will look America in the eye and say the border is secure.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

State News

Fourth Suspect Arrested In Deadly Tractor-Trailer Case

By Guillermo Contreras

San Antonio Express-News

A man described as one of the collectors of smuggling fees in the deadly tractor-trailer incident this week has been arrested in East Texas, making him the fourth suspect connected to the case.

Christian Martinez, 28, was arrested in Palestine and is charged with one count of conspiracy to transport illegal aliens resulting in death. According to court documents, a search warrant was executed on a cellphone belonging to the accused driver, Homero Zamorano Jr., 45, who is from Brownsville but was living in Palestine.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in San Antonio said in a news release that it discovered Zamorano and Martinez communicated with each other about the smuggling event.

If convicted, Martinez faces up to life in prison or could face the death penalty. He had an initial appearance Wednesday in Tyler and will be transported to San Antonio for further proceedings.

Federal prosecutors also said Zamorano has been charged with alien smuggling resulting in death. If convicted, he faces up to life in prison or possibly the death penalty.

The smugglers ferried the migrants from the Laredo area to the South Side of San Antonio in a big rig disguised as a border produce truck. At least 53 migrants from Mexico and Central

America died in the suffocating heat of the trailer, which was abandoned near JBSA-Lackland on Monday.

Earlier this week, Craig Larrabee, acting special agent for Homeland Security Investigations in San Antonio, made it clear he would not speak about the case.

But speaking generally about immigrant-smuggling or transporting cases, he said his agents try to be thorough.

“When we see incidents like this, we investigate all aspects,” Larrabee said. “We investigate the coordinators, we investigate the transporters, the guides, the drivers, the financial side — the people collecting payments and distributing the payments. Everybody.”

The arrest is the latest since officials detained three other people this week, including Zamorano, who is accused of abandoning the tractor-trailer on a dirt road near the military base. San Antonio police were called to the scene about 6 p.m. Monday, and city officials later reported that night that 46 of the immigrants were found dead of heat-related causes, and 16 were hospitalized. As of Wednesday, the death toll had grown to 53, making it the deadliest truck-smuggling case in recent history.

In Mexico, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and members of his Cabinet confirmed details previously reported by the Express-News, including Zamorano’s first name, and released photos of him and the red 1995 Volvo rig crossing an international bridge.

The officials said the truck driver tried to pass himself off as one of the immigrants after they were found by police.

Zamorano was apparently still recovering from a drug and medical episode Wednesday. He was not brought to a federal court appearance, as expected.

Relatives of a woman who was briefly in a relationship with Zamorano said the couple were married or together a short while before he went off to work in oilfields “up north.”

“He was a decent person. He was very respectful,” said Yanet Balderas, whose sister had a relationship with Zamorano. “You wouldn’t think he’d be that kind of guy.”

Balderas said she did not know him to be a trucker, but said it was at least eight years ago that she met him.

Records show Zamorano has a criminal past, including misdemeanor arrests for fraud and driving without a license in Florida. Attempts to gather further information on those arrests were unsuccessful Wednesday.

Court records show investigators traced license plates on the rig to a home in the 100 block of Arnold Drive after the truck was found. After putting the house under surveillance, they moved in and detained two young men who were about to leave in separate trucks. One of the men confessed to having a gun in his truck.

Eric Terry, the Chapter 11 trustee overseeing the bankruptcy of ex-San Antonio lawyer Christopher “Chris” Pettit and his law firm, said walking through the Pettit law office at 13111

Huebner Road was “a little eerie.”

Officers found a gun, and after getting a search warrant, agents with the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives found more guns, including at least one rifle, in the house, records show.

Those suspects, Juan Francisco D’Luna-Bilbao, 48, and Juan Claudio D’Luna-Mendez, 23, appeared in federal court in San Antonio on Tuesday on charges of being undocumented immigrants who illegally possessed weapons. They are scheduled for probable cause and bail hearings on Friday. D’Luna-Bilbao’s lawyer, Cynthia Orr, said she plans to waive the probable cause hearing, and ask for the bail hearing to be postponed. The pair face up to 10 years in prison if convicted.

Michael Gross, D’Luna-Mendez’s lawyer, said he does not comment on his ongoing cases.

While the pair’s arrests seem more like a firearms case, they show a pattern.

The ATF bureau has partnered with Homeland Security Investigations in the past to take down immigrant-trafficking groups that are also involved in acquiring firearms.

One of the most notorious cases is that of Jose Miguel Sandoval-Pineda, an immigrant with ties to San Antonio and Central Texas. He is accused of leading co-defendants who would acquire guns used as part of immigrant-smuggling and trafficking. Some of his co-defendants admitted he instructed them to fire-bomb homes of some rivals.

“To facilitate their human smuggling, members of the organization would (make) straw purchases and exchange firearms, which would then be used to guard illegal aliens and to retaliate against the organization’s rivals,” prosecutor Brian Nowinski wrote in a court document in Sandoval-Pineda’s case.

Sandoval-Pineda was scheduled to be sentenced this week, but it was postponed until August. It is unrelated to the truck case.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Paxton: Biden Dismisses Smuggling Incident with Twice the Death Toll of Uvalde Because He ‘Doesn’t Care About These People’

By Ian Hanchett

Breitbart

On Wednesday’s broadcast of the Fox Business Network’s “Evening Edit,” Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton (R) stated that President Joe Biden pushed for gun legislation immediately after the Uvalde school shooting, but now that twice as many people died in the recent smuggling incident, “he says we’re grandstanding about it and he dismisses it.” Because “the Biden administration doesn’t care about these people.”

Paxton said, “We just had Uvalde, where 21 people were killed. He made a really big deal about that, we had, obviously, legislation passed, which he was for, he got very engaged in that issue, this is twice as many people and he says we’re grandstanding about it and he dismisses it. Because, look, we all know he’s invited this problem. He’s asked the cartels to

bring these people here. This is going to happen again. It's happened before and the Biden administration doesn't care about these people."

He later added, "[T]hose numbers are just going to go up as the heat continues to increase, which it will in Texas throughout July and August and into September, people are going to die and the Biden administration is literally encouraging this to happen. They're willing to let these people die to get more people in the country."

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Energy

-

Texas And EPA Face Off Over Ozone Designation In Permian Basin

By James Osborne

Houston Chronicle

After years of resistance from politicians in Texas, oil and gas companies in West Texas's Permian Basin could soon have to operate under much tougher air pollution restrictions.

The Environmental Protection Agency is weighing whether to declare counties in West Texas and eastern New Mexico in violation of federal limits on ozone pollution. At issue are the large volumes of methane, a potent greenhouse gas that when exposed to oxygen forms ozone, leaking into the atmosphere during oil and gas drilling.

Air monitors in eastern New Mexico have been tracking elevated ozone levels for years, prompting that state to put in place tougher air pollution rules for oil drillers.

But across the border in Texas, the state government has resisted calls for similar action, refusing to install air monitors to track the level of pollution around oil and gas fields, said Jon Goldstein, senior director of regulatory and legislative affairs at the Environmental Defense Fund.

"You can't know what you don't know," he said. "Texas does not have any rules on the books on methane pollution. That's what makes the EPA action so important. It's going to kick over to the state these tougher regulations."

The EPA is expected to face a tough fight from Texas Governor Greg Abbott, who last year ordered state agencies to do whatever necessary to protect the state's oil and gas industry from climate action by the Biden administration.

Earlier this week Abbott wrote a letter to President Joe Biden threatening to "take the action needed to protect the production of oil" and warning the EPA's proposed crackdown on methane emissions would likely decrease crude production in one of America's largest oil fields, further driving up gasoline prices already at record levels.

"Your fellow Americans are counting on you," Abbott wrote. "You can either stand with Americans by working to reduce gas prices, or you can side with arbitrary and discretionary EPA bureaucrats who could impair oil production and jobs in the Permian Basin."

Were the EPA to declare the Permian Basin a non-attainment area, state officials would be required to enact tougher air pollution laws, likely requiring oil and gas companies to regularly inspect their equipment for methane leaks through technologies such as infrared cameras and drones and replace older equipment.

Such practices are becoming commonplace in oil and gas fields around the country, as publicly traded companies, under pressure from investors, look to prove their commitment to fighting climate change. In the oil and gas fields of Colorado and Wyoming, where the EPA has declared non-attainment areas for ozone, monitoring for methane emissions is fast becoming standard.

At a recent hearing before the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon, a Republican, bragged how a recent Georgia Tech study showed his state had a lower rate of fugitive emissions from natural gas drilling than any western state.

“Given the reality fossil fuels will continue to be an essential component of energy consumption for years to come,” he said, “it is vital to recognize what states like Wyoming can do to minimize the footprint of energy sources.”

But the prospect of more federal environmental regulations is being met with resistance by some oil and gas companies, particularly smaller, privately held firms with smaller budgets, who argue it will add cost to their production.

Todd Staples, president of the Texas Oil and Gas Association, said the industry is already making “great strides” in reducing methane emissions and improving air quality in West Texas, making federal intervention unnecessary.

“Domestic oil and natural gas produced in the United States, and largely right here in Texas, is the cleanest in the world,” he said. “At a time when the administration should be working with industry to unleash America’s energy potential, the administration is making moves that ignore and even discourage progress.”

U.S. companies have long argued oil and gas produced here is cleaner than that produced in other nations, but a new analysis by the nonprofit Rocky Mountain Institute indicates oil and gas operations in Texas have some of the highest methane emissions in the world.

Tracking methane emissions is notoriously difficult. EPA data shows methane emissions have been on a steady decline since 1990. But the statistics companies report to the EPA are estimates, based on assumptions about how frequently oil and gas equipment is likely to leak and in some cases observations in the field.

A 2018 study from the Environmental Defense Fund estimated that the EPA was under counting methane emissions from U.S. oil and gas fields by 60 percent.

EPA is expected to make a decision on designating the Permian Basin a nonattainment area next year, Goldstein said.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

‘War On Fossil Fuels’ Drives Uncertainty Among Texas Oil And Gas Producers

By Brad Johnson
The Texan

Fossil fuel producers in the nation's most prolific energy-producing state are not bullish on the near future of their industry.

A renaissance that began with the fracking revolution and took off with 2015's lifting of the crude oil export ban created an abundant supply of cheap, plentiful energy, due primarily to Texas' prolific oil and gas production.

But that unstoppable force met the immovable object of the global pandemic and its resulting government shutdowns — a wrench thrown into the global engine, seriously affecting the fuel that powers it.

Oil prices sit consistently above \$110 per barrel. Average gasoline prices in Texas have eclipsed \$4.50. And natural gas prices in May were three times higher than in 2019.

Fossil fuel producers do not see a break in these high costs any time soon, according to a survey done by the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas.

Uncertainty about their industry is as prolific as was their fossil fuel production before the pandemic.

Nearly half of respondents primarily blamed labor shortages, inflation, and supply chain bottlenecks as the primary causes for oil and gas production concerns — each of which is an indirect consequence of government policy.

Responding to the coronavirus pandemic — a factor outside of their control — federal, state, and local governments shut down business operations across the nation: grounding air travel, closing everyday businesses, or putting strict constraints on ingress and egress of persons.

This sent a ripple effect throughout the global supply chain, creating a self-fulfilling disruption for both demand and supply. Fewer people traveling meant less demand for fuel. Less demand for fuel at first drove down the cost of oil to historic lows, but then led to less fuel production when the market adjusted. As travel demand recovered, the production side struggled, and continues to struggle, to catch up — playing into the high prices currently seen.

Another consequence of the shutdowns, unemployment skyrocketed both as a result of the closures themselves and the loss of business profits the lockdowns exacerbated. The oil and gas industry is still struggling to return to pre-pandemic levels of employment — employing 30,000 fewer workers than at the end of 2019.

To cushion that financial blow felt by the millions of newly unemployed — the business left with no choice but to shed payroll — Congress opted to print trillions of dollars, hoping to stabilize the economy.

While it momentarily put some money into pockets, the country now faces 40-year high inflation, currently sitting at 8.6 percent. Inflation means higher costs, whether it's labor, materials, or the end product — affecting every point along the energy supply chain from the wellhead to the gas pump.

Most respondents said they don't see the supply chain problems being resolved in the next year.

But the second-highest primary contributor to industry uncertainty is regulation from the federal government. The Biden administration — which tried to toe the line between the environmental faction of his party and the oil and gas-reliant faction during his campaign — has sent mixed signals to the oil and gas industry.

On the one hand, Biden has called on the fossil fuel industry to ramp up production to put downward pressure on fuel prices. He's also put in motion a release of 130 million barrels of oil from the nation's Strategic Oil Reserve — a total that accounts for about a week of the nation's oil consumption.

But his administration has also placed fossil fuel producers under increased regulatory scrutiny.

The nation's largest oil and gas-producing region, the Permian Basin, is staring down the barrel of a new Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulation. The new rule would redesignate certain counties in the Permian Basin under the Clean Air Act — a broad-sweeping law that grants the EPA significant authority to regulate operations.

The Clean Air Act, and the authority it grants the EPA, is the subject of a legal challenge currently in front of the U.S. Supreme Court; the ruling is likely to come out this week.

EPA regulations have shifted substantially from presidential administration to administration. Five years ago, the Trump administration EPA announced the rollback of the Obama administration's heightened regulations on the Permian's energy producers. But this redesignation would either reinstate or build upon those Obama-era restrictions.

In a letter to the White House, Gov. Greg Abbott warned the rule proposal “could result in draconian regulations imposed by the EPA that would directly attack America's most prolific oil field.”

The Permian Basin accounts for 40 percent of the nation's oil production.

“If you do not [rescind the proposal], this action alone might serve as a catalyst for economic harm leading to an even deeper reliance on imported foreign energy and a faster economic decline into the pending recession by forcing even more pain for American consumers to pay at the pump,” Abbott said.

Similar to its campaign rhetoric, the Biden administration has pushed the envelope on renewable energy development. Included among its set of strategies, the administration has said it will employ the Defense Production Act to expedite construction of large capacity batteries needed to store renewable generation.

While he's called for larger short-term production, the long-term policy path from the White House has focused on renewable development — a position of which the fossil fuel industry has taken notice.

One executive told the Dallas Federal Reserve, “The current administration [in Washington]

declared war on fossil fuels before going into office, and they have continued that war to this day.”

Another comment in the survey states, “Government animosity toward our industry makes us reluctant to pursue new projects.”

One executive stated, “Mixed messages from politicians remain unhelpful to longer-term projects and commitments.”

“Politicians need the reminder that a barrel of oil does not go directly into the gas tank of a car. Broadly speaking, permitting of all kinds remains difficult, if not impossible, and the lead times are forever.”

Over 80 percent of the respondents said that it’d take them anywhere between four months and a year to drill a new oil well — a lengthy timeline made more difficult due to regulatory hoops.

There is no easy or immediate solution to runaway inflation and rising energy costs. But Texas fossil fuel producers, who drive much of the economic activity within the state, point to a clear obstacle standing in the way of a return to \$2.00 gas: the current inhabitant of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Business/Economy

-

Dallas-Fort Worth Adds Nearly 295,000 Jobs In The Past Year, Triple Its Typical Pace

By Mitchell Schnurman

Dallas Morning News

The economy may be facing headwinds from inflation and higher interest rates, but the labor market is still on fire in North Texas.

Dallas-Fort Worth added 294,700 jobs in the 12 months ended in May, roughly three times more than the typical annual gains before the pandemic, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported on Wednesday.

Only the New York and Los Angeles metro areas added more workers in the past year, and they have much larger employment bases.

Among metros with over 1 million people, D-FW ranked second in job growth rate – up 7.7% in May, behind only Las Vegas.

At the same time, the local unemployment rate remained low: 3.3% in May compared with 5.1% a year earlier, not seasonally adjusted.

“We’re still gonna see strong growth for a while,” said Adam Perdue, an economist with the Texas Real Estate Research Center at Texas A&M University. “It’s been primarily driven by the migration of companies and people. A lot of what happened during COVID seems to have

supercharged the underlying growth in Texas. "

D-FW includes two metropolitan divisions, and the largest, Dallas-Plano-Irving, has been setting the pace. It accounted for over three-quarters of the region's job gains in the past year.

In May, Dallas-Plano-Irving gained 21,400 jobs, seasonally adjusted. That was a slight decline from April but was higher than earlier months this year. And May's gain was over three times greater than the monthly average in 2019, the last full year before the pandemic.

There have been signs of a slowdown in some parts of the economy, with Plano-based First Guaranty Mortgage Corp. laying off most of its workers. In addition, Texas manufacturers are tapping the brakes – some in anticipation of a potential recession.

Nearly a quarter of manufacturing executives said they cut production in June, a sharp increase from May, according to a recent survey from the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas. Over 30% said new orders had declined and their company outlook had worsened – reflecting the most negative sentiments since the early months of the pandemic.

Despite those concerns, they're continuing to hire, and more often than not, manufacturers and services companies said they expect to beef up employee rolls in six months, too.

"D-FW is a truly diversified market, and that's a big reason hiring is still so hot here," said Thomas Vick, Dallas-Fort Worth regional director of Robert Half, a major staffing firm.

Employment in Dallas-Plano-Irving surged 8.2% in the year ended in May, far ahead of historical trends. The growth rate was even faster than perennial leader Austin, which was up 6.7%.

And Dallas-Plano-Irving's 12-month increase was the highest among 38 metropolitan divisions tracked by the BLS.

North Texas is the state's leader in financial activities and professional and business services, Perdue said. Those sectors accounted for much of the outsized growth, as they have throughout the pandemic.

Over the past year, jobs in professional and business services grew 11.2% in Dallas-Plano-Irving. Since last May, the sector added over 61,000 net hires, and it's had 14 consecutive months of double-digit, year-over-year gains.

Financial activities grew 9.5%, and transportation, warehousing and utilities rose 12.5%.

Restaurants and bars, among the hardest hit by the pandemic, continued a strong recovery. They added 6,600 positions for a 12-month gain of nearly 32,000. Since May 2021, local jobs in the industry are up nearly 16%.

"Eventually, this will slow down," Perdue said, noting that such job increases cannot continue indefinitely. "But there's still a lot of steam" left.

He expects growth to continue, just not at the same breakneck pace. In housing, there are already signs of a slowdown. Inventories of homes for sale in D-FW have roughly doubled

since early this year, but they're still far short of the traditional level, he said.

As a result, he expects housing prices to grow, just closer to historical norms – not the high double-digit increases of the past year.

“Since we have migration into Texas and we're still relatively short of supply, we're still seeing the pricing pressure, even in the face of increasing mortgage rates,” Perdue said.

Dallas-Plano-Irving added nearly as many jobs as Los Angeles-Long Beach despite the L.A. metro division having 1.5 million more workers.

Migrants from California, along with New York and Illinois, have helped fuel the faster growth here. Texas has been attracting companies and workers from higher-cost states for decades, and those trends accelerated during the pandemic.

That was partly because more employees had the option to work remotely, and many opted for here.

“On a daily basis, we're hearing from candidates looking to relocate to Texas,” Vick said.

In a late May survey, Robert Half asked workers about their job searching plans, and 46% said they were limiting the job hunt to their home cities. Among Dallas-Fort Worth respondents, 60% said they wouldn't go beyond the area.

“Most people don't want to leave D-FW,” Vick said. “They see companies and people moving here, and other good signs – like rising home prices.

“If they're gonna look for another job, they believe there are more opportunities here.”

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Chevron's Offer To Pay For Staff To Move To Houston Signals Growing Focus On Texas

By Marissa Luck

Houston Chronicle

Chevron is offering to pay for California employees to voluntarily relocate to Houston and is selling its San Ramon headquarters campus, as the company's center of gravity continues to shift to Texas.

Last week Chevron confirmed it will remain in California, but it is inviting employees to move to Houston as it puts its 92-acre corporate campus in San Ramon on the market and plans to move its headquarters offices into a smaller leased office spaces elsewhere in the region. The 1.4 million square-foot campus is about 35 miles east of San Francisco.

It's still a question though of how many of its 2,000 employees in San Ramon would actually make the move. Chevron isn't requiring employees to move to Texas, but its offer to cover employees' relocation is another sign that Houston is a primary center of operations for the oil major. Chevron has about 8,000 employees in the Houston area, including about 6,000 employees in downtown Houston.

Chevron's real estate shuffle was first reported by the Wall Street Journal.

The energy firm has roughly 3 million square feet of office space in downtown Houston spread across three buildings. Chevron also owns two office buildings in northwest Houston that it picked up after it acquired Noble Energy. One of those 438,000 square-foot building represented one of the largest blocks of sublease office spaces available in Houston area as of the first quarter 2022, according to real estate firm Cushman & Wakefield. In the past year, Chevron also moved into a leased small office space in The Ion, Rice Management Co.'s startup incubator in Midtown Houston.

In February, Chevron started requiring office-based employees to physically commute to the office at least three days a week.

"One of the primary reasons that we felt strongly that it was the right thing to eventually come back is we believe that every company has to preserve a strong culture and that comes from collaboration, face-to-face feedback and our ability to interact with each other on a human (level). We strongly believe that contributes to better business outcomes," Steve Green, president of Chevron North America, in a March interview. "I've heard more and more people had forgotten all the positive things from being together, like the ability to go to lunch with someone, the ability to walk out of the building to go to a different restaurant, the ability to collaborate fact-to-face on a business issue, or to ask a short question without having to jockey for positions on a calendar for a Teams or Zoom call."

As the biggest private employer in downtown Houston, Chevron's return-to-office was a major boost in assisting downtown Houston's economic recovery from the pandemic. Green, however, said the company has continued to see value in allowing for some flexibility.

"We did learn some things working remotely that we very much want to preserve," Green said. "Long-term it will be less necessary for people to travel for a 2-hour meeting (for example)."

The pandemic has shifted company's physical office space needs as more firms adopt hybrid strategies both in Houston and the Bay Area. Chevron is among numerous Bay Area companies that have sought to cut office space during the pandemic, including Wells Fargo, Salesforce and Airbnb. In Houston, where the oil price crash early in the pandemic hit the energy industry, many energy firms moved to shed office space too. Halliburton has said it has cut its real estate footprint in Houston by about 30 percent since the start of the pandemic. Exxon, Schlumberger, EP Energy and Petroleum Geo Services also put large blocks of sublease space on the market at the end of last year, according to research from the real estate firm Cushman and Wakefield. Additionally last quarter Engie put sublease space on the market in the Galleria and BP put its 76,600 square-foot on WestLake Park Boulevard on the market for sublease, according to Cushman & Wakefield.

Even as oil prices rebounded, energy firms aren't all jumping to expand their office spaces even as many do commit to long-term leases. Enbridge is halving its office footprint as it moves its employees to McDermott International tower in the Energy Corridor from the Galleria next month. And Exxon is selling its former headquarters campus in Irving, Texas after moving its headquarters officially to Houston.

Although many California companies have relocated to Texas during the pandemic - from Tesla to Oracle and Hewlett Packard Enterprises - Chevron has maintained its plans to headquarterd in the Golden State.

“The current real estate market provides the opportunity to right-size our office space to meet the requirements of our headquarters-based employee population,” the company said in a statement. “Chevron will remain headquartered in California, where the company has a 140-year history and operations and partnerships throughout the state.

Chevron’s roots in San Francisco stretch to Pacific Coast Oil Co. in 1879, a company that was later part of John D. Rockefeller’s corporate juggernaut Standard Oil. For three and a half decades, Chevron was headquartered on Market Street before moving its headquarters in 2001 to San Ramon. The company also has a major refinery in Richmond, Calif. with more than 3,000 workers.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Texans View State's Economic Growth As A Good Thing But Feel Pinch Of Higher Prices

By Antony Salvanto, Fred Backus, Jennifer De Pinot, and Kabir Khanna
CBS News

Texans rate their state's economy better than Americans rate the nation's overall, and they're mostly optimistic about Texas' — much more so than they are about the national economy.

Texans view the economic growth of their state in a positive light — two out of three Texans say new business moving into Texas and increased building, growth and development in the state are making Texas better.

But not all is rosy in the Lone Star state. Their views of the state's economy are only mixed — they're just better compared against the nation's very low marks. And many Texans are not just concerned about inflation and gas prices, higher prices are leading to cutbacks in spending and reported difficulties, especially for those with lower incomes, just as with Americans overall.

Most Texans are optimistic about their family's financial situation, but there are clear worries about the impact of inflation; Texans are not spared that. They're pessimistic about the cost of goods and services. For most, higher prices have impacted their lives, and the price of gas, in particular, has been a difficulty, and lower income Texans say they're being affected in disproportionate numbers.

Optimism is tempered by concerns about inflation, and particularly the cost of gas.

Gas prices and inflation top of a list of important issues, just ahead of the economy overall, and above gun policy and education. So while most Texans are optimistic about their family's finances, a large majority are pessimistic about the cost of goods and services specifically.

Gas prices have had a particularly broad impact. Two-thirds of Texans say the higher gas prices Texans are facing have been a financial difficulty, including three in 10 who describe it as a financial hardship.

Most Texans are feeling the pinch personally — seven out of 10 are cutting back on

entertainment or other activities and cutting back on trips and travel. Most have also felt the effect when it comes to day-to-day activities — 57% are cutting back on food and grocery items as a result of higher prices, and 68% say they are driving less.

Some Texans are faring worse. Half say they have had to use their savings to pay bills, and a third say they have missed some bill payments altogether.

Lower-income Texans have felt the impact day-to-day the most. Two-thirds making under \$50,000 a year have had to cut back on food and groceries, and about half have had to dip into savings to pay bills. This group is also more likely than higher-income families to have missed bill payments.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Immigration/Border Security

-

Durbin Says Migrant Deaths In Texas Could Be 'Uvalde Moment' For Immigration Deal

By Adam Shaw

Fox News Channel

Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin, D-Ill., says that he hopes the deaths of 51 migrants in a tractor-trailer in Texas will prove to be a "Uvalde moment" for efforts to pass a broad immigration deal.

Durbin told Politico that talks have restarted with Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., about a possible Senate deal as the two are traveling in Europe for a NATO Summit in Madrid.

He referenced the shooting in Uvalde, Texas where 21 people were killed by a gunman at an elementary school. That massacre led to a bipartisan gun control bill passing through the chamber last week.

Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., wants the deaths of 51 migrants in a tractor-trailer in Texas to be a "Uvalde moment" for efforts to pass a broad immigration deal.

Durbin expressed hope that the deaths this week of 51 migrants in a tractor-trailer in San Antonio, Texas would provide a similar impetus for stalled efforts to pass a similar bipartisan deal on immigration. The migrants were found in the abandoned vehicle, which authorities believe was part of a human smuggling operation.

"We've been talking the last couple days about reviving that effort," Durbin told Politico. "And I think what happened at the border with finding 51 dead migrants in that tractor trailer is what I would call a 'Uvalde moment.' I hope it sparks an interest in finding a bipartisan approach to dealing with immigration."

Biden border policy failures blamed for deaths of illegal migrantsVideo
Tillis' office later downplayed the possibility of a deal until the Biden administration took action to secure the border.

"A group of senators previously held discussions that were exclusively focused on border

security and stopping the abuse of our nation's asylum laws," Tillis' office told Fox News Digital. "However, until the Biden-Harris administration starts to enforce immigration laws and finally takes some action to end the crisis at the border that they created, there is not much to negotiate. Leaders in Washington have to act in the best interest of the American people and American workers."

Senators in both parties have been pushing for years to find a comprehensive immigration deal. Democrats sought to revive the effort at the start of the Biden administration -- but Republicans balked at the inclusion of a mass amnesty for millions of illegal immigrants already in the country, especially given the ongoing migrant crisis at the southern border.

Democrats later sought to include a number of amnesty proposals in its budget reconciliation framework, but they were found to be inappropriate for inclusion by the Senate parliamentarian -- and the reconciliation bill stalled in general after Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., said he would not support it.

Additionally, any deal that includes a pathway to citizenship for any number of illegal immigrants is likely to face significant opposition from both the Republican base and lawmakers in Congress. Republican Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy recently declared any "amnesty" efforts a "non-starter."

Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, recently raised eyebrows with comments he made to Senate Democrats in which he said: "First guns, now it's immigration." The comments sparked pushback from a number of conservatives and Republicans who objected to any such effort.

His office later said that those comments were a joke: "There's no immigration bill," a spokesperson told Fox News Digital.

Sen. John Cornyn received backlash earlier this month when he told Senate Democrats "First guns, now it's immigration," referring to him working with Democrats on a bipartisan gun bill. Cornyn's office later said his comments were a joke.

Meanwhile, two Mexican nationals living in the U.S. illegally have been charged with firearm offenses in connection to the migrant deaths in San Antonio.

Juan Francisco D'Luna-Bilbao and Juan Claudio D'Luna-Mendez, who both allegedly overstayed B-2 visas, have been charged through separate criminal complaints as illegal aliens in possession of firearms, according to court documents filed Tuesday.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

National News

Jackson To Be Sworn In As Supreme Court Justice Thursday

By The Associated Press

Dallas Morning News

Nearly three months after she won confirmation to the Supreme Court, Ketanji Brown Jackson is officially becoming a justice.

Jackson, 51, will be sworn as the court's 116th justice Thursday, just as the man she is replacing, Justice Stephen Breyer, retires.

The judicial pas de deux is set to take place at noon, the moment Breyer said in a letter to President Joe Biden on Wednesday that his retirement will take effect after nearly 28 years on the nation's highest court.

The court is expected to issue its final opinions earlier Thursday in a momentous and rancorous term that included overturning *Roe v. Wade's* guarantee of the right to an abortion. The remaining cases are a challenge to the Environmental Protection Agency's ability to regulate climate-warming emissions from power plants, and Biden's bid to end the Trump-era "remain in Mexico" asylum program.

In a ceremony the court said it will stream live on its website, Jackson will recite two oaths required of Supreme Court justices, one administered by Breyer and the other by Chief Justice John Roberts.

Jackson, a federal judge since 2013, will be the first Black woman to serve as a justice. She will be joining three women, Justices Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Amy Coney Barrett — the first time four women will serve together on the nine-member court.

Biden nominated Jackson in February, a month after Breyer, 83, announced he would retire at the end of the court's term, assuming his successor had been confirmed. Breyer's earlier-than-usual announcement and the condition he attached was a recognition of the Democrats' tenuous hold on the Senate in an era of hyper-partisanship, especially surrounding federal judgeships.

The Senate confirmed Jackson's nomination in early April, by a 53-47 mostly party-line vote that included support from three Republicans.

She has been in a sort of judicial limbo ever since, remaining a judge on the federal appeals court in Washington, D.C., but not hearing any cases. Biden elevated her to that court from the district judgeship to which she was appointed by President Barack Obama.

Jackson will be able to begin work immediately, but the court will have just finished the bulk of its work until the fall, apart from emergency appeals that occasionally arise. That will give her time to settle in and familiarize herself with the roughly two dozen cases the court already has agreed to hear starting in October as well as hundreds of appeals that will pile up over the summer.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Congress Investigates Portable Generator Manufacturers Following Carbon Monoxide Deaths In Texas And Other States

By Mike Hixenbaugh, NBC News, and Perla Trevizo

Texas Tribune

A congressional committee is investigating whether portable generator manufacturers have done enough to protect the public from deadly levels of carbon monoxide emitted by their

products.

Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney, D-N.Y., who leads the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, sent letters to top executives at four major generator companies on Tuesday requesting copies of records documenting why they have not implemented potentially lifesaving safety upgrades in many generator models for sale. Maloney also asked for messages sent or received by officials at the companies — Generac Power Systems, DuroMax Power Equipment, Firman Power Equipment and Champion Power Equipment — related to any injuries or deaths connected to their products.

The committee investigation comes more than two decades after U.S. regulators identified the deadly risks posed by portable generators and six months after an investigation by NBC News, ProPublica and The Texas Tribune found that federal efforts to make portable generators safer have been stymied by a statutory process that empowers manufacturers to regulate themselves. That system has resulted in limited safety upgrades and continued deaths. Maloney repeatedly cited the news outlets' findings in her letters to company executives.

Portable generators, often used to power critical medical equipment and appliances such as refrigerators and air conditioners during electrical outages, emit enough carbon monoxide to kill within minutes when operated in enclosed spaces or too close to exterior openings. Carbon monoxide deaths caused by generators predictably follow nearly every major power outage caused by extreme weather, which scientists say is becoming more common with climate change. Generators played a role in at least 10 deaths in Texas during the February 2021 winter storm and electric grid failure.

“As families prepare for potential extreme weather during the 2022 hurricane season, they shouldn’t have to worry about whether the products they buy to keep themselves safe are dangerous and potentially life-threatening,” Maloney said in a statement. “Unfortunately, with tragedy after tragedy, we’ve seen that portable generators have become one of the deadliest consumer products on the market.”

Portable generators kill an average of 80 people in the U.S. annually. After years of studying the problem, the Consumer Product Safety Commission concluded that warning labels and manuals instructing users to only operate generators outdoors were not enough to prevent accidental deaths. In 2016, the agency determined that manufacturers could save lives by making machines that emit significantly less carbon monoxide.

Instead, under industry-friendly federal laws, generator makers were allowed in 2018 to propose their own less expensive and voluntary solution: sensors that automatically turn the machines off when carbon monoxide builds up to an unsafe level.

But in the years since, some manufacturers have not added the safety switches or reduced carbon monoxide emissions in many generators for sale, especially in low-budget models, leaving consumers in many instances to choose between cost and safety, the ProPublica, Texas Tribune and NBC News investigation found.

The safety commission echoed those findings in a report issued this year. The 104-page report said automatic shut-off sensors alone, even if manufacturers installed them in every model, could not prevent all carbon monoxide poisonings caused by generators. The best solution, according to the commission’s findings, was to both reduce generator carbon monoxide

emissions and add automatic shut-off switches — a comprehensive approach that only a few manufacturers have implemented.

Based on those findings, the commission said its staff would urge the agency's five commissioners to move forward with a federal rule requiring generator makers to cut carbon monoxide emissions and add safety switches in the next fiscal year, which begins in October.

Maloney cited the safety commission report in her letters Tuesday to the chief executive officers of the four companies. Maloney told each of the CEOs she was concerned that the companies had "failed to adequately implement voluntary standards to reduce the risk of death from CO poisoning," based on the commission's report.

The letters said that the four companies had failed to add any safety upgrades to many or most of the generators they listed for sale in the fall of 2021.

"The Committee is seeking to understand why your company has failed to adequately adopt industry-led standards, how your company plans to prevent putting your customers at risk in the future, and whether legislative reform is necessary to protect consumers," she wrote to each company executive.

Maloney gave the companies until July 12 to turn over information related to the safety of their products, details about the amount of money they have saved by declining to implement changes and their communication with federal regulators. If the companies fail to voluntarily comply, the committee's chair has the power to issue subpoenas.

Tami Kou, a Generac spokesperson, said that company officials were in the process of reviewing the letter and that they would respond to lawmakers. In an earlier statement to reporters, Kou defended the company's efforts to protect consumers. Kou told the news organizations that by 2023, all portable generators sold by the company would be equipped with shut-off sensors.

Dennis Trine, CEO of Champion, said in a statement that the company prioritizes the safety and quality of its products and that officials had started compiling the information requested and will provide it to the committee.

"Temporary, emergency power saves lives for people storing hundreds of dollars of Insulin in their refrigerators and people using breathing machines to sleep at night. The list goes on regarding the critical benefits of portable generators," Trine wrote in an email.

Trine also said portable generators "never" kill users when they are "used correctly as depicted on the product, packaging and owners manual."

But safety advocates say those instructions aren't always easy to follow, because the machines usually can't be operated in rain or snow. And a review of user manuals by the news organizations, which didn't include Champion's products, found that they can provide conflicting messages. Some instruction booklets suggest keeping generators a shorter distance from windows or doors than the 20-foot minimum recommended by the safety commission, while others provide more general guidance such as keeping the machines "far away" from homes.

The other two companies did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Susan Orena, executive director of the Portable Generator Manufacturers' Association, the trade group that developed the voluntary shut-off switches standard, told federal regulators that generator makers have been affected by supply chain problems caused by the pandemic, according to the safety commission's February report.

"It has been difficult to obtain parts, including CO sensors, to move forward any quicker," Orena told the agency.

But Marietta Robinson, a commissioner with the Consumer Product Safety Commission from 2013 to 2018, said portable generator manufacturers could have taken such steps years ago. She welcomed the House committee investigation.

"Most portable generator manufacturers have not invested in making their products safer," Robinson said. "Instead, they have invested heavily in fighting both this technological change and regulations that would require it."

The Consumer Product Safety Commission previously estimated that reducing generators' carbon monoxide emissions would add about \$115 to the manufacturing cost of most units, which typically sell for \$500 to \$1,500.

Robinson noted that generator manufacturers have "made many millions of dollars" off of people's need for their products in the wake of increasingly frequent severe weather events.

"The least they can do is invest the modestly additional amount in making these products safer by significantly reducing their emissions of CO and saving the lives of those using this product," Robinson said.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

From: [OOG News Alerts](#)
Subject: Morning News Clips 7.1.22
Date: Friday, July 1, 2022 8:33:16 AM
Attachments: [Morning News Clips 7.1.22.pdf](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

Morning News Clips 7/1/2022

- [Texas Take](#)

- [Texas Tribune: The Brief](#)

- [Politico Playbook](#)

Greg Abbott News

KTVT – Anthony Slvanto, Fred Backus, Jennifer De Pito, and Kabir Khanna: [CBS News Poll: Governor Greg Abbott Leads Democrat Beto O'Rourke 49%-41% \[Web\]](#)

Administration News

Fox News Channel – Brooke Singman: [Biden To Host Virtual Meeting With Governors To 'Protect Women's Reproductive Health' After Abortion Ruling \[Web\]](#)

State News

Texas Tribune – Uriel J. Garcia: [“Nobody’s Giving Us Any Answers”: Uvalde Families Demand Details Of Shooting Investigation At City Council Meeting \[Web\]](#)

Houston Chronicle – Joel Umanzor and John Wayne Ferguson: [Person In Custody After SWAT, FBI Respond To Barricaded Man Inside River Oaks Home \[Web\]](#)

KTRK – Rudy Aguero: [Injured Uvalde Teacher Welcomed Home By Community After Spending 1 Month In The Hospital \[Web\]](#)

KXXV – Associated Press: [Man Gets Life In Prison In Fatal Shooting Of Texas Officer \[Web\]](#)

Houston Chronicle – Jermei Wallace: [Texas GOP Pushes Lawmakers To Limit Vote-By-Mail For Seniors And Cut Early Voting Period \[Web\]](#)

Business/Economy

-
Center Square – Bethany Blankey: [Texas Sets Employment Growth Record For May \[Web\]](#)

Immigration/Border Security

-
Fox News Channel – Bradford Betz: [Texas Border Patrol Agents Nab Convicted Sex Offenders Entering US Illegally \[Web\]](#)

Transportation

-
Fox Business – Adam Sabes: [Republican State Attorneys General File Petition For Review In Court, Challenging Fuel Economy Standards \[Web\]](#)

Health Care

-
Dallas Morning News – Isabella Volmert: [Denton’s Resolution To De-Prioritize Abortion Laws Seen As A Symbolic ‘First Step’ \[Web\]](#)

-
Dallas Morning News – Marin Wolf and Isabella Volmert: [Requests For Contraceptives On The Rise In Texas After Abortion Ruling Was Overturned \[Web\]](#)

Environment

-
Houston Chronicle – Joel Umanzor: [Houston Under Flood Watch As Rainfall Expected To Strengthen Through End Of Week, Experts Say \[Web\]](#)

Opinion/Editorial

-
Austin American-Statesman – David DeMatthews and David S. Knight: [Texas Must Invest More In Student Mental Health \[Web\]](#)

-

#

-
-
-
-

Greg Abbott News

CBS News Poll: Governor Greg Abbott Leads Democrat Beto O'Rourke 49%-41%

By Anthony Slvanto, Fred Backus, Jennifer De Pito, and Kabir Khanna

KTVT

A new CBS News-YouGov Texas poll conducted for CBS DFW found Governor Greg Abbott has an eight-percentage point lead over Democratic challenger Beto O'Rourke. If the election were held today, 49% of Texans surveyed said they would vote for Abbott, the two-term Republican incumbent, while 41% said they would vote for O'Rourke, a former Congressman from El Paso and former Presidential candidate.

Governor Abbott gets mixed results when Texans look at the job he's doing. Most Republicans like the job he's doing, most Democrats do not, and Independents are split down the middle. Still, in a state that leans more red than the rest of the country, Abbott is viewed as doing a better job as governor than Joe Biden is as president.

Texans rate Governor Abbott's response to the deadly mass shooting in Uvalde more negatively than positively. Governor Abbott gets negative marks from younger Texans, women, and Black and Latino people for how he has handled the Uvalde shooting. Majorities of both Democrats and Independents think he's done a bad job, but most in his own party rate his response positively.

Senator John Cornyn is getting mixed marks from his own party on representing Texas' interests as it relates to guns, and this is dragging on Cornyn's overall job approval rating, which is just 35% among Texans overall.

Republicans who think Cornyn has done a bad job on gun policy overwhelmingly disapprove of his overall job performance. Cornyn's job approval among Republicans is 20 points lower than it is for Senator Ted Cruz.

Most of the interviewing for the poll was conducted as the gun safety legislation Cornyn negotiated was being considered and before it passed. More Texas Republicans said they oppose the legislation than favor it. The Texas public overall is more inclined to favor it.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Administration News

Biden To Host Virtual Meeting With Governors To 'Protect Women's Reproductive Health' After Abortion Ruling

By Brooke Singman

Fox News Channel

President Biden will meet virtually Friday with a group of governors whose states have "moved swiftly" to "protect women's reproductive health" following the Supreme Court's ruling to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

A White House official said the president is hosting an event Friday afternoon to meet with governors "from across the country in a virtual meeting," just a week after the high court announced its decision to return the issue of abortion back to the states after nearly 50 years.

"President Biden will join from the White House and talk with governors whose states have moved swiftly post-Dobbs decision to protect women's reproductive health," the White House official said.

Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker, California Gov. Gavin Newsom, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown and Washington Gov. Jay Inslee are expected to take part in the president's event.

Lamont signed a first-in-the-nation law that protects medical providers and patients seeking abortion care in Connecticut who may be traveling from other states that have outlawed abortion. Additionally, that law expands abortion access in Connecticut by expanding the type of practitioners eligible to perform certain abortion-related care.

Earlier this month, Hochul signed a package to further preserve, protect and strengthen abortion rights for patients and providers in New York, a state where Medicaid covers the cost of an abortion.

In New Mexico, Lujan Grisham signed an executive order to protect medical providers from attempts at legal retribution. The order protects health care providers from "discipline due to an out-of-state resident receiving abortion services in the state" and makes clear it will "not cooperate with extradition attempts from other states where criminal charges are being pursued against the individual for receiving or performing reproductive services."

Minnesota and Massachusetts also recently took similar executive action.

And in Illinois, Pritzker is set to call a special session of the General Assembly to focus on legislation to strengthen women's access to abortion.

California, Oregon and Washington issued a multi-state commitment to defend access to reproductive health care, including abortion and contraceptives, and commitments to protecting patients and doctors against efforts by other states to enforce their abortion bans in the three western states.

Meanwhile, an official said the White House "waited until the end of the foreign trip to announce this event, but it is happening the president's first day back, without him skipping a beat."

The president, during a press conference from Spain on the sidelines of the NATO summit Thursday, teased the meeting, telling reporters he is "meeting with a group of governors when I get home on Friday."

"The first and foremost thing we should do is make it clear how outrageous this decision was and how much it impacts not just a woman's right to choose, which is a critical, critical piece, but on privacy generally," Biden said. "And so I'm going to be talking to the governors as to what actions they think I should be taking as well."

The president again stressed that the U.S. should "codify Roe v. Wade into law, and the way to do that is to make sure the Congress votes to do that."

"And if the filibuster gets in the way, it's like voting rights, we should require an exception to the filibuster for this action," he added.

Biden had previously called on Congress to codify Roe following the Supreme Court's June 24 ruling, but he had not called for ending the filibuster. Biden has only previously called for the measure during his effort to pass voting reforms, which did not succeed.

The filibuster is a threshold of 60 votes in the Senate that's necessary before a piece of legislation is given an up or down vote.

If Democrats wanted to establish a new filibuster precedent, they could do so with 51 votes — all 50 senators in the Democratic caucus, plus Vice President Harris breaking the tie.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

State News

-

"Nobody's Giving Us Any Answers": Uvalde Families Demand Details Of Shooting Investigation At City Council Meeting

By Uriel J. Garcia

Texas Tribune

At an emotional City Council meeting Thursday, families of the Robb Elementary School shooting victims demanded the mayor release details from the investigation. Mayor Don McLaughlin told them he didn't have any new information and the city can't share anything with the public because of the ongoing investigation.

"Nobody's giving us any answers, it's been over a month, you have no idea how frustrating that is. We're sitting here, just listening to empty words," said the sister of Irma Garcia, one of two teachers who was killed in the May 24 massacre along with 19 students. She didn't identify herself by name when she addressed the City Council.

Tina Quintanilla-Taylor, whose daughter survived the shooting, also made a plea to state leaders who have details of the investigation and haven't shared them with the community: "Show your face. Answer our questions, now," she said, facing TV news cameras.

Some family members also demanded to know why Pete Arredondo, a City Council member

and school district police chief whose actions during the shooting have brought withering criticism, failed to show up to his second consecutive City Council meeting. According to the city charter, the City Council could vacate the seat if Arredondo misses a third consecutive meeting.

McLaughlin told family members that if city officials released details about the shooting investigation, they could be prosecuted, citing letters from the Texas Department of Public Safety and Uvalde County District Attorney Christina Mitchell Busbee requesting that no information be released until the investigation is complete.

The shooting is being investigated by the Texas Rangers, who are part of DPS, and the FBI.

In the letter dated June 8, Busbee does not mention prosecuting anyone, but says that “Any release of records to that incident at this time would interfere with said ongoing investigation and would impede a thorough and complete investigation.”

Busbee didn’t return a phone message from The Texas Tribune seeking comment Thursday.

The shooting by an 18-year-old Uvalde man — who was killed by law enforcement after they waited more than an hour to confront the shooter — is the worst K-12 school shooting in the country since a gunman killed 20 children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, in 2012.

The aftermath has brought anguished questions from parents and residents who are demanding answers, as well as finger-pointing between state and local officials over what most law enforcement experts agree was a botched response by police as children were being slain inside the school.

During the council meeting, family members discussed the idea of starting an effort to recall Busbee. McLaughlin also offered to resign if Uvalde residents felt he wasn’t doing his job

“I’m not a quitter. But if this community feels like I haven’t done a good job as mayor and they want me to resign, I’d be happy to,” he said.

The meeting came as a state House committee held its second straight day of private interviews as part of an investigation of the shooting. The committee, which is chaired by state Rep. Dustin Burrows, R-Lubbock, heard testimony from the mayor, teachers and Uvalde police and state police officers.

Burrows has said he believes witnesses would give more candid testimony away from the public eye.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Person In Custody After SWAT, FBI Respond To Barricaded Man Inside River Oaks Home

By Joel Umanzor and John Wayne Ferguson *Houston Chronicle*

A person was taken into custody after an hours-long standoff at a River Oaks home, according to the Houston Police Department.

Houston Police Department officers responded around 9:30 a.m. to the 3800 block of Del Monte Drive, where witnesses said authorities were attempting to execute a search warrant. It is currently unclear who or what police were looking for at the time of the incident.

A person inside the home was detained at about 3 p.m., police said in a tweet. The name of the person wasn't released, and police said they weren't releasing any more details on Thursday evening.

FBI officials also responded to the scene and said they were assisting HPD in the incident.

During the standoff, police cordoned off the area and residents were encouraged to find alternate routes. There were still police officers in the area at 4 p.m., but officials said there was no threat to the public.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Injured Uvalde Teacher Welcomed Home By Community After Spending 1 Month In The Hospital

By Rudy Agüero

KTRK

A teacher who was injured in the mass shooting at Robb Elementary School is back home and he received an emotional welcome from the community.

Arnulfo Reyes witnessed what officials say was the deadliest school shooting in Texas history when a gunman opened fire, killing 19 students and two teachers and critically injuring him at Robb Elementary School.

Recent Stories from ABC 13

Biden says he supports changing Senate filibuster rules to codify nationwide abortion protections

After spending one month in the hospital and undergoing more than 10 surgeries, Reyes returned home from the hospital on Sunday.

Over 40 cars from the community lined up to welcome the teacher back home. Reyes also shared an emotional moment with Sandra Torres, whose 10-year-old daughter was in his class but did not survive the shooting. A video shows Torres embracing Reyes as she got out of her vehicle.

Torres and Reyes are not blood-related, but Torres' daughter was the niece of the teacher's stepbrother.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Man Gets Life In Prison In Fatal Shooting Of Texas Officer

By The Associated Press

KXXV

A man was sentenced to life in prison in the 2018 fatal shooting of an undercover Fort Worth,

Texas, police officer, prosecutors said.

A jury on Wednesday gave Timothy Huff, 36, a life sentence without possibility of parole in the death of Garrett Hull, an officer who was promoted to corporal after his death. The Tarrant County jury found Huff guilty of capital murder Monday.

Huff didn't shoot Hull, but he was one of three men officers were pursuing after a robbery at a bar when Hull was killed, prosecutors said. The group had been robbing bars and police had staked out the area that night, prosecutors said.

After robbing customers, Huff, Dacion Steptoe and Samuel Mayfield ran in different directions when they saw the officers, prosecutors said.

Steptoe fatally shot Hull and another officer killed Steptoe.

Huff and Mayfield were both charged with capital murder. Mayfield's trial date hasn't been set.

Huff took the witness stand during his punishment phase, telling jurors he wasn't aware Hull had been shot that night and he "didn't intend for it to happen."

Prosecutor Tim Rodgers told jurors that the violence had escalated in the group's robberies and that Huff was "dangerous, dangerous, dangerous."

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Texas GOP Pushes Lawmakers To Limit Vote-by-mail For Seniors And Cut Early Voting Period

By Jeremy Wallace

Houston Chronicle

Not satisfied with the new voting restrictions put in place less than a year ago, the Texas Republican Party is plowing ahead with yet new measures that would reduce the number of early voting days and end the practice of allowing any senior to vote by mail without an excuse.

At the same time, party leaders are threatening GOP state lawmakers who control the Texas Legislature with increased sanctions if they don't support the platform, including potentially spending tens of thousands of dollars directly to oppose them in future primaries.

"We made a good step the last time, but we are not there yet," State Sen. Bob Hall, a Republican from Edgewood, said about last year's election reforms packages that reduced early voting hours in places like Harris County and put new restrictions on mail-in voting.

The push to further restrict early voting and mail-in ballots is rooted in former President Donald Trump's continued claim without evidence that the 2020 election was stolen from him largely because of mail-in balloting. At the same convention where the state GOP adopted the new legislative priorities, more than 8,000 delegates also approved a resolution rejecting the "certified results of the 2020 Presidential election" and declaring "that acting President Joseph Robinette Biden Jr. was not legitimately elected by the people of the United States."

“Texas Republicans rightly have no faith in the 2020 election results and we don’t care how many times the elites tell us we have to,” said Republican Party of Texas Chairman Matt Rinaldi, who was elected the leader of the party with no opposition.

What’s more, the Republican Party of Texas membership voted overwhelmingly at its statewide convention in June to make more election reforms its No. 1 priority for the next legislative session that begins in January. That would include increasing penalties for those who violate election laws even inadvertently, reducing early voting days and restricting mail-in balloting to only the military, the disabled and people who will be out of the county during the entirety of early voting.

Texas has allowed voters 65 and older to vote absentee without needing an excuse since 1975. If the GOP succeeds, that would end. More than 1 million Texans used vote-by-mail during the 2020 presidential election.

“There’s no reason, just because you’ve turned 65, that you can’t show up to vote,” Hall said in promoting the changes during the June GOP Convention in Houston.

Democrats decried the last round of Republican-led restrictions as voting suppression calculated to discriminate against Black and Latino voters, going so far as to flee Austin mid-session and stay away for weeks to block the legislation and slow its passage. The legislation put new restrictions on vote-by-mail and reduced early voting hours in places like Harris County that ran late night and 24-hour voting centers.

The new rules led to a dramatic increase in mail-in ballots being rejected in the March primary. About 25,000 voters had their mail-in votes rejected, a rejection rate of over 12 percent — far higher than the typical 1 percent.

Texas was a pioneer of in-person early voting. It created a 20-day window of early voting in the late 1980s and expanded it dramatically in the early 1990s to include more locations like shopping malls and grocery stores. Currently, Texas has two weeks of early voting before elections, though in 2020 Gov. Greg Abbott expanded early voting for an additional week to allow more people concerned about COVID-19 to vote before Election Day.

If the state cut early voting to just one week, as Hall has proposed, it would affect up to 6.5 million Texans — that’s how many voted in the first two weeks in 2020.

Voting rights groups and Democrats are concerned that lawmakers are cutting voting options at a time Texas is seeing a historic voter registration surge, particularly in Democratic strongholds.

“They’re clearly doing it to hold onto power,” Texas Democratic Party chairman Gilberto Hinojosa said of Republican tactics on elections. “The whole electorate has shifted on them.”

Since 2014, Texas has added more than 3.3 million voters, with Harris County and Bexar County leading the way.

Those counties have also seen the most dramatic shift: Gov. Greg Abbott, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and Attorney General Ken Paxton all won them in 2014, then lost them badly en route

to the closest re-elections of their careers in 2018. They are up for re-election this year.

State Sen. Bryan Hughes, the lead Republican author of the election reforms enacted in 2021, said he's not committed yet to any additional reforms, but stressed that he's pushed to improve election security for years.

"I'm talking to election administrators, election workers and volunteers to see what we should do next," said Hughes.

While historically the GOP legislative priorities have been a wish list that wasn't taken that seriously, that's different now. In addition to public censure, party leaders added the possibility of spending money against Republicans who interfere with their agenda.

Other legislative priorities the party adopted included banning gender modification of children, opposing red flag laws for gun purchasers and more border security.

In regards to the border, the party's leaders are demanding Abbott invoke a clause in the U.S. Constitution to declare an invasion at the border that they say would allow him to immediately deport any immigrants caught crossing — a step Abbott has already said he's researched and doesn't believe he can do legally because the federal government has jurisdiction over immigration laws.

The censure rule was a major point of debate during the GOP convention as grassroots volunteers complained about legislators and members of Congress not paying enough attention to their legislative priorities. Those complaints came even as the Legislature last year expanded gun laws, passed the so-called heartbeat law that effectively ended most access to abortions in Texas, added new voting restrictions, and barred transgender children from playing on girls sports teams — all priorities of the Republican Party of Texas in 2021.

But convention delegates complained the censure has mostly been a slap on the wrist with no real consequences. That led the party to pass new rules that will allow it to spend up to 12 percent of its general funds against Republicans they censure to make sure voters know that there is a penalty for not following the platform. With anywhere between \$1 million to \$4 million in the general fund, that could mean hundreds of thousands of dollars being spent against GOP candidates.

The platform adopted last month includes planks such as calling for a vote on secession from the United States, privatizing Social Security and opposing both the expansion of gambling and legalizing marijuana.

At one point, Republicans proposed a rule that could have gone even further and barred censured Republicans from competing in future Republican Primary elections, effectively blocking their re-election. That brought concern from party leaders like Rinaldi who said the party would be subject to costly lawsuits.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Business/Economy

-

Texas Sets Employment Growth Record For May

By Bethany Blankey

Center Square

For the seventh consecutive month, Texas employers set new employment highs. In May, Texas added 74,200 total nonagricultural jobs. Total nonfarm jobs reached 13,357,100 in May, with 762,400 new jobs added since May of last year.

"Texas continues to set records for employment growth with more than 250,000 jobs added from the beginning of this year through May," Texas Workforce Commission Chairman Bryan Daniel said. "Training and upskilling are crucial to maintain this level of employment growth, and TWC remains committed to offering innovative training programs."

Industries that gained the most were Leisure and Hospitality with 27,600 new jobs, Professional and Business Services with 15,300 new jobs and Trade, Transportation, and Utilities with 11,700 new jobs.

Three major industries surpassed their pre-COVID employment levels for the first time in May 2022 – Construction, Manufacturing, and Leisure and Hospitality, TWC notes. A total of eight industries have recovered "from the pandemic-related downturn," TWC says, also including Trade, Transportation, and Utilities, Information, Financial Activities, Professional and Business Services, and Education and Health Services.

To Texans looking for work, TWC Commissioner representing labor Julian Alvarez said, "Regardless of your background or skill level, TWC offers pathways to a successful career for all Texans." Over the next few months, it will be highlighting opportunities available in the Texas labor market.

It's also hosting a range of job fairs and hiring events statewide listed by date and location on its website.

It's also promoting a range of programs to help employers train their current and future workforce, TWC Commissioner representing employers, Aaron Demerson, said. "TWC is here for all Texas employers large and small. Through the power of new initiatives like Texas Interns Unite!, we look forward to creating career opportunities for our future workforce and keeping Texas the best place to do business."

TWC's upcoming conference in Sherman on July 15 is sold out but events in Abilene (August 5) and San Marcos (Sept. 9) remain open. Conferences for employers are either one or two days long and require registration.

Earlier this year, the TWC approved the Statewide Healthcare Registered Apprenticeship Initiative, which created short-term pathways to entry for health-care professions. It expedites the application processes, and is working directly with private and public health-care employers to coordinate across multiple workforce areas.

On May 31, the TWC also suspended multiple administrative rules to allow it to provide funds to train apprentices and other employees in public sector health-care occupations to address a health-care worker shortage. Doing so also made \$5 million available in FY 2022-2023 to support employer training of healthcare workers.

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Immigration/Border Security

-

Texas Border Patrol Agents Nab Convicted Sex Offenders Entering US Illegally – By
Bradford Betz
Fox News Channel

Texas Border Patrol agents nabbed two convicted sex offenders Tuesday morning after they illegally entered the U.S. from Mexico.

Agents assigned to the Del Rio Sector encountered a group of migrants around 9:15 a.m. The migrants were walking in the brush hoping to not be seen by Border Patrol, according to a U.S. Customs and Border Protection press release.

Agents took the migrants into custody and transported them to the Eagle Pass Processing Facility. Record checks showed that one of the people in the group – a 42-year-old Honduran national named Edis Noe Hernandez-Ruiz – was convicted of sexual battery in Georgia in 2008 and spent five years in prison. He was deported in 2017.

Less than an hour later, Eagle Pass South Station agents came across another group of migrants trying not to be seen after illegally entering the U.S. The agents took the group into custody and transported them to the Eagle Pass Processing Facility.

During processing, agents discovered that a member of the apprehended migrants – 55-year-old Jose Marlon de La O-Mejia, of El Salvador – was also a convicted sex offender. In 2001, De La O-Mejia was arrested in Alaska for sexually abusing a minor and sentenced to years in prison. He was ultimately deported in 2006.

Both subjects, along with the other migrants, were processed in accordance with U.S. Customs and Border Protection policies. CBP says Hernandez-Ruiz and De La O-Mejia, as convicted felons with prior removals, face up to 20 years in prison.

Their capture came a day after 53 migrants were found dead in a tractor-trailer that had been abandoned on a desolate road in San Antonio. The alleged driver of the truck, 45-year-old Homero Zamorano Jr., is facing one count of alien smuggling resulting in death and faces life in prison or the death penalty if he is convicted.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Transportation

-

Republican State Attorneys General File Petition For Review In Court, Challenging Fuel Economy Standards
By Adam Sabes
Fox Business

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton along with other Republican attorneys general have filed a petition for review in federal court, challenging the National Highway Traffic Safety

Administration's corporate average fuel economy standards.

The new National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's corporate average fuel economy standards, which were announced on April 1, require "an industry-wide fleet average of approximately 49 mpg for passenger cars and light trucks in model year 2026," and an increase of fuel efficiency by 8% per year for passenger cars and light trucks with a model year of 2024 and 2025.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says that the standards will help make the air cleaner while saving American's money.

"NHTSA is helping American families by making life more affordable – and the air cleaner for their children. These vehicles will be better for the environment, safer than ever, and cost less to fuel over their lifetimes," the regulation's announcement reads.

Other states including Arkansas, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, Ohio, South Carolina and Utah joined Texas in the petition.

Paxton said that the court challenge "opposes the Biden Administration's climate change agenda," adding that the new regulations will only lead to higher prices for consumers.

"At a time when Americans are already struggling because of Biden's inept policies and radical progressive agenda, NHTSA's fuel standards will only create more concerns and saddle consumers with higher-priced electric vehicles," Attorney General Paxton said. "I will continue to fight back and challenge these unnecessary regulations that are unconstitutional and do more harm than good."

The petition for review was filed in the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia on June 30.

A press release by Paxton's office also alleges that "NHTSA violated the express statutory prohibition on its mandating electric vehicles in setting the CAFE standards," adding that "The rule also implicates important state sovereignty interests."

U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said when the regulation was announced that it would reduce carbon emissions as well.

"These improvements will also make our country less vulnerable to global shifts in the price of oil, and protect communities by reducing carbon emissions by 2.5 billion metric tons," Buttigieg said.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Health Care

-

Denton's Resolution To De-Prioritize Abortion Laws Seen As A Symbolic 'First Step'

By Isabella Volmert

Dallas Morning News

After the Denton City Council passed a resolution Tuesday asking police to de-prioritize abortion Texas abortion laws and recommending the city direct resources away from enforcing them, some were quick to point out the resolution has no power to enable legal abortions.

Activists who support abortion rights, however, have heralded its symbolic value.

Kamyon Connor, executive director of the Texas Equal Access Fund, said she hopes the resolution encourages pregnant women to seek health care if they are experiencing a medical emergency, such as a miscarriage, and encourages medical providers to treat these patients without fear of legal repercussions.

“I am glad to see a municipality taking a stance that supports people in accessing their reproductive health care,” Connor said.

She described the resolution as a “great first step” and hopes other cities and counties will do the same.

“If we don’t have bold city officials, pushing back at a local level, we will not make headway at the state level,” Connor said.

The Supreme Court’s 6-3 decision last week in *Dobbs vs. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* overturned *Roe vs. Wade* — reversing nearly 50 years of constitutional abortion protections and leaving it up to states to establish their own abortion laws.

Texas, along with 12 other states, is poised to implement a “trigger law” that bans the procedure. In June, Gov. Greg Abbott signed a law that will outlaw abortion within 30 days of the high court’s judgment becoming final, which could take several weeks.

Denton’s resolution asks the city’s police department to not investigate, store data on, or report abortion, miscarriage or any pregnancy outcome as a violation of state law. While the council has no legal authority over the police department’s policy, the resolution tasks city officials to take steps to implement the measures it calls for.

The resolution does not guarantee protection from state agencies enforcing abortion laws.

It also has no bearing on Senate Bill 8, a Texas law enacted in September that allows private citizens to sue anyone who aids or abets an abortion after six weeks of pregnancy — and does not give enforcement power to state official.

Southern Methodist University law professor Joanna Grossman said because the resolution recommends designating violations of the abortion laws as low-priority crime, providers will still refuse to perform abortions because of the threat of criminal and financial penalties.

“That is not enough reassurance to any provider,” she said. “A low-priority crime doesn’t mean there’s any kind of immunity.”

Grossman said while the resolution has little power over practical change, “I think there is some symbolic value in having voters go to their elected representatives and saying ‘We object to what’s happening here and we want to make clear this is the kind of place where we are not going to turn these doctors into criminals.’”

Additionally, Grossman said, the resolution holds value in the way the city and its residents consider the treatment and attitudes towards providers. It could also draw enough attention to the matter to affect other proposals and future elections.

Delashawn Bordeaux, the founder of Speak Your Truth, an organization that supports survivors of sexual abuse, said she hopes the resolution will encourage women to feel safe to search and find resources for travel out of state for legal abortions. She also called on local and state governments to improve foster care conditions and secure the right to contraception.

“As a state in general, I don’t have high hopes,” Bordeaux said. “But I’m glad to see Denton putting forth the resolution. I would love for other counties and cities to take forth that same effort.”

Council member Alison Maguire, who proposed the resolution, said that even if the City Council can’t set police police, the resolution would clearly establish the city’s priorities.

“We can make recommendations and as leaders in the community we have the responsibility to do,” Maguire said.

A city spokesperson said in a written statement that officials are “reviewing the extent to which the recommendations of the resolution can be implemented and that further reporting back to council will be provided in accordance with the dates in the resolution.”

Other local governments in Texas have suggested ways to keep providers and women from being prosecuted for abortions.

The El Paso City Council is set to consider a resolution similar to Denton’s early next week. The City Council voted to create a commission to protect women’s rights in early May, shortly after the leak of a draft Supreme Court opinion on the case set off national alarms.

El Paso City Representative Cassandra Hernandez said even though the resolution could be seen as purely symbolic, the El Paso Police Department is already stretched for resources and should not be tasked in “criminalizing pregnant women.”

“That shouldn’t really be the focal point here for our services,” she said.

In Dallas County, District Attorney John Creuzot has said his office will not prosecute violations of the Texas abortion laws.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Requests For Contraceptives On The Rise In Texas After Abortion Ruling Was Overturned

By Marin Wolf and Isabella Volmert

Dallas Morning News

On the day the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, the Austin Urology Institute fielded 400 calls, double its usual volume.

Not every call was a patient inquiry about a vasectomy, but many were. The office added extra

appointment slots to accommodate the increased requests for consultations for the sometimes-reversible contraceptive procedure, said urologist Dr. Koushik Shaw.

Reproductive health specialists across the state are seeing increased interest in long-term and permanent contraceptive options, including vasectomies, tubal ligations and intrauterine devices, known as IUDs, in response that limits the procedure in most cases.

“People are revisiting their contraception, life planning, family planning, and they’re fast forwarding the decision process,” he said.

The apparent rush for long-term contraceptive options began as Texas’ near-complete abortion ban took effect in September, with interest climbing since the Supreme Court’s draft decision on abortion’s constitutionality was leaked in May. The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* last Friday appears to have only accelerated the demand for birth control.

Google searches in Texas related to vasectomies and tubal ligations – or “getting your tubes tied” – jumped in the days following the decision.

Patients span all ages, genders and income brackets, although the ruling will likely impact low-income people most. They include people who are already parents and people who don’t ever plan to have children. The common denominator is their desperation for more reliable birth control options, even if they come with potentially negative side effects.

Dr. John Thoppil, president of the Texas Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, said his private practice in Austin has had a 50% increase in requests for long-term contraceptives since the Supreme Court decision, especially tubal ligation.

The sterilization procedure, which can be reversed in some cases, is performed under anesthesia by a surgeon who blocks or cuts the fallopian tubes to prevent pregnancy.

Jessica Moore, 36, from Austin, scheduled a consultation with Thoppil immediately after the Supreme Court ruling, saying her “sense of security” if she were to become pregnant was now gone.

In the past, she had been on the pill and had an IUD, but suffered negative side effects. She decided she’ll try the arm implant Nexplanon, which releases hormones that prevent pregnancy.

“It’s really unfortunate we have to either choose, ‘I’ll risk getting pregnant, despite my best efforts not to,’ or ‘I’m putting these hormones in my body that negatively affect me and give me side effects,’” she said.

Hormonal birth control methods such as the daily pill, hormonal IUDs, and Nexplanon can result in numerous side effects such as weight gain, nausea and mood changes.

Trust Her, a Dallas-based initiative that partners with eight community health clinics in the area to financially assist patients seeking same day birth control services, has seen a “steady increase” in patients seeking contraceptives since the passage of Senate Bill 8.

Organization director Kate McCollum reported a 54% increase in the number of patients they covered in the first quarter of 2022 compared to the same quarter a year prior.

“These would be women who are uninsured and not enrolled in any kind of payer program like Medicaid or Healthy Texas Women, who likely couldn’t afford their method out of pocket,” she said.

She also reported an increase in the number of teens visiting clinics for birth control and an increase in the number of women choosing “highly effective methods like IUDs that often have the most barriers to access.” IUDs can have high out-of-pocket costs and can require someone to take time off work to recover from the short procedure.

One of Trust Her’s partner clinics, Women’s Health Care Center in Dallas, saw a 10-15% increase in women seeking long-term birth control methods “in all forms,” since September, said the non-profit clinic’s founder Dr. Sherry Tenison.

“It’s our low income women, low insured women, with all ages and all races,” she said.

Dr. Shanna Combs, a pediatric and adolescent gynecologist based out of Fort Worth, saw not only an uptick in young women seeking long term reliable birth control, but also a significant spike in the number of parents inquiring after female birth control for their children. Both groups cite the legal developments of Texas’ abortion law and the recent Supreme Court decision.

“In September, I saw a lot of parents saying, ‘Well in light of recent news or recent law changes, I want to make sure that she’s protected because if she got pregnant, there’s nothing she could do.’”

Other patients are more concerned that the Supreme Court decision could open the way for a ban on contraceptives in the future. In a concurring opinion, Justice Clarence Thomas said the court should reconsider other past rulings, including one codifying the right to contraception access.

Dallas podcast producer Kelly Kolff, 25, learned of the monumental court decision one hour before her previously-scheduled gynecologist appointment. She wasn’t planning on talking to the doctor about birth control, but her plans quickly changed, she said. Kolff had been on the birth control pill since 2019.

She told her doctor she wanted to get an IUD, a long-term birth control option that can last anywhere from three to 10 years. Kolff had been previously hesitant to get the device because of pain during and after the procedure.

“But there was no hesitation in my mind that day. I felt, and still feel, like I have no choice but to get an IUD for my own survival,” she said. “I don’t know what’s going to happen next, and I wanted something that was long term enough to know I’d be protected if Texas starts banning contraceptives.”

Kolff is scheduled to have the IUD procedure next week.

People are also rushing to stock-up on emergency contraceptives. CVS announced Tuesday it

is limiting the sale of ‘morning after pills,’ such as the well known brand name Plan-B, after a surge in consumer stocking. Emergency contraceptives can be purchased over the counter without a prescription.

Austin Urology Institute’s Dr. Shaw regularly performs vasectomies for men who don’t want to have children. During the procedure, which he performs at his clinic using local anesthetic, Shaw goes into the scrotum through a tiny incision and severs the vas deferens, or the tube that carries sperm from the testes to the penis.

Recovery takes about a week and, after around 90 days, the procedure is more than 99% effective, Shaw said.

His patients typically range from age 25 to 55, although he’s recently noticed a sizable jump in patients under 30.

“The sub-30 population, [they’re] saying, ‘We don’t want kids, it’s not in our life plan,’” he said.

Vasectomies can be reversed through another outpatient operation that has an up-to-95% success rate, depending on how much time has passed since the original procedure and what type of reversal is required. Shaw said he advises patients to consider a vasectomy as permanent because there’s always a chance a reversal won’t work.

While the Affordable Care Act requires insurance companies to cover women’s contraceptives, it does not require all companies to cover vasectomies. The procedure can cost up to \$1,000 out-of-pocket, Shaw said.

Many of Shaw’s patients said they’re getting a vasectomy because they don’t want their partner to have to take birth control pills or get an IUD. Other patients cited worries about condoms failing. It’s a noticeable shift in thinking, Shaw said, as the responsibility of contraception has historically fallen on women.

“We’re changing a little bit of that machismo factor in that women are responsible for all of the family care planning. What’s happening is that men are starting to speak about it more,” he said. “We’re getting the word out that this is not a big deal. It’s easy to do, no long-term repercussions, it’s affordable. If the timing is right, I think it’s a safer alternative.”

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

-

Environment

-

Houston Under Flood Watch As Rainfall Expected To Strengthen Through End Of Week, Experts Say

By Joel Umanzor

Houston Chronicle

Houston is under a flood watch as showers are expected to hit southeast Texas Thursday morning and strengthen throughout the end of the week, according to forecasters.

After an initial clear morning, scattered thunderstorms are likely to begin at 10 a.m. with chances of precipitation reaching 70 percent, the National Weather Service stated. New rainfall amounts are forecast to hit between a quarter- and half-inch.

Temperatures will be in the 80s throughout the day, the NWS added.

Thursday's rain will likely be unorganized and the threat of heavy rainfall won't be a reality until about midnight for the coastal areas and into Friday morning for the inland, according to Space City Weather.

Although precipitation will increase to 80 percent, temperature highs will be around the mid-80s, according to NWS forecasters.

As the rainfall is anticipated to increase to almost an inch on Friday, Space City Weather has issued a Stage 1 Flood Alert which means residents should expect "nuisance" street and frontage road flooding with some neighborhoods impacted.

Depending on where the tropical low moves, the intense rainfall around the coast Friday may impact offshore areas with Galveston potentially experiencing up to 10 inches of rain, according to Space City Weather.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Opinion/Editorial

Texas Must Invest More In Student Mental Health

By David DeMatthews and David S. Knight

Austin American-Statesman

The head of the Texas state police recently called law enforcement's response to the May 24 Uvalde murders of 19 children and 2 teachers an "abject failure." Law enforcement failed to act quickly, but many Texas lawmakers have also failed to act quickly to ensure mental health services were widely available after prior mass shootings.

Texas Department of Public Safety Director Steve McCraw uses maps and graphics to present a timeline of the school shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, during a hearing, June 21 in Austin.

After the Uvalde shooting, Governor Abbott said, "We as a state – we as a society – need to do a better job with mental health." Yet, the governor had ample time to make mental health investments since taking office in 2015 and governing through numerous mass shootings. In fact, he made similar statements about mental health investments following the Santa Fe High School and El Paso Walmart shootings in 2018 and 2019.

In the wake of the Uvalde massacre, Texans should be concerned with how their state ranks in mental health access. A recent report on access to mental health care highlights incomprehensible failure. Texas ranks 51st among states and the District of Columbia when it comes to mental health care access, the percent of adults with mental illness who are uninsured, the percent of adults with a cognitive disability who could not afford to see a doctor, and youth who have experienced a major depressive episode who did not receive

mental health services. Shockingly, over 255,000 Texas children with major depression did not receive any mental health treatment in 2022.

Texas has made investments in school security although evidence suggests increased security came at the expense of school-based mental health care. Since the 1999-2000 school year, Texas school districts have doubled the amount of funds allocated to school security. The state spent \$254 million or about \$64 per pupil on security in 1999-2000, in inflation-adjusted terms. By 2020-21, districts in Texas spent a total of \$665 million or \$124 per student.

For the typical Texas district, spending on school security now represents 11.6% of spending on student support services, up from 7.3% in 1999-2000. The proportion of funds spent on guidance counseling and social work services remained flat over the same time period, while the proportion spent on community services declined. Clearly, Texas has not made large investments in student mental and physical health care, and the state's own data show the average school counselor is responsible for over 455 students, a far higher threshold than the recommended student-to-counselor ratio of 250.

Quality mental health care and educational outcomes that help youth successfully transition into adulthood require greater investments than what has been made to date. If state policymakers are serious about addressing mental health, they would no longer put Texas public schools in the position to choose between more school security and more mental health staff. Poorer communities like Uvalde would have adequate resources to proactively meet their community's needs.

Texas failed to provide adequate resources to schools and communities like Uvalde. Approximately, 80% of children in Uvalde ISD are classified by the state as economically disadvantaged. Texas consistently ranks within the bottom 5 to 10 states when it comes to providing adequate funds to districts serving higher percentages of students in poverty. Given these shortfalls, policymakers could predict that communities like Uvalde would struggle with mental health.

As officials examine law enforcement's failure to intervene at Robb Elementary School, Texans should demand explanations for why policymakers have failed to enact policies that provide mental health care and adequate school funding to communities like Uvalde.

Texas schools and communities need significant and sustained investments coupled with common sense gun reform, as mental health is only one aspect of the nation's gun violence crisis. Even immediate investments in mental health and public schools will take time to bear fruit and will not immediately make up for decades of funding inequities and unmet mental health needs.

In Texas, every child deserves to reach adulthood, every teacher should feel safe at work, and every community should have a well-funded school to meet children's academic and emotional needs. We must all demand that our policymakers acknowledge their failures and act swiftly with significant investments.

-

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

From: COVID Solutions Bulletin <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Monday, April 11, 2022 8:50 AM
To: Secretary
Subject: Reminder: COVID Solutions Bulletin 16

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.



COVID Solutions Bulletin

Clearing the Air to Re-Open America

April 8, 2022

Issue No. 16

In this issue:

- Disinfection devices gain equal status with ventilation and filtration as the Biden Administration pivots to give more importance to clean and safe interior air.
- The White House is making a change in its approach that's been "long in coming."
- Without disinfection devices, ventilation and filtration alone have serious drawbacks when it comes to energy consumption and effectiveness.
- Boosting an HVAC system or adding strong filtration means heightening energy use and greenhouse gases.
- Dr. Nelson opens the door for disinfection technologies to clean interior air of pathogens.
- High-level Rockefeller report urges cleaner, safer air in schools and workplaces to reduce health care costs and absenteeism and "improve productivity, academic performance and cognitive function."
- American cases, hospitalizations, and deaths decline, but a new subvariant boosted infections in Europe, and there are signs that another surge may come to the U.S.
- Can government protect those especially vulnerable to COVID in the workplace, or do we have to depend on the private sector?

White House Gives ‘Disinfection’ Equal Billing as a Way to Clear Indoor Air of SARS-CoV-2

“Let’s Clear the Air on COVID” was the title of a March 23 blog by Alondra Nelson, the head of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and formerly a chair of the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton.

The pun was common, but the blog itself was unusual. It is part of what the [Washington Post](#) on March 29 called a “pivot” by the Administration, which will follow up the blog and a [Fact Sheet](#) with a [virtual summit on “evidence for action”](#) on the afternoon of April 7. Post reporter Dan Diamond wrote that the White House action is “a move scientists say is long overdue and will help stave off future outbreaks.”

Not only did the Nelson blog emphasize the importance of clean and safe air in the fight against the SARS-CoV-2 virus, it gave “air disinfection” equal billing with ventilation and filtration as part of a “set of simple but powerful actions we can use to **bring clean air into the rooms we’re in and clean the air already in the room.**” (The boldface is Dr. Nelson’s.)

The science chief is quick to note that the “Biden Administration identified improved indoor air quality as an important tool to fight the spread of airborne diseases in the [American Pandemic Preparedness Plan](#) last September – and the [National COVID-19 Preparedness Plan](#) prioritized it again earlier this month.”

In fact, a thorough reading of the September plan finds improved air quality cited exactly once, in a section on personal protective equipment, and nowhere are specifics, even about ventilation, discussed. The plan emphasizes vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics and early-warning systems. Air quality doesn’t even merit a mention in the summary of 12 goals.

Nor can the March plan can hardly be said to “prioritize” cleansing indoor air. It does, however, pledge that the Administration will work with Congress to “secure the necessary funding to give schools and businesses guidance, tests, and supplies to stay open, including tools to improve ventilation and air filtration.”

The truth is that government has been slow to recognize the value of clean and safe indoor air in stopping the spread of COVID. And even with earlier recognition, policy makers stressed ventilation and filtration, which certainly have their place but which alone are rarely a solution.

That has now changed, as evidenced by the latest White House activity. Schools and businesses will have to take notice – and act.

A Change That’s Been Too Long in Coming

The Administration even says it will “foster ways to recognize steps taken by buildings to improve indoor air quality and protect their communities,” adding:

Similar to how programs like LEED, Fitwel, and WELL recognize buildings for their environmental and health impacts, this new effort between the federal government and external experts will develop ways to recognize steps taken by building owners for the health and safety of their communities and their achievements in improving air filtration and ventilation systems to protect and promote public health.

In other words, buildings with safe air will get a government seal of approval for clean and safe air. We will see how that process develops, but what's clear is that policy makers are beginning to understand that unsafe indoor air is at least as dangerous as unsafe water.

The change has been long in coming. In the early days of the pandemic, public health institutions, including at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO), resisted the notion that COVID could be spread in tiny aerosols that can remain suspended in the air for minutes or even hours. Instead, as we noted in [Issue No. 5 of this newsletter](#), CDC and WHO guidance stated that the SARS-CoV-2 virus was contained in droplets, which would fall harmlessly to the ground of their own weight within a few feet. More worrisome was supposed to be spread from surfaces or hand-to-hand.

But in July 2020, [an article](#) by Lidia Morawska of the Queensland University of Technology in Australia and Donald Milton of the University of Maryland School of Public Health, titled, "It's Time to Address Airborne Transmission of Coronavirus 2019," drew the support of 237 scientists in an open letter. The authors wrote:

There is significant potential for inhalation exposure to viruses in microscopic respiratory drop- lets (microdroplets) at short to medium distances (up to several meters, or room scale), and we are advocating for the use of preventive measures to mitigate this route of airborne transmission.

In November of that year, Kimberly Prather of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography, an expert on aerosols, and several colleagues wrote a [letter to Science magazine](#), explaining that aerosols were the problem:

Individuals with COVID-19, many of whom have no symptoms, release thousands of virus-laden aerosols and far fewer droplets when breathing and talking. Thus, one is far more likely to inhale aerosols than be sprayed by a droplet, and so the balance of attention must be shifted to protecting against airborne transmission.

Then, a little over a year ago, a group of 13 U.S. public health experts, including such members of President Biden's own [COVID task force](#) as Rick Bright, the former director of the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, and Michael Osterholm, a highly regarded epidemiologist at the University of Minnesota, called for "immediate action to strengthen measures to limit inhalation exposure to SARS-CoV-2."

They wrote in [a letter Feb. 16 to Rochelle Walensky](#), director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Administration COVID Coordinator Jeff Zients; and Anthony Fauci, director of NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases:

For many months it has been clear that transmission through inhalation of small aerosol particles is an important and significant mode of SARS-CoV-2 virus transmission... Numerous studies have demonstrated that aerosols produced through breathing, talking, and singing are concentrated close to the infected person, can remain in air and viable for long periods of time and travel long distances within a room and sometimes farther.

[Linsey Marr](#), an expert on aerosols at Virginia Tech who also signed the Science letter, was quoted as saying:

It's time to stop pussyfooting around the fact that the virus is transmitted mostly through the air. If we properly acknowledge this, and get the right recommendations and guidance into place, this is our chance to end the pandemic in the next six months. If we don't do this, it could very well drag on.

The CDC and WHO finally changed their guidance at the end of April 2021, precipitating a [long opinion piece](#) on May 7 in the New York Times Zeynep Tufekci of the University of North Carolina with the headline, "Why Did It Take So Long to Accept the Facts About COVID?"

She said the updates were momentous, even though the two organizations seemed to try to bury them ("no news conference, no big announcement") because of embarrassment: "These latest shifts challenge key infection control assumptions,...putting a lot of what went wrong last year in context. They may also signal one of the most important advancements in public health during this pandemic."

Better late than never, she added:

If the importance of aerosol transmission had been accepted early, we would have been told from the beginning that it was much safer outdoors, where these small particles disperse more easily, as long as you avoid close, prolonged contact with others. We would have tried to make sure indoor spaces were well ventilated, with air filtered as necessary.

Instead of blanket rules on gatherings, we would have targeted conditions that can produce superspreading events: people in poorly ventilated indoor spaces, especially if engaged over time in activities that increase aerosol production.... And we would have been less obsessed with cleaning surfaces. Our mitigations would have been much more effective, sparing us a great deal of suffering and anxiety.

Unfortunately, the shifts by the CDC and WHO did not alter mitigation efforts, but perhaps the Biden Administration's own shift will.

The Post on March 29 [quoted David Michaels](#), a George Washington University professor who previously led the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and advised Biden's transition team on the coronavirus pandemic, as saying that the new White House approach is "'a total rejection' of earlier assumptions that the virus was spread through direct person-to-person contact. "

I think much of the world has been dragged kicking and screaming into this because the World Health Organization and the CDC both clung to the infectious-disease model," said Michaels.

Ventilation, Filtration and Disinfection

Let's dig into the details of the Nelson blog.

It begins by saying, "While there are various strategies for avoiding breathing that air [i.e., air contaminated with SARS-CoV-2] – from remote work to masking – we can and should talk more about how to make indoor environments safer by filtering or cleaning air."

Nelson writes that changing the air and filtering it can reduce COVID spread, "with studies showing that five air changes an hour reduce transmission risk by 50 percent." She cites a [study in July by Rothamer](#), et al., in Science and Technology for the Built Environment, and [another by de Oliveria](#), et al., in Proceedings of the Royal Society.

Curiously, neither study is on point. The Rothamer research concerns the use of masks in ventilated environments, and the de Oliveria article describes a modeling exercise on the spread of aerosols and droplets.

If studies indeed show that an HVAC system that produces five air changes per hour reduces transmission risk by just 50%, that is hardly reassuring. There's still a lot of risk.

The deficiencies of ventilation alone, or even with filtration, have been well documented. We previously cited an extensive [article in HPAC Engineering](#) in August 2020, in Gary and Ken Elovitz of Energy Economics in Newton Centre, Mass., write:

The biggest danger for COVID-19 infection is close-range contact with infected people who are talking loudly or are otherwise exhaling heavily for at least several minutes. The HVAC system does not have much effect on those conditions.

The Elovitzes' main contribution is to deploy the Wells-Riley equation (also cited in the Rothamer study), which uses "infectious particle concentration, exposure time, and outside air ventilation" to come up with a prediction of the "likelihood that a person will be infected by a virus." (Academic research shows that, if anything, [Wells-Riley underestimates](#) risk.)

After the authors plug in the numbers, they conclude:

No practical amount of ventilation can be relied on or expected to protect occupants over long exposure times like the 6 or 8 hours people might spend together in an office or school classroom. Similarly, ventilation is unlikely to succeed as the prime means of protection for people in close contact in a small space like a private office.

The authors say that “improved filtration can reduce the risk of transmission by reducing the concentration of infectious particles in the air.” But that reduction is by no means complete. They write that, on average, “MERV 13 filters might be 60% to 70% efficient at removing particles that contain viral material.”

Higher-Capacity HVAC Systems Are Needed, But They Produce Higher Emissions

The Elovitzes also warn that higher-efficiency filters “have higher pressure drop,” which means reduced air flow and heating and cooling capacity. Bringing an HVAC system back up to its pre-filter levels of air flow requires an increased “motor load” – that is, a bigger-capacity system, which will use more energy and pose a greater threat to the environment.

One would expect that, with its focus on climate change, the Biden Administration would show concern about the increased emissions from powering up an HVAC system to achieve more air changes per hour in addition to adding additional power to compensate for the pressure drop from stronger filters. But, so far at least, no one in the Administration has mentioned the danger to the environment of what it proposes.

“Using high-quality air filters like HEPA or MERV-13 – connected to capable HVAC systems or portable air purifiers – to remove virus particles from indoor air is also important,” writes Nelson. But there are deficiencies here as well in addition to the climate-change threat.

An article in the October issue of the [ASHRAE Journal](#), a publication of the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers, acknowledged that HVAC systems are ineffective in fighting pathogens like SARS-CoV-2, even with the addition of powerful filters.

In analyzing a restaurant simulation, Zhiqiang Zhai, a professor of Civil, Environmental and Architectural Engineering at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and three colleagues write:

It is evident that if purely using the CA [that is, central air-conditioning with filtration], only a small fraction of the particles can be discharged through the ceiling exhausts. Most of the particles are spread out indoors and ultimately deposited on the occupants, tables, ground and walls.

The danger to occupants from HEPA [high-efficiency particulate air] filters placed on HVAC systems, write Zhai and his colleagues, is that some pathogens “do not get entrained into

the return air vents and may float around in a given space.” In other words, this is hardly the solution to contaminated indoor air.

Adding eight air purifier units “can clean 28% of the particles.” A table purifier placed in the center of each table in the room – only a few feet away from each occupant -- “can handle almost 80% of the particles, while slightly increasing the deposition on the tables compared to floor units.” But, clearly, placing an air purifier in front of nearly every person in a room is impractical and expensive.

The problem is that for filters to work, pathogens need to find them. If they have to travel large distances, that connection is elusive.

Nelson Opens the Door

To its credit, the Biden Administration has acknowledged that something else may be needed: “air disinfection.” Nelson writes, “By inactivating (‘killing’) airborne virus through methods like [ultraviolet germicidal irradiation \(UVGI\)](#) systems, we can add another layer of protection in indoor spaces.

She then spends the rest of the section discussing ultraviolet lights, citing [a 2015 study by Matsie Mphaephlele](#) of South Africa and colleagues that showed UVGI “about 80% effective against the spread of airborne tuberculosis, equivalent to replacing the air in an indoor room up to 24 times in an hour.” Ultraviolet disinfection also has the drawback of being [dangerous to humans](#), which is why [hospitals take great care](#) in using UV in operating rooms, requiring special equipment or clearing the rooms entirely while disinfection occurs.

But Nelson has done a great service in opening the door to the use of other disinfection approaches – particularly active systems, as opposed to passive UV. For example, [ActivePure](#), a Dallas-based company, has developed an Advanced Photocatalysis technology, [cleared by the Food & Drug Administration](#), that is capable of safely suffusing an occupied indoor space with the same oxidative particles found to clean the atmosphere naturally.

Rockefeller Report Also Stresses Safe and Clean Indoor Air

The rising White House interest in indoor air follows [“Getting to and Sustaining the Next Normal,”](#) a Rockefeller Foundation report issued in March by a distinguished group of epidemiologists and public health experts – including Bright, Michaels, Osterholm, and Ezekiel Emanuel of the University of Pennsylvania -- puts significant emphasis on safe and clean indoor air. It stated:

Indoor aerosol transmission in shared-room air, especially from people with few symptoms and who often don't know they are infected, is a key reason Covid transmission has been so difficult to control.

The authors also noted that cleaner, safer air in the workplace and schools will reduce health care costs and absenteeism and “improve productivity, academic performance and cognitive function.”

The report urges “necessary investments in ventilation, filtration, and disinfection” and says, “Specific funds must be allocated to low-income communities to enable these investments

for small businesses, schools, and other public buildings.” Also proposed by the Rockefeller group are “income-linked subsidies” to households for upgrades to systems to fight COVID indoors.

COVID Surging, Leveling Off in Europe and Rising in Parts of the United States

Masks have come off all over the United States and kids are back in school, but the COVID pandemic is not over. A surge dominated by the Omicron variant began in November and peaked in mid-January with 805,000 cases. By April 3, the seven-day average daily case count [had declined to 27,000](#), the lowest figure since July. But the slide seems to be at an end, with a national rate of 8 cases per 100,000. Some states, mainly in the Mid-Atlantic and New England regions -- are seeing sharp hikes, though their case rates remain below 20.

The increases – 51% in two weeks in New Jersey, for example -- seem to be the result of the new Omicron subvariant, BA.2, which now accounts for the majority of infections. According to a [Yale Medicine report](#) on March 30, the subvariant is “believed to be more contagious than any previous strain of the virus.” However, say the Yale experts, “the good news is that BA.2 does not appear to cause more severe illness than the original variant, and it has not caused a widespread rise in hospitalizations in Europe. But there is still much to learn about Omicron and BA.2.”

Europe has suffered a spike in cases as a result of BA.2. [In the U.K.](#), infections went from 28,000 on Feb. 27 to 85,000 on March 22; in France, from 53,000 on March 3 to 138,000 on April 3. But both countries are seeing cases level off, a phenomenon also seen in Germany, Italy and Japan. Still, with COVID, what happens in America first happens in Europe, so it is logical to expect that the rise in cases in a few states will spread.

But, meanwhile in the U.S., hospitalizations are continuing to drop sharply – down another 28% in the past two weeks to 21,000, the lowest level in more than a year. Deaths have fallen to 649 a day as a weekly average, down 41% in the last 14 days and at the lowest point since August.

The broader message is that we can expect a surge – or sub-surge – of some sort this month and that the ups and downs of COVID-19 will persist.

Protecting Vulnerable Employees in the Workplace

As COVID-19 cases decline in the U.S. and elsewhere, businesses are bringing workers back, but the work environment won't be the same. As the [New York Times](#) put it recently:

Executives are entering the next zone of return-to-office planning with what psychologists call “stress-related growth.” They have endured a sustained period of tumult. They are emerging feeling hopeful, equipped with new insights about how to respond when Covid cases surge and how to keep workers safe while businesses are open.

One of these “new insights,” especially with the Omicron surge, is that certain groups are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, especially to severe disease. The [CDC provides a long list](#) of conditions of vulnerability. They include: cancer; kidney, liver, heart, and lung conditions, diabetes; HIV/AIDS; immunocompromised states, either primary or brought on by taking medicines to weaken immune reactions after transplants, for example; mental health conditions such as mood disorders; overweight and obesity; and sickle cell disease.

Those over 65 are also far more vulnerable. CDC data, updated March 9, find that Americans aged 65 to 74 are just as likely as those aged 18 to 29 to become infected with COVID, but the [older group](#) is four times as likely to be hospitalized and 65 times as likely to die. (Some 11 million Americans over 65 are still in the workforce.)

Overall, a study found that [92 million Americans](#) are at especially high risk of serious disease if they become infected. That is 37.6% of adults aged 18 and over.

Unfortunately, the Americans With Disabilities Act does not impose an affirmative obligation to take protective steps to a person who is for example, immunocompromised. If that person asks for a “reasonable accommodation” (which often benefit other workers as well), a covered employer has to take appropriate steps to comply.

That employer has a range of possible solutions, from remote work to improving ventilation or purchasing an air disinfection system. Remote work is a popular mitigation means, but it also isolates the worker, especially as the rest of the workforce returns, post-COVID. And a worker's home environment without protection devices can be worse than the workplace.

The [Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\)](#) does have requirements that create affirmative obligations, but not for all workers. OSHA has issued an [Emergency Temporary Standard \(ETS\)](#) for health care workers only. That ETS makes minimal demands on employers when it comes to clean and safe air. It requires only that “employer-owned or controlled HVAC system(s) are used in accordance with manufacturer's instructions and the design specifications of the system(s) [and] air filters are rated Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) 13 or higher if the system allows it.”

There is no mention of air disinfection, and, based on its new “pivot,” the White House may want to get OSHA to update the ETS.

Throughout the pandemic, private employers have been the vanguard of caring for their workers. The incentives are large. Healthier workers are more productive, and clean and safe air is an attraction for potential new workers at a time of low unemployment.

COVID Solutions Bulletin | a publication providing regular updates on new and existing technologies that can help stop the spread of COVID-19, and help clear the air to open America back up.

For more information visit www.COVIDsolutionsbulletin.com.

EAH Strategies LLC | Headquarters, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

[Unsubscribe secretary@sos.texas.gov](mailto:secretary@sos.texas.gov)

[Constant Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent by [REDACTED] powered by



Try email marketing for free today!

From: COVID Solutions Bulletin <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Sunday, April 17, 2022 10:01 PM
To: Secretary
Subject: Reminder: ICYMI - COVID Solutions 16

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.



COVID Solutions Bulletin

Clearing the Air to Re-Open America

April 14, 2022

Issue No. 16

In this issue:

- Disinfection devices gain equal status with ventilation and filtration as the Biden Administration pivots to give more importance to clean and safe interior air.
- The White House is making a change in its approach that's been "long in coming."
- Without disinfection devices, ventilation and filtration alone have serious drawbacks when it comes to energy consumption and effectiveness.
- Boosting an HVAC system or adding strong filtration means heightening energy use and greenhouse gases.
- Dr. Nelson opens the door for disinfection technologies to clean interior air of pathogens.
- High-level Rockefeller report urges cleaner, safer air in schools and workplaces to reduce health care costs and absenteeism and "improve productivity, academic performance and cognitive function."
- American cases, hospitalizations, and deaths decline, but a new subvariant boosted infections in Europe, and there are signs that another surge may come to the U.S.
- Can government protect those especially vulnerable to COVID in the workplace, or do we have to depend on the private sector?

White House Gives ‘Disinfection’ Equal Billing as a Way to Clear Indoor Air of SARS-CoV-2

“Let’s Clear the Air on COVID” was the title of a March 23 blog by Alondra Nelson, the head of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and formerly a chair of the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton.

The pun was common, but the blog itself was unusual. It is part of what the [Washington Post](#) on March 29 called a “pivot” by the Administration, which will follow up the blog and a [Fact Sheet](#) with a [virtual summit on “evidence for action”](#) on the afternoon of April 7. Post reporter Dan Diamond wrote that the White House action is “a move scientists say is long overdue and will help stave off future outbreaks.”

Not only did the Nelson blog emphasize the importance of clean and safe air in the fight against the SARS-CoV-2 virus, it gave “air disinfection” equal billing with ventilation and filtration as part of a “set of simple but powerful actions we can use to **bring clean air into the rooms we’re in and clean the air already in the room.**” (The boldface is Dr. Nelson’s.)

The science chief is quick to note that the “Biden Administration identified improved indoor air quality as an important tool to fight the spread of airborne diseases in the [American Pandemic Preparedness Plan](#) last September – and the [National COVID-19 Preparedness Plan](#) prioritized it again earlier this month.”

In fact, a thorough reading of the September plan finds improved air quality cited exactly once, in a section on personal protective equipment, and nowhere are specifics, even about ventilation, discussed. The plan emphasizes vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics and early-warning systems. Air quality doesn’t even merit a mention in the summary of 12 goals.

Nor can the March plan can hardly be said to “prioritize” cleansing indoor air. It does, however, pledge that the Administration will work with Congress to “secure the necessary funding to give schools and businesses guidance, tests, and supplies to stay open, including tools to improve ventilation and air filtration.”

The truth is that government has been slow to recognize the value of clean and safe indoor air in stopping the spread of COVID. And even with earlier recognition, policy makers stressed ventilation and filtration, which certainly have their place but which alone are rarely a solution.

That has now changed, as evidenced by the latest White House activity. Schools and businesses will have to take notice – and act.

A Change That’s Been Too Long in Coming

The Administration even says it will “foster ways to recognize steps taken by buildings to improve indoor air quality and protect their communities,” adding:

Similar to how programs like LEED, Fitwel, and WELL recognize buildings for their environmental and health impacts, this new effort between the federal government and external experts will develop ways to recognize steps taken by building owners for the health and safety of their communities and their achievements in improving air filtration and ventilation systems to protect and promote public health.

In other words, buildings with safe air will get a government seal of approval for clean and safe air. We will see how that process develops, but what's clear is that policy makers are beginning to understand that unsafe indoor air is at least as dangerous as unsafe water.

The change has been long in coming. In the early days of the pandemic, public health institutions, including at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO), resisted the notion that COVID could be spread in tiny aerosols that can remain suspended in the air for minutes or even hours. Instead, as we noted in [Issue No. 5 of this newsletter](#), CDC and WHO guidance stated that the SARS-CoV-2 virus was contained in droplets, which would fall harmlessly to the ground of their own weight within a few feet. More worrisome was supposed to be spread from surfaces or hand-to-hand.

But in July 2020, [an article](#) by Lidia Morawska of the Queensland University of Technology in Australia and Donald Milton of the University of Maryland School of Public Health, titled, "It's Time to Address Airborne Transmission of Coronavirus 2019," drew the support of 237 scientists in an open letter. The authors wrote:

There is significant potential for inhalation exposure to viruses in microscopic respiratory drop- lets (microdroplets) at short to medium distances (up to several meters, or room scale), and we are advocating for the use of preventive measures to mitigate this route of airborne transmission.

In November of that year, Kimberly Prather of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography, an expert on aerosols, and several colleagues wrote a [letter to Science magazine](#), explaining that aerosols were the problem:

Individuals with COVID-19, many of whom have no symptoms, release thousands of virus-laden aerosols and far fewer droplets when breathing and talking. Thus, one is far more likely to inhale aerosols than be sprayed by a droplet, and so the balance of attention must be shifted to protecting against airborne transmission.

Then, a little over a year ago, a group of 13 U.S. public health experts, including such members of President Biden's own [COVID task force](#) as Rick Bright, the former director of the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, and Michael Osterholm, a highly regarded epidemiologist at the University of Minnesota, called for "immediate action to strengthen measures to limit inhalation exposure to SARS-CoV-2."

They wrote in [a letter Feb. 16 to Rochelle Walensky](#), director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Administration COVID Coordinator Jeff Zients; and Anthony Fauci, director of NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases:

For many months it has been clear that transmission through inhalation of small aerosol particles is an important and significant mode of SARS-CoV-2 virus transmission... Numerous studies have demonstrated that aerosols produced through breathing, talking, and singing are concentrated close to the infected person, can remain in air and viable for long periods of time and travel long distances within a room and sometimes farther.

[Linsey Marr](#), an expert on aerosols at Virginia Tech who also signed the Science letter, was quoted as saying:

It's time to stop pussyfooting around the fact that the virus is transmitted mostly through the air. If we properly acknowledge this, and get the right recommendations and guidance into place, this is our chance to end the pandemic in the next six months. If we don't do this, it could very well drag on.

The CDC and WHO finally changed their guidance at the end of April 2021, precipitating a [long opinion piece](#) on May 7 in the New York Times Zeynep Tufekci of the University of North Carolina with the headline, "Why Did It Take So Long to Accept the Facts About COVID?"

She said the updates were momentous, even though the two organizations seemed to try to bury them ("no news conference, no big announcement") because of embarrassment: "These latest shifts challenge key infection control assumptions,...putting a lot of what went wrong last year in context. They may also signal one of the most important advancements in public health during this pandemic."

Better late than never, she added:

If the importance of aerosol transmission had been accepted early, we would have been told from the beginning that it was much safer outdoors, where these small particles disperse more easily, as long as you avoid close, prolonged contact with others. We would have tried to make sure indoor spaces were well ventilated, with air filtered as necessary.

Instead of blanket rules on gatherings, we would have targeted conditions that can produce superspreading events: people in poorly ventilated indoor spaces, especially if engaged over time in activities that increase aerosol production.... And we would have been less obsessed with cleaning surfaces. Our mitigations would have been much more effective, sparing us a great deal of suffering and anxiety.

Unfortunately, the shifts by the CDC and WHO did not alter mitigation efforts, but perhaps the Biden Administration's own shift will.

The Post on March 29 [quoted David Michaels](#), a George Washington University professor who previously led the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and advised Biden's transition team on the coronavirus pandemic, as saying that the new White House approach is "'a total rejection' of earlier assumptions that the virus was spread through direct person-to-person contact. "

I think much of the world has been dragged kicking and screaming into this because the World Health Organization and the CDC both clung to the infectious-disease model," said Michaels.

Ventilation, Filtration and Disinfection

Let's dig into the details of the Nelson blog.

It begins by saying, "While there are various strategies for avoiding breathing that air [i.e., air contaminated with SARS-CoV-2] – from remote work to masking – we can and should talk more about how to make indoor environments safer by filtering or cleaning air."

Nelson writes that changing the air and filtering it can reduce COVID spread, "with studies showing that five air changes an hour reduce transmission risk by 50 percent." She cites a [study in July by Rothamer](#), et al., in Science and Technology for the Built Environment, and [another by de Oliveria](#), et al., in Proceedings of the Royal Society.

Curiously, neither study is on point. The Rothamer research concerns the use of masks in ventilated environments, and the de Oliveria article describes a modeling exercise on the spread of aerosols and droplets.

If studies indeed show that an HVAC system that produces five air changes per hour reduces transmission risk by just 50%, that is hardly reassuring. There's still a lot of risk.

The deficiencies of ventilation alone, or even with filtration, have been well documented. We previously cited an extensive [article in HPAC Engineering](#) in August 2020, in Gary and Ken Elovitz of Energy Economics in Newton Centre, Mass., write:

The biggest danger for COVID-19 infection is close-range contact with infected people who are talking loudly or are otherwise exhaling heavily for at least several minutes. The HVAC system does not have much effect on those conditions.

The Elovitzes' main contribution is to deploy the Wells-Riley equation (also cited in the Rothamer study), which uses "infectious particle concentration, exposure time, and outside air ventilation" to come up with a prediction of the "likelihood that a person will be infected by a virus." (Academic research shows that, if anything, [Wells-Riley underestimates](#) risk.)

After the authors plug in the numbers, they conclude:

No practical amount of ventilation can be relied on or expected to protect occupants over long exposure times like the 6 or 8 hours people might spend together in an office or school classroom. Similarly, ventilation is unlikely to succeed as the prime means of protection for people in close contact in a small space like a private office.

The authors say that “improved filtration can reduce the risk of transmission by reducing the concentration of infectious particles in the air.” But that reduction is by no means complete. They write that, on average, “MERV 13 filters might be 60% to 70% efficient at removing particles that contain viral material.”

Higher-Capacity HVAC Systems Are Needed, But They Produce Higher Emissions

The Elovitzes also warn that higher-efficiency filters “have higher pressure drop,” which means reduced air flow and heating and cooling capacity. Bringing an HVAC system back up to its pre-filter levels of air flow requires an increased “motor load” – that is, a bigger-capacity system, which will use more energy and pose a greater threat to the environment.

One would expect that, with its focus on climate change, the Biden Administration would show concern about the increased emissions from powering up an HVAC system to achieve more air changes per hour in addition to adding additional power to compensate for the pressure drop from stronger filters. But, so far at least, no one in the Administration has mentioned the danger to the environment of what it proposes.

“Using high-quality air filters like HEPA or MERV-13 – connected to capable HVAC systems or portable air purifiers – to remove virus particles from indoor air is also important,” writes Nelson. But there are deficiencies here as well in addition to the climate-change threat.

An article in the October issue of the [ASHRAE Journal](#), a publication of the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers, acknowledged that HVAC systems are ineffective in fighting pathogens like SARS-CoV-2, even with the addition of powerful filters.

In analyzing a restaurant simulation, Zhiqiang Zhai, a professor of Civil, Environmental and Architectural Engineering at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and three colleagues write:

It is evident that if purely using the CA [that is, central air-conditioning with filtration], only a small fraction of the particles can be discharged through the ceiling exhausts. Most of the particles are spread out indoors and ultimately deposited on the occupants, tables, ground and walls.

The danger to occupants from HEPA [high-efficiency particulate air] filters placed on HVAC systems, write Zhai and his colleagues, is that some pathogens “do not get entrained into

the return air vents and may float around in a given space.” In other words, this is hardly the solution to contaminated indoor air.

Adding eight air purifier units “can clean 28% of the particles.” A table purifier placed in the center of each table in the room – only a few feet away from each occupant -- “can handle almost 80% of the particles, while slightly increasing the deposition on the tables compared to floor units.” But, clearly, placing an air purifier in front of nearly every person in a room is impractical and expensive.

The problem is that for filters to work, pathogens need to find them. If they have to travel large distances, that connection is elusive.

Nelson Opens the Door

To its credit, the Biden Administration has acknowledged that something else may be needed: “air disinfection.” Nelson writes, “By inactivating (‘killing’) airborne virus through methods like [ultraviolet germicidal irradiation \(UVGI\)](#) systems, we can add another layer of protection in indoor spaces.

She then spends the rest of the section discussing ultraviolet lights, citing [a 2015 study by Matsie Mphaephlele](#) of South Africa and colleagues that showed UVGI “about 80% effective against the spread of airborne tuberculosis, equivalent to replacing the air in an indoor room up to 24 times in an hour.” Ultraviolet disinfection also has the drawback of being [dangerous to humans](#), which is why [hospitals take great care](#) in using UV in operating rooms, requiring special equipment or clearing the rooms entirely while disinfection occurs.

But Nelson has done a great service in opening the door to the use of other disinfection approaches – particularly active systems, as opposed to passive UV. For example, [ActivePure](#), a Dallas-based company, has developed an Advanced Photocatalysis technology, [cleared by the Food & Drug Administration](#), that is capable of safely suffusing an occupied indoor space with the same oxidative particles found to clean the atmosphere naturally.

Rockefeller Report Also Stresses Safe and Clean Indoor Air

The rising White House interest in indoor air follows [“Getting to and Sustaining the Next Normal,”](#) a Rockefeller Foundation report issued in March by a distinguished group of epidemiologists and public health experts – including Bright, Michaels, Osterholm, and Ezekiel Emanuel of the University of Pennsylvania -- puts significant emphasis on safe and clean indoor air. It stated:

Indoor aerosol transmission in shared-room air, especially from people with few symptoms and who often don't know they are infected, is a key reason Covid transmission has been so difficult to control.

The authors also noted that cleaner, safer air in the workplace and schools will reduce health care costs and absenteeism and “improve productivity, academic performance and cognitive function.”

The report urges “necessary investments in ventilation, filtration, and disinfection” and says, “Specific funds must be allocated to low-income communities to enable these investments

for small businesses, schools, and other public buildings.” Also proposed by the Rockefeller group are “income-linked subsidies” to households for upgrades to systems to fight COVID indoors.

COVID Surging, Leveling Off in Europe and Rising in Parts of the United States

Masks have come off all over the United States and kids are back in school, but the COVID pandemic is not over. A surge dominated by the Omicron variant began in November and peaked in mid-January with 805,000 cases. By April 3, the seven-day average daily case count [had declined to 27,000](#), the lowest figure since July. But the slide seems to be at an end, with a national rate of 8 cases per 100,000. Some states, mainly in the Mid-Atlantic and New England regions -- are seeing sharp hikes, though their case rates remain below 20.

The increases -- 51% in two weeks in New Jersey, for example -- seem to be the result of the new Omicron subvariant, BA.2, which now accounts for the majority of infections. According to a [Yale Medicine report](#) on March 30, the subvariant is “believed to be more contagious than any previous strain of the virus.” However, say the Yale experts, “the good news is that BA.2 does not appear to cause more severe illness than the original variant, and it has not caused a widespread rise in hospitalizations in Europe. But there is still much to learn about Omicron and BA.2.”

Europe has suffered a spike in cases as a result of BA.2. [In the U.K.](#), infections went from 28,000 on Feb. 27 to 85,000 on March 22; in France, from 53,000 on March 3 to 138,000 on April 3. But both countries are seeing cases level off, a phenomenon also seen in Germany, Italy and Japan. Still, with COVID, what happens in America first happens in Europe, so it is logical to expect that the rise in cases in a few states will spread.

But, meanwhile in the U.S., hospitalizations are continuing to drop sharply -- down another 28% in the past two weeks to 21,000, the lowest level in more than a year. Deaths have fallen to 649 a day as a weekly average, down 41% in the last 14 days and at the lowest point since August.

The broader message is that we can expect a surge -- or sub-surge -- of some sort this month and that the ups and downs of COVID-19 will persist.

Protecting Vulnerable Employees in the Workplace

As COVID-19 cases decline in the U.S. and elsewhere, businesses are bringing workers back, but the work environment won't be the same. As the [New York Times](#) put it recently:

Executives are entering the next zone of return-to-office planning with what psychologists call “stress-related growth.” They have endured a sustained period of tumult. They are emerging feeling hopeful, equipped with new insights about how to respond when Covid cases surge and how to keep workers safe while businesses are open.

One of these “new insights,” especially with the Omicron surge, is that certain groups are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, especially to severe disease. The [CDC provides a long list](#) of conditions of vulnerability. They include: cancer; kidney, liver, heart, and lung conditions, diabetes; HIV/AIDS; immunocompromised states, either primary or brought on by taking medicines to weaken immune reactions after transplants, for example; mental health conditions such as mood disorders; overweight and obesity; and sickle cell disease.

Those over 65 are also far more vulnerable. CDC data, updated March 9, find that Americans aged 65 to 74 are just as likely as those aged 18 to 29 to become infected with COVID, but the [older group](#) is four times as likely to be hospitalized and 65 times as likely to die. (Some 11 million Americans over 65 are still in the workforce.)

Overall, a study found that [92 million Americans](#) are at especially high risk of serious disease if they become infected. That is 37.6% of adults aged 18 and over.

Unfortunately, the Americans With Disabilities Act does not impose an affirmative obligation to take protective steps to a person who is for example, immunocompromised. If that person asks for a “reasonable accommodation” (which often benefit other workers as well), a covered employer has to take appropriate steps to comply.

That employer has a range of possible solutions, from remote work to improving ventilation or purchasing an air disinfection system. Remote work is a popular mitigation means, but it also isolates the worker, especially as the rest of the workforce returns, post-COVID. And a worker's home environment without protection devices can be worse than the workplace.

The [Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\)](#) does have requirements that create affirmative obligations, but not for all workers. OSHA has issued an [Emergency Temporary Standard \(ETS\)](#) for health care workers only. That ETS makes minimal demands on employers when it comes to clean and safe air. It requires only that “employer-owned or controlled HVAC system(s) are used in accordance with manufacturer's instructions and the design specifications of the system(s) [and] air filters are rated Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) 13 or higher if the system allows it.”

There is no mention of air disinfection, and, based on its new “pivot,” the White House may want to get OSHA to update the ETS.

Throughout the pandemic, private employers have been the vanguard of caring for their workers. The incentives are large. Healthier workers are more productive, and clean and safe air is an attraction for potential new workers at a time of low unemployment.

COVID Solutions Bulletin | a publication providing regular updates on new and existing technologies that can help stop the spread of COVID-19, and help clear the air to open America back up.

For more information visit www.COVIDsolutionsbulletin.com.

EAH Strategies LLC | Headquarters, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

[Unsubscribe secretary@sos.texas.gov](mailto:secretary@sos.texas.gov)

[Constant Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent by [REDACTED] powered by



Try email marketing for free today!

From: Governor Greg Abbott Press Office <GovernorAbbottPress@public.govdelivery.com>
Sent: Thursday, June 9, 2022 12:32 PM
To: Kim Bergmann
Subject: Texas State Resources Provide Ongoing Support To Uvalde Community Following Recent Tragedy At Robb Elementary School

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.



GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

For Immediate Distribution | June 9, 2022 | (512) 463-1826

Texas State Resources Provide Ongoing Support To Uvalde Community Following Recent Tragedy At Robb Elementary School

AUSTIN – Governor Greg Abbott today provided an update on Texas state agencies' continued efforts to assist and support the Uvalde community as they heal. Following the tragedy at Robb Elementary School, the Governor [announced](#) Texas' comprehensive, ongoing plan to coordinate with state and local officials in offering resources to those affected by the tragedy. To accelerate all available state and local resources, Governor Abbott [issued a disaster declaration](#) for the City of Uvalde to assist the community and continue providing much needed support unencumbered by regulations as they recover from this tragedy.

Members of the Uvalde community seeking state mental health resources can receive help through a single 24/7 hotline: **888-690-0799**.

Members of the public wishing to show their support and help the community can donate through a [one-stop webpage](#) created by the OneStar Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization.

RECENT HIGHLIGHTS ASSISTING UVALDE COMMUNITY:

[Governor Abbott, Uvalde County Announce Opening Of Uvalde Together Resiliency Center](#)

Governor Abbott announced Uvalde County officials [opened a temporary facility](#) this Monday, June 6 for the newly created Uvalde Together Resiliency Center (UTRC). The UTRC

will serve as a long-term support services for the community's ongoing needs, including mental health resources and crisis counseling.

Last week, the Governor's Public Safety Office made an initial \$5 million [investment](#) to establish the UTRC as a hub for state agencies and local organizations to provide assistance to impacted members of the community. A full list of services provided at the UTRC is available [here](#).

Governor Abbott Works With OneStar To Create One-Stop Webpage For Donations To Support Uvalde Community

"Donations of any amount to the OneStar Foundation webpage will go a long way in letting these grief-stricken families, teachers, and loved ones know that they are not alone as they begin the long and difficult process of piecing their lives back together," said Governor Abbott. "The true spirit of the Lone Star State is Texans helping Texans, and we must continue supporting those working to heal in the weeks and months ahead."

The OneStar Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization, will give 100% of the donations to the Robb School Memorial Fund, which was established by the First State Bank of Uvalde to ensure immediate financial support is given to those impacted by the horrific tragedy at Robb Elementary School.

Texas Division Of Emergency Management Activates State Operations Center To Level II, Works With Local Officials To Fulfill Needs

The Texas Division of Emergency Management's (TDEM) State Operations Center remains activated at Level II, or Increased Readiness.

Deploying 25 staff members to provide onsite support in Uvalde, TDEM continues coordinating with state agency partners and vendors to fulfill requests from local officials for services and resources, including:

- Resources for the temporary Family Assistance Center and permanent UTRC, including a climate-controlled reception area, a group counseling trailer, nine private counseling areas, and restroom facilities.
- Information technology staff, three computers for the UTRC, and public support call numbers.
- Temporary lodging for immediate family members visiting for funeral services via 22 RV units.
- Fuel for generators powering the UTRC and other command trailers and vehicles.
- 100 bedding packs for first responders' lodging.
- Resources to support multiple command areas, including 130 tables, 130 chairs, 10 hand-washing stations, and portable toilets.

In addition, TDEM has supported resource requests routed to other state agency partners, such as four counseling teams, seven dispatchers, four call takers, six nurses, and six ambulances.

TDEM's Disaster Recovery Task Force coordinated with local officials, community stakeholders, local and state disaster behavioral health services, and victim service agencies to support the formation of the UTRC. The task force also provided guidance to local officials, Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District (CISD) leaders, and First State Bank personnel for the partnership with OneStar Foundation to create the [one-stop webpage](#) for donations to support victims' families, teachers, and the Uvalde community.

Texas Education Agency Continues Providing Assistance To Local School Systems, Uvalde CISD Community

In partnership with Education Service Center (ESC) 20, the Texas Education Agency continues providing assistance to the local school systems, students, parents, and faculty, including:

- Coordinating with local school systems to provide counselors as a direct support to staff, students, and their families in the Uvalde CISD learning community.
- Collaborating with Uvalde CISD school counselors and other organizations, including Communities In Schools and the Children's Bereavement Center, to provide responsive school-based mental health services.
- Providing support through classroom guidance lessons during summer school, including two-30 minute sessions per week for each grade level/class.
- Supporting a detailed facilities review of all existing Uvalde CISD school buildings to ensure all exterior doors are fully functional.
- Supporting Uvalde CISD with planning for an enhanced security presence at summer school.

Texas Health And Human Services Commission Providing Mental Health Support

24/7 Hotline Offering Mental Health Assistance: 888-690-0799

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission's (HHSC) Disaster Behavioral Health Services coordinated with the local Hill Country Mental Health and Development Disabilities Center and the Harris Center for Mental Health and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Call Center to deliver crisis services to the community, including creating a dedicated mental health support line: 888-690-0799. The hotline has answered over 235 calls since May 27.

HHSC is also working with the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium to provide additional mental health counseling resources.

HHSC eligibility staff are assisting families who may need health, food, or cash assistance benefits. HHSC has assisted in the activation of the Critical Incident Stress Management network, a volunteer entity with the primary focus to address first responder mental health needs.

Department of State Health Services Deploys Immediate Medical Resources

The Department of State Health Services (DSHS) provided immediate medical resources to the Uvalde community, including an air medical unit, 15 units of whole blood, two ambulance buses, and a Zumero tent as a cooling station.

DSHS has also deployed the following response teams:

- Medical incident support team members
- One mobile medical unit with two logistics personnel
- An ambulance strike team, which includes ambulances, one critical care unit, and an ambulance strike team leader
- Two medics with an all-terrain vehicle for funeral support
- Registered nurse strike team, comprised of eight members and a team leader
- Five behavioral health staff supporting responders and Uvalde Memorial Hospital (from the Texas Emergency Medical Task Force)

Texas Department Of Insurance, Division Of Workers' Compensation Assist With Workers Compensation Questions, Claims

The Division of Workers' Compensation (DWC) customer service staff have been embedded in Uvalde to answer workers' compensation questions and help with claims, assisting about 30 customers at the center and supporting 18 workers' compensation claims related to the tragedy to date. Those injured or with an injured beneficiary can call 800-252-7031.

The Texas Department of Insurance (TDI) is coordinating with private health insurance companies and those that offer managed care plans through Texas' Medicaid program for access to physical and mental health resources. To provide help for any Texas insurance consumer, TDI is operating a call center from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday: 800-252-3439.

Texas Workforce Commission Offers Child Care, Unemployment, Workforce, And Vocational Rehabilitation Services

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), in partnership with Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande, is assisting families with child care by [implementing additional flexibility and care extensions](#). The agency also created a new Uvalde Emergency Care program to provide child care regardless of income or employment status to eligible families affected by the tragedy.

Tele-centers are prioritizing calls from Uvalde residents seeking unemployment assistance, and work search requirements have been temporarily waived for the area. The agency is also prioritizing unemployment benefits, appeals, and tax services to affected families and employers. Services are being provided through vocational rehabilitation counselors, who can help address barriers to employment, information and referral services, job placement, and education and training.

Residents of Uvalde County who are Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients will not be required to meet certain mandatory requirements to ensure the continuation of benefits.

Texas Department Of Housing And Community Affairs Helps Impacted Texans With Food, Gas Expenses

The Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA), along with its area partner, Community Council of South Central Texas, has helped 85 households and 291 individuals in Uvalde with hotel costs for families, gas cards, food, and housing-related assistance, including mortgage, rent, and utilities help. Funding is provided through TDHCA's Community Services Block Grant Program, with nearly \$68,000 expended for direct services to assist families.

Recent Donations To Uvalde Community

The Texas Mutual Insurance Company has donated \$100,000 to the Robb School Memorial Fund through the OneStar Foundation, \$100,000 to the Uvalde Mental Health Resiliency Fund, organized by Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, and \$50,000 to the Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country's Uvalde Strong Fund.

BCBSTX/Health Care Service Corporation is also donating \$50,000 to the San Antonio Area Foundation to support Employees Retirement System and Teacher Retirement System of Texas members and dependents and provide them with access to no-cost virtual behavioral health care.

###

Please DO NOT REPLY to this message. It comes from an un-monitored mailbox. If you have any questions regarding this announcement, please contact the Governor's Press Office at (512) 463-1826.

[Manage Subscriptions](#) | [Unsubscribe All](#)

[GovDelivery](#), Inc. sending on behalf of the Office of the Governor · P.O. Box 12428 · Austin TX 78711-2428 · 800-843-5789

From: Governor Greg Abbott Press Office <GovernorAbbottPress@public.govdelivery.com>
Sent: Thursday, June 9, 2022 12:32 PM
To: Secretary
Subject: Texas State Resources Provide Ongoing Support To Uvalde Community Following Recent Tragedy At Robb Elementary School

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.



GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

For Immediate Distribution | June 9, 2022 | (512) 463-1826

**Texas State Resources Provide Ongoing Support To Uvalde Community
Following Recent Tragedy At Robb Elementary School**

AUSTIN – Governor Greg Abbott today provided an update on Texas state agencies' continued efforts to assist and support the Uvalde community as they heal. Following the tragedy at Robb Elementary School, the Governor [announced](#) Texas' comprehensive, ongoing plan to coordinate with state and local officials in offering resources to those affected by the tragedy. To accelerate all available state and local resources, Governor Abbott [issued a disaster declaration](#) for the City of Uvalde to assist the community and continue providing much needed support unencumbered by regulations as they recover from this tragedy.

Members of the Uvalde community seeking state mental health resources can receive help through a single 24/7 hotline: **888-690-0799**.

Members of the public wishing to show their support and help the community can donate through a [one-stop webpage](#) created by the OneStar Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization.

RECENT HIGHLIGHTS ASSISTING UVALDE COMMUNITY:

Governor Abbott, Uvalde County Announce Opening Of Uvalde Together Resiliency Center

Governor Abbott announced Uvalde County officials [opened a temporary facility](#) this Monday, June 6 for the newly created Uvalde Together Resiliency Center (UTRC). The UTRC will serve as a long-term support services for the community's ongoing needs, including mental health resources and crisis counseling.

Last week, the Governor's Public Safety Office made an initial \$5 million [investment](#) to establish the UTRC as a hub for state agencies and local organizations to provide assistance

to impacted members of the community. A full list of services provided at the UTRC is available [here](#).

Governor Abbott Works With OneStar To Create One-Stop Webpage For Donations To Support Uvalde Community

"Donations of any amount to the OneStar Foundation webpage will go a long way in letting these grief-stricken families, teachers, and loved ones know that they are not alone as they begin the long and difficult process of piecing their lives back together," said Governor Abbott. "The true spirit of the Lone Star State is Texans helping Texans, and we must continue supporting those working to heal in the weeks and months ahead."

The OneStar Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization, will give 100% of the donations to the Robb School Memorial Fund, which was established by the First State Bank of Uvalde to ensure immediate financial support is given to those impacted by the horrific tragedy at Robb Elementary School.

Texas Division Of Emergency Management Activates State Operations Center To Level II, Works With Local Officials To Fulfill Needs

The Texas Division of Emergency Management's (TDEM) State Operations Center remains activated at Level II, or Increased Readiness.

Deploying 25 staff members to provide onsite support in Uvalde, TDEM continues coordinating with state agency partners and vendors to fulfill requests from local officials for services and resources, including:

- Resources for the temporary Family Assistance Center and permanent UTRC, including a climate-controlled reception area, a group counseling trailer, nine private counseling areas, and restroom facilities.
- Information technology staff, three computers for the UTRC, and public support call numbers.
- Temporary lodging for immediate family members visiting for funeral services via 22 RV units.
- Fuel for generators powering the UTRC and other command trailers and vehicles.
- 100 bedding packs for first responders' lodging.
- Resources to support multiple command areas, including 130 tables, 130 chairs, 10 hand-washing stations, and portable toilets.

In addition, TDEM has supported resource requests routed to other state agency partners, such as four counseling teams, seven dispatchers, four call takers, six nurses, and six ambulances.

TDEM's Disaster Recovery Task Force coordinated with local officials, community stakeholders, local and state disaster behavioral health services, and victim service agencies to support the formation of the UTRC. The task force also provided guidance to local officials, Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District (CISD) leaders, and First State Bank personnel for the partnership with OneStar Foundation to create the [one-stop webpage](#) for donations to support victims' families, teachers, and the Uvalde community.

Texas Education Agency Continues Providing Assistance To Local School Systems, Uvalde CISD Community

In partnership with Education Service Center (ESC) 20, the Texas Education Agency continues providing assistance to the local school systems, students, parents, and faculty, including:

- Coordinating with local school systems to provide counselors as a direct support to staff, students, and their families in the Uvalde CISD learning community.

- Collaborating with Uvalde CISD school counselors and other organizations, including Communities In Schools and the Children's Bereavement Center, to provide responsive school-based mental health services.
- Providing support through classroom guidance lessons during summer school, including two-30 minute sessions per week for each grade level/class.
- Supporting a detailed facilities review of all existing Uvalde CISD school buildings to ensure all exterior doors are fully functional.
- Supporting Uvalde CISD with planning for an enhanced security presence at summer school.

Texas Health And Human Services Commission Providing Mental Health Support

24/7 Hotline Offering Mental Health Assistance: 888-690-0799

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission's (HHSC) Disaster Behavioral Health Services coordinated with the local Hill Country Mental Health and Development Disabilities Center and the Harris Center for Mental Health and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Call Center to deliver crisis services to the community, including creating a dedicated mental health support line: 888-690-0799. The hotline has answered over 235 calls since May 27.

HHSC is also working with the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium to provide additional mental health counseling resources.

HHSC eligibility staff are assisting families who may need health, food, or cash assistance benefits. HHSC has assisted in the activation of the Critical Incident Stress Management network, a volunteer entity with the primary focus to address first responder mental health needs.

Department of State Health Services Deploys Immediate Medical Resources

The Department of State Health Services (DSHS) provided immediate medical resources to the Uvalde community, including an air medical unit, 15 units of whole blood, two ambulance buses, and a Zumero tent as a cooling station.

DSHS has also deployed the following response teams:

- Medical incident support team members
- One mobile medical unit with two logistics personnel
- An ambulance strike team, which includes ambulances, one critical care unit, and an ambulance strike team leader
- Two medics with an all-terrain vehicle for funeral support
- Registered nurse strike team, comprised of eight members and a team leader
- Five behavioral health staff supporting responders and Uvalde Memorial Hospital (from the Texas Emergency Medical Task Force)

Texas Department Of Insurance, Division Of Workers' Compensation Assist With Workers Compensation Questions, Claims

The Division of Workers' Compensation (DWC) customer service staff have been embedded in Uvalde to answer workers' compensation questions and help with claims, assisting about 30 customers at the center and supporting 18 workers' compensation claims related to the tragedy to date. Those injured or with an injured beneficiary can call 800-252-7031.

The Texas Department of Insurance (TDI) is coordinating with private health insurance companies and those that offer managed care plans through Texas' Medicaid program for access to physical and mental health resources. To provide help for any Texas insurance

consumer, TDI is operating a call center from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday: 800-252-3439.

Texas Workforce Commission Offers Child Care, Unemployment, Workforce, And Vocational Rehabilitation Services

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), in partnership with Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande, is assisting families with child care by [implementing additional flexibility and care extensions](#). The agency also created a new Uvalde Emergency Care program to provide child care regardless of income or employment status to eligible families affected by the tragedy.

Tele-centers are prioritizing calls from Uvalde residents seeking unemployment assistance, and work search requirements have been temporarily waived for the area. The agency is also prioritizing unemployment benefits, appeals, and tax services to affected families and employers. Services are being provided through vocational rehabilitation counselors, who can help address barriers to employment, information and referral services, job placement, and education and training.

Residents of Uvalde County who are Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients will not be required to meet certain mandatory requirements to ensure the continuation of benefits.

Texas Department Of Housing And Community Affairs Helps Impacted Texans With Food, Gas Expenses

The Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA), along with its area partner, Community Council of South Central Texas, has helped 85 households and 291 individuals in Uvalde with hotel costs for families, gas cards, food, and housing-related assistance, including mortgage, rent, and utilities help. Funding is provided through TDHCA's Community Services Block Grant Program, with nearly \$68,000 expended for direct services to assist families.

Recent Donations To Uvalde Community

The Texas Mutual Insurance Company has donated \$100,000 to the Robb School Memorial Fund through the OneStar Foundation, \$100,000 to the Uvalde Mental Health Resiliency Fund, organized by Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, and \$50,000 to the Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country's Uvalde Strong Fund.

BCBSTX/Health Care Service Corporation is also donating \$50,000 to the San Antonio Area Foundation to support Employees Retirement System and Teacher Retirement System of Texas members and dependents and provide them with access to no-cost virtual behavioral health care.

###

Please DO NOT REPLY to this message. It comes from an un-monitored mailbox. If you have any questions regarding this announcement, please contact the Governor's Press Office at (512) 463-1826.

[Manage Subscriptions](#) | [Unsubscribe All](#)

[GovDelivery](#), Inc. sending on behalf of the Office of the Governor · P.O. Box 12428 · Austin TX 78711-2428 · 800-843-5789