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Greg Abbott News

Texas Gov. Abbott: Biden's Border Policies 'Most Disastrous Thing' Anyone Has Ever Witnessed

By Talia Kaplan

Fox News

Texas Governor Greg Abbott argued on Sunday that President Biden's stance on the southern border is the "most disastrous thing" anyone has ever witnessed.

The Texas governor made the argument during an exclusive interview on "Sunday Morning Futures" referencing the Biden administration's move to end the use of the Title 42 public health order to expel migrants at the border.

Abbott told host Maria Bartiromo that the move "will be catastrophic for the United States of America."

Earlier this month, the Biden administration confirmed it will terminate the policy at the end of May despite fears from both Democrats and Republicans, as well as officials within the administration, of a massive migrant wave in the coming months.

The administration has acknowledged a potential migrant surge, as it has been preparing for up to 18,000 migrants a day.

"Do the math on that and you will find it means that more than six million people will be coming across the border a year, and about half of those will be in the state of Texas," Abbott said.

Bill Melugin: Potentially thousands of migrants waiting for Title 42 to expireVideo
He then noted that this would mean more people would be coming across the border in one year than the amount of people who live in the state's largest city of Houston.

"There is no way the state of Texas can assimilate those people, and there's no way the United States can assimilate that number of people, and so what Joe Biden is doing is far more than reckless, it's the most disastrous thing to the United States of America anybody has ever witnessed in our lifetime," Abbott said.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas earlier this month claimed that the Department of Homeland Security has "put in place a comprehensive, whole-of-government strategy to manage any potential increase in the number of migrants encountered at our border."

Abbott told Bartiromo that he has taken matters into his own hands, given that the situation at the border is "a total disaster." He argued that this was not only created by President Biden and his administration, but "by the Democrats across the board."

"We have a president of the United States who has not negotiated with the president of Mexico, so I, as governor of Texas, have taken matters into my own hands, and I have negotiated landmark, historic deals with the governors of Mexican states that are adjacent to Texas where these Mexican states are going to step up, and they are going to start securing the border," Abbott said.

He noted that this "is on top of things that Texas has done that's never been done before in the history of America."

Abbott provided examples, noting that Texas is building its own border wall, installing "miles of razor wire to prevent people from coming across the border," and creating a boat blockade.

Abbott also said that the Texas National Guard "turned back more than 15,000 people who attempted to come across the border illegally."

"So Texas is doing everything that we possibly can to contain a completely out of control border situation that is the worst I've ever seen it," he continued.

Texas Gov. Abbott on missing National Guard soldier who tried to rescue illegal migrants [Video](#)

Abbott also weighed in on the missing National Guard soldier who tried to rescue illegal migrants, calling the situation a "tragedy."

"It shows how dangerous it is on the border," he said. "It shows heroism by the member of the Texas National Guard who was trying to save lives."

Two illegal migrants who a now-missing Texas National Guard soldier tried to save from a river were involved in "illicit transnational narcotics trafficking," officials said Saturday as the search for the missing service member resumed.

The soldier went missing on Friday after entering a river in Eagle Pass to help two migrants who officials say "appeared to be drowning as they illegally crossed the river from Mexico to the United States."

In a statement, the Texas Military Dept. said that initial reports from Texas Rangers "have determined that the two migrants were involved in illicit transnational narcotics trafficking." They are both in Customs and Border Protection (CBP) custody.

Abbott told Bartiromo that the goal is "to locate this missing soldier" and "hopefully it'll lead to a safe outcome."

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Abbott Calls Current Border Situation ‘Worst That I Have Ever Seen’

By Monique Beals

The Hill

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) claimed on Sunday that the current situation at the border was the worst he has ever seen.

“Texas is doing everything we possibly can to contain a completely out-of-control border situation. This is the worst that I have ever seen it,” Abbott said during an interview on Fox News’s “Sunday Morning Futures.”

“I will tell you this, something else has never happened before, and that is the Texas National Guard, they have turned back more than 15,000 people who attempted to come across the border illegally,” Abbott also said on Sunday, citing other actions Texas has taken at the border, including negotiating deals with Mexican states and creating its own border wall.

More than 125,000 people were detained at U.S. land, sea and air borders in Texas in March, according to data from U.S. Customs and Border Protection on nationwide encounters.

Earlier this month, Abbott garnered attention when he sent a bus carrying migrants from Texas to Washington, D.C.

Twitter could reach takeover deal with Musk as soon as Monday: reports

Biden to nominate Bridget Brink as US ambassador to Ukraine

The governor said that the migrants had been voluntarily sent to D.C. so the Biden administration could “immediately address the needs of the people that they are allowing to come across our border.”

Before that, the Biden administration had announced its decision to rescind Title 42, the Trump-era policy that allowed for the prompt expulsion of migrants at the border and blocked them from claiming asylum. That policy will end on May 23.

Now, more than 20 states have filed a temporary restraining order in an effort to prevent the administration from lifting the ban.

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Greg Abbott: As Governor Of Texas, I Am Taking Border Security Into My Own Hands

By Tim Hains

Real Clear Politics

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott told FNC's Maria Bartiromo on Sunday that the state is doing what "never been done before in the history of America" to secure the border with Mexico. He warned that if President Biden continues to do nothing, up to six million people per year could illegally cross the border into the U.S.

"If [President Biden] lifts Title 42, it will be catastrophic for the United States of America," Abbott said. "And that is to expect, with the lifting of Title 42, about 18,000 people coming

across the border per day. Do the math on that, and you will find it means that more than six million people will be coming across the border a year."

"Half of those would be in the state of Texas, that we would have coming across the border in one year more people than are the residents of our largest city in Texas, which is Houston. We would be adding more than one Houston a year."

"There's no way the state of Texas can assimilate those people," he said. "There's no way the United States can assimilate that number of people. And so what Joe Biden is doing is far more than reckless. It's the most disastrous thing to the United States of America anybody's ever witnessed in our lifetime."

GOV. GREG ABBOTT: First, we keep the soldier in our prayers. We continue to search for him. There's no new additional information to be issued by the Texas Military Department today, other than the fact that, obviously, what has happened is a tragedy. It shows how dangerous it is on the border.

It shows heroism by the member of the Texas National Guard, who was trying to save lives. Unfortunately, for the people he was trying to save the lives of, they turned out to be drug traffickers, and they were both arrested.

But our goal right now is to locate this missing soldier with the Texas Military Department. And, hopefully, it will lead to a safe outcome. But we have no information that we can add to what's going on right now about that particular soldier.

We do have information about what's going on, on the border, because, as you know, it's a total disaster created not only by President Biden and his administration, but by the Democrats across the board. And we have a president of the United States has -- who has not negotiated with the president of Mexico.

So I, as governor of Texas, have taken matters into my own hands. And I have negotiated landmark historic deals with the governors of Mexican states that are adjacent to Texas, where these Mexican states are going to step up, and they are going to start securing the border.

And that's on top of things that Texas has done that's never been done before in the history of America, such as Texas building its own border wall, Texas laying down miles of razor wire to prevent people from coming across a border, creating boat blockades.

And I will tell you this, something else has never happened before, and that is, the Texas National Guard, they have turned back more than 15,000 people who attempted to come across the border illegally. So, Texas is doing everything we possibly can to contain a completely out-of-control border situation. This is the worst that I have ever seen it.

This is a national disaster, could be a catastrophe, because of what could happen to the country.

People need to understand that there's been enough fentanyl seized to kill every man, woman and child in the United States of America. We could lose our entire population because of this. There was a report a month ago in The Houston Chronicle talking about how, in Harris County, Texas, there's one person who dies every single day because of these fentanyl

overdoses.

This fentanyl -- mostly either the fentanyl itself or the components of it come from China to Mexico, then comes across the border, and then is spread throughout the entire country by cartel activity. And the Biden administration is allowing this to happen by Biden and his administration's refusal to step up and do anything about it.

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‘A Hero’: Greg Abbott Honors Missing Texas National Guardsman

By Paul Bois
Breitbart

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) honored missing National Guard Specialist Bishop Evans on Sunday after he went missing, presumably from jumping into the Rio Grande to save migrants from drowning.

Sharing a photo of the serviceman, Greg Abbott hailed Evans a “hero” for risking his life in service to the Lone Star State and the United States of America.

“Texas National Guard Specialist Bishop Evans is a hero who risked his life in service to Texas & America. Law enforcement & rescue teams continue a relentless search for him. Join us in prayer for a successful recovery,” tweeted Abbott.

As Breitbart News reported, Evans was identified by authorities on Sunday after search and rescue teams had been tirelessly searching for his whereabouts since he went missing in the Rio Grande on Friday:

An extensive search was launched on Friday morning after Evans was reported missing. Search teams from the Texas Army National Guard, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Border Patrol, and other agencies converged along the river. The search continued through Saturday with negative results. Operations resumed early Sunday, with the addition of three airboats from the Texas Department of Public Safety.

The Texas Rangers, a division of the Texas Highway Patrol, are currently investigating the circumstances surrounding the soldier’s disappearance. Initial information has led them to believe two of the migrants struggling in the current were involved in illicit transnational narcotics trafficking, according to a statement issued by the Texas Military Department. Those migrants are currently being held at a Border Patrol detention facility in Eagle Pass.

Though not yet conclusive, Evans is believed to have drowned while rescuing migrants attempting to cross the sometimes deadly river. Thoughts and prayers poured out all over social media, with people honoring him as a hero.

Former presidential candidate and Hawaii Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard (D) said the incident highlights the danger of an open borders policy.

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Border Security Vs. Inflation: Abbott, O’Rourke Sharpen Campaign Themes In

Showdown For Governor

By Gromer Jeffers Jr.

Dallas Morning News

The race for Texas governor between incumbent Republican Greg Abbott and Democrat Beto O'Rourke is featuring a duel of issues.

Border security vs. inflation.

April has sprouted attempts by Abbott and O'Rourke to intensify their campaign themes, and they've done it in disparate ways.

It's a long way between now and the Nov. 8 general election and there will be twists and turns in the messaging from Abbott and O'Rourke.

For now, Abbott is settling for border security — the tried-and-true issue for Republican voters — while O'Rourke is trying to become the rare Democrat who makes high taxation an issue. With Democrat Joe Biden in the White House, O'Rourke's talk of Texas inflation is an interesting tactic.

Let's discuss the last two weeks.

Earlier this month Abbott shook up North America by ordering enhanced inspections of vehicles coming into the country. That tactic snarled traffic and threatened an already shaky supply chain. It brought wide-ranging criticism that included conservative voices.

But Abbott, who may have presidential aspirations, knows that he's tapped into an issue important to a majority of Texas Republican voters — and some independents: border security. They are willing to forgive a misstep if it was done in the name of securing the border.

"It's a clear winning issue for Republicans," said Rice political scientist Mark Jones. "It simultaneously appeals to the base without it being a losing issue in the general election. It also ties Beto O'Rourke to unpopular Biden administration policies."

Jones is correct, and that's why Abbott's other major stunt is a hit in conservative circles. Texas authorities have been offering migrants free bus rides to Washington, D.C., a move that illustrates the federal government's failures on this issue.

Biden has promised to remove the pandemic-era Title 42 next month, a policy that allowed authorities to return migrants to Mexico over COVID-19 concerns.

"One of the reasons Abbot pushed the envelope is because he wants to focus attention on the border and prime then for the removal of Title 42 and the looming migrant surge," Jones said.

But Abbott's ill-fated enhanced inspections policy created a crisis and would be widely considered a bungle if he didn't have his base supporters giving him a pass because of concerns about border security.

The move is estimated to have cost Texas \$4.2 billion and the equivalent of 36,000 jobs.

O'Rourke and Democrats are scrambling to make Abbott pay.

The governor's cleanup after aborting the tactic included agreements with Mexican states on enhanced inspections.

"He did not anticipate border security being used against him as a source of inflation," Jones said. "The lesson for him is that he needs to think these things through."

For his part, O'Rourke is pounding Abbott over the scrapped inspections policy that wreaked havoc on the economy.

The El Paso Democrat has made it a part of a basket of grievances against Abbott related to Texans paying more for food, electricity and property taxes.

Last week O'Rourke blamed Abbott for not doing enough to provide appraisal-shocked Texans with property tax relief. His Dallas news conference occurred as residents were getting their property appraisal notices, many which revealed soaring values that will lead to higher taxes.

O'Rourke said Texans have paid \$20 billion more in property taxes since Abbott has been in office, while the governor counters that he's cut taxes by \$18 billion.

With increased energy bills because of the 2021 Texas winter storm and tax dollars going to Abbott's Operation Lone Star at the border, O'Rourke is labeling Abbott as an inflation villain.

"He is the single greatest driver of inflation in the state of Texas and is causing real pain to our fellow Texans right now," O'Rourke said.

But O'Rourke is trying to thread the needle by linking Abbott to high property taxes and inflation.

In various legislative sessions, Texas Republicans have often made property tax relief a goal, even as they've failed to close loopholes available to commercial property tax owners.

And the word "inflation" has increasingly become a bugaboo for Biden, who has seen his poll numbers plummet as Americans pay more for almost everything.

"Inflation is a top concern for everyone," Jones said. "It's also an issue where the source of inflation is traced back to the Biden administration."

Still, O'Rourke has brought attention to several topics that could gain traction with voters, even if they don't propel him to the governor's office.

He has promised that as governor he will push the Legislature to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, which would return to Texas federal dollars that would be used to bolster health care in a state with an embarrassingly high uninsured rate.

Expanding Medicaid, which would free up funds that counties now have to pay for indigent care and other services, has some Republican support, but it's a long way from passage in the

GOP-controlled Legislature or embraced by Abbott.

O'Rourke also supports legalizing marijuana, and polls show most Texans agree with him.

A regulated marijuana industry would fire up an already stout Texas economy.

O'Rourke may have a hard time beating Abbott in November, but these issues aren't going away.

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State News

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Early Voting Starts Today On Texas Property Tax Relief Measures

By Cayla Harris

San Antonio Express News

Early voting begins today for the May 7 constitutional amendment election.

There are local propositions on the ballot, too, which vary by region. But at the statewide level, Texans will decide on two measures aiming to cut property taxes.

Proposition 1 would approve the tax cuts for elderly and disabled homeowners beginning in 2023, while a second measure seeks to raise the state's homestead exemption from \$25,000 to \$40,000, lowering school property taxes by about \$176 a year, on average.

Find your polling place here. Early voting ends May 3.

Texas has one of the highest property tax rates nationwide — only six states, Wisconsin, Vermont, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Illinois and New Jersey — have higher property tax rates, according to the personal finance website WalletHub.

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Property Taxes Move To Political Center Stage Across Texas Amid Rocketing Appraisals

By Phillip Jankowski

Dallas Morning News

Property tax appraisals arriving in homeowners' mailboxes statewide are showing massive increases in values for many households, pushing property taxes to the front and center of Texas politics.

The candidate sniping comes as two property tax-related constitutional amendments are about to come before voters. On May 7, Texas will hold a statewide election that could mean some tax relief for homeowners. Early voting begins Monday.

Across Texas, appraisal districts reported market values for residential homes soaring as high

as 50%. The sticker shock of sharply higher tax bills for homeowners and the indirect effect they will have on rents has refocused some political attention on Texas' chief funding mechanism for schools, first responders and local streets: property taxes.

According to the Texas Association of Appraisal Districts, Texas' booming housing market has seen many regions in the state with values increasing by 10% to 50%, a news release from the organization stated. Initial estimates for Dallas County were not available from the Dallas Central Appraisal District, a spokeswoman said.

However, in Collin County, Chief Appraiser Bo Daffin estimated that property values increased on average between 28% and 30%. Initial data from the appraisal district shows that more than 97% of residential properties saw increases in market value of 10% or more.

"It is the largest increase year over year that I have ever seen in Collin County," Daffin said. "Values certainly escalated hard in the last half of 2021. I've never seen this much movement in our housing market here."

This past week, Democratic gubernatorial candidate Beto O'Rourke launched an offensive against Gov. Greg Abbott over property taxes, blaming the governor for home value increases that could increase tax bills as much as 10% this year.

Appearing in south Oak Cliff alongside state Sen. Nathan Johnson, D-Dallas, and Dallas City Council member Adam Bazaldua, O'Rourke blamed Abbott for property tax increases along with increases to electricity bills stemming from the 2021 winter storm and food prices spurred by Abbott's costly increase to inspections at the Mexican border.

"Whether it is the cost at the grocery store, the increase that we're seeing in utility bills or the \$20 billion increase in property taxes under Greg Abbott, he is the single greatest driver of inflation in the state of Texas and it is causing real pain to our fellow Texans right now," O'Rourke said.

O'Rourke said he would increase state funding to public education and reduce the local burden in the process. He also proposed new revenue streams to pave the way for tax cuts by pushing the Legislature to legalize marijuana and expand Medicaid. O'Rourke also expressed openness to legalized gambling in Texas.

Abbott has his own property tax relief plan that he unveiled in January that proposed discounts to taxpayers who pay their bill early and no-interest payment plans. In response to O'Rourke's announcement, Abbott's campaign pointed to O'Rourke votes in favor of property tax increases while a member of the El Paso City Council.

"Serial flip-flopper Beto O'Rourke is once again misleading the public," campaign spokesman Mark Miner said in an email. "Governor Abbott has reduced property taxes for Texans by over \$18 billion since taking office, while Beto O'Rourke has an established track-record of increasing property taxes while serving on the city council in El Paso."

Democratic candidate for lieutenant governor Mike Collier has similarly attacked Republican Lt. Gov Dan Patrick over property tax increases during Patrick's tenure. Patrick has called for the Senate to examine property tax relief in his interim charges to the Legislature's upper chamber.

May 7 propositions

But voters don't have to wait until November to weigh in on the issue. They get to decide the fate of two statewide propositions on the May 7 ballot.

If approved, Proposition 1 would extend property tax relief from school district taxes, which are generally the largest portion of a Texan's property tax bill, to property owners 65 or older and the disabled. State Sen. Paul Bettencourt said the amendment is part of Texas' arcane tax laws that can require a two-step process to extend tax relief to the over-65 and disabled.

It would cut the tax bills for roughly 1.8 million homeowners over 65 and 180,000 disabled homeowners by about \$110 on average in its first year, according to analysis from Bettencourt's office.

Proposition 2 would increase the homestead exemption on school district property taxes from \$25,000 to \$40,000. That would cut about \$175 on average from the school district tax bill of 5.7 million homeowners.

To get on the ballot, proposed amendments to the Texas Constitution require support from a two-thirds supermajority of state lawmakers. Both proposals saw near universal support in both chambers.

Bettencourt, a Houston Republican who was an author of both Senate resolutions that put the amendments on the ballot, said the measures will save homeowners thousands of dollars.

"It's big because these are new incremental benefits that have not existed before," he said.

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Energy

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In Texas, Thousands In Fines Paid By Oil And Gas Polluters Benefit The Fossil Fuel Industry

By Amal Ahmed

Texas Tribune

After a Taiwanese plastics and petrochemical company leaked harmful gasses from its chemical plant in the Gulf Coast town of Point Comfort in 2021, Texas' environmental agency fined it nearly \$267,000. Instead of paying the entire fine to the state, Formosa — which uses fossil fuels to create plastics — sent half the money to the Texas Natural Gas Foundation, a nonprofit entity that promotes natural gas to the public.

Texas state law allows polluters to divert some of their fines that normally go to the state's general revenue fund to "supplemental environmental projects," or SEPs. The Texas Natural Gas Foundation has qualified as an SEP since 2016.

In theory, SEPs are meant to remediate industrial pollution and environmental harm by funding programs like cleanups at illegal dump sites, habitat restoration or household hazardous waste pickups in communities.

Public documents obtained by Floodlight show that SEPs like the one with the Texas Natural Gas Foundation can directly benefit the companies that are being penalized — by paying to staff and run industry programs.

According to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality’s description of the Texas Natural Gas Foundation’s SEP, the nonprofit aims to raise \$8 million to replace state government-owned diesel trucks and buses with new gas vehicles that the foundation argues are cleaner. Several school districts receive SEP funding for similar bus replacement projects. But by allowing entities like the Texas Natural Gas Foundation to receive state funds, Texas is allowing the fossil fuel industry to reshuffle money back to itself, public documents show.

“You get back to this policy question [of] is [TCEQ] putting SEP dollars into the hands of a marketing organization that is using those dollars to create further demand for natural gas?” said James Bradbury, an environmental lawyer and professor at Texas A&M University School of Law.

The foundation’s work has included developing curriculum for schoolchildren that energy experts have deemed “incomplete or misleading information about energy that appear out of the fossil fuel industry’s playbook,” according to a 2018 investigation from the Austin American-Statesman. Last year, it also supported and lobbied for revised state public school standards that would “emphasize the critical role of energy in modern life” with a focus on how fossil fuel energy produced in Texas is “eradicating global energy poverty.”

To date, TCEQ records show that the Texas Natural Gas Foundation has received \$217,000 from deferred fines exclusively from fossil fuel companies, including from oil and gas companies like Motiva Enterprises, which operates one of the largest refineries in the state, in Port Arthur. In an emailed statement, a representative from Formosa Plastics did not address questions about the foundation’s industry ties but said that, with the approval of TCEQ, the company supported the foundation’s goal to reduce vehicle emissions.

The diversion of fines also raises questions about the close relationship between the polluters and the agency responsible for regulating and reprimanding them. The Texas Natural Gas Foundation was co-founded by a former Texas state representative, Republican Jason Isaac. Its executive director, Heather Ball, formerly worked at the Texas Railroad Commission, which regulates the oil and gas industry in the state. Ball did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Another nonprofit with oil and gas industry ties that qualifies as an SEP under Texas law is the Houston Regional Monitoring Corp., which has received more than \$950,000 in deferred SEPs from the state since 2016 to subsidize existing air monitors that it maintains. The corporation is a nonprofit but was first formed as a private entity about 40 years ago by refineries and plants operating along the Houston Ship Channel, according to the corporation’s lawyer, Christopher Amandes. It provides air quality data that facilities need to prove that their proposed expansions or changes that might increase pollution will not put the region in violation of federal air quality standards. The Houston Regional Monitoring Corp. has for decades allowed dozens of facilities to use its data to expedite that step in the process.

In a statement, TCEQ said that both the Houston Regional Monitoring Corp. and Texas Natural Gas Foundation were approved to receive SEPs because their projects “provide direct, significant, immediate, and enduring enhancements to the quality of the environment, or

prevent or reduce further environmental degradation.”

Since 2016, Houston Regional Monitoring Corp. has received \$171,292 from Chevron Phillips Chemical Co.; \$60,845 from Exxon; and \$137,870 from TPC Group, which operates a chemical plant that infamously exploded in 2019.

Yet some of Houston’s biggest fossil fuel and chemical companies with facilities around the Houston port — Arkema, BASF, Chevron Phillips, Shell, TPC Group and Dow Chemical, among others — also pay the Houston Regional Monitoring Corp. annual membership fees.

The SEP funds go toward subsidizing five of the Houston Regional Monitoring Corp.’s 10 air monitors. Yet the corporation is required to share only certain data, such as volatile organic compound concentrations, from those five monitors, according to its agreement with TCEQ. A large amount of the data collected is not released to the public, Amandes said.

According to Texas’ environmental agency guidelines, SEPs cannot be used to bring violators into compliance. For example, when Chevron Phillips Chemical received its \$26,000 fine in 2021 from TCEQ, the \$10,000 it deferred couldn’t be given to a program that would repair Chevron’s faulty equipment or install better leak detection. The aim is to require polluters to pay for their own repairs and upgrades. Chevron Phillips did not respond to a request for comment.

But as the SEP agreement is set up, Chevron Phillips has been able to defer \$171,292 in fines to the Houston Regional Monitoring Corp. for 13 violations since 2018 — essentially benefiting by redirecting fines to a nonprofit that provides the industry a service.

Amandes, the monitoring corporation’s lawyer, acknowledged that companies “get some marginal benefit from the fact that the SEP money supplements regular membership fees, so they are in effect subsidized.” But he argued that the arrangement is not a conflict of interest that requires scrutiny from TCEQ or other state regulators.

In 2003, the Texas state auditor concluded the program wasn’t achieving its main goals and TCEQ wasn’t appropriately monitoring the funds it granted. Yet there was no formal follow-up to recommendations.

Environmental advocates say that nonprofits like the Houston Regional Monitoring Corp. and Texas Natural Gas Foundation haven’t demonstrated that their programs are the best use of state funds, particularly for a program that is supposed to have a measurable public impact.

“There’s a real concern that TCEQ is effectively subsidizing a private corporation that is not publicly accountable in terms of the data they are collecting,” said Corey Williams, a director at Air Alliance Houston, about the Houston Regional Monitoring Corp. “A more equitable distribution of those fines would help draw a more direct line from the pollution to the public health impacts associated with it.”

Williams said the SEP system isn’t designed to support smaller, community-led nonprofits to set up programs that companies can pay into. The nearly \$1 million that the Houston Regional Monitoring Corp. has pulled in since 2016, for example, could easily have established two air monitors within communities adjacent to industrial sites, Williams said.

Juan Flores, program manager for Air Alliance Houston — which helps find community participants to host neighborhood air monitors across Texas — said the monitors offered by the state are sparse and that the Houston Regional Monitoring Corp. hasn't made an effort to engage with community members about its data.

In a statement, a spokesperson for the Houston Regional Monitoring Corp, said it makes its monitoring data available on several websites, including TCEQ's and its own, and said it offers presentations to groups that ask for it.

“We've been dealing with these companies for decades, like Exxon,” said Flores. “I know these companies monitor themselves. But come on. I don't mean to sound so negative, but we don't have a lot of good things to say about their past.”

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Democrat Pushes For More US Oil Drilling In Fox Interview

By Brad Dress
The Hill

Rep. Henry Cuellar (D-Texas) on Sunday pushed for more oil drilling in the U.S., saying the nation needs to be “energy independent” as gas prices rise.

“Let's go ahead and allow that opportunity to do domestic drilling so we can have jobs here, and certainly make sure we don't depend on another country when it comes to energy,” Cuellar said on “Fox News Sunday.”

Cuellar, a moderate Democrat facing a May 24 runoff primary challenge in his Texas district, also said President Biden's administration is “not helping Democrats.”

“We got to make sure we are all working together, and right now some of the actions by the administration is not helping Democrats, certainly in South Texas when it comes to oil and gas,” Cuellar said.

Gas prices have soared to near-record highs this year amid Russia's war in Ukraine and high inflation.

In response, the Biden administration announced last week it would resume oil and gas lease sales on public lands.

More domestic oil drilling is expected to help with production, but Republicans have knocked the Biden administration for raising royalty rates for the leases and cutting the acres offered for drilling.

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Immigration/Border Security

Texas National Guardsman Still Missing, Believed To Have Drowned In Rio Grande River

By Bethany Blankley
The Center Square

A Texas National Guard soldier participating in Operation Lone Star remains missing after he attempted to save a woman crossing the Rio Grande River.

The guardsman was first reported missing in Eagle Pass, Texas, located roughly 143 miles southwest of San Antonio. The area is a major crossing point for people attempting to cross the Rio Grande River, and into Texas illegally, often drowning in the process.

The guardsman was first reported missing Friday morning. Shortly before 2 p.m. CST, law enforcement found a walkie-talkie and body armor that belonged to a guardsman.

Some news reports said the guardsman had drowned but the Texas Military Department issued a statement saying, “A Texas Army National Guard Soldier assigned to Operation Lone Star has gone missing along the river during a mission related incident ... The Soldier has not been found. We are aware of reports of a fatality, although those reports are inaccurate.”

"The Texas Governor's office continues to work with the Texas National Guard and other law enforcement agencies as they search for the missing soldier," Gov. Greg Abbott said in a statement.

Later, the Texas Military Department issued another statement, saying, “The search for our missing National Guard Soldier continues,” adding that the Texas Rangers took the lead on the investigation. Other agencies providing support in the investigation include the Texas Department of Public Safety, Parks and Wildlife and Border Patrol.

Maverick County Sheriff Tom Schmerber told the Washington Examiner the incident occurred around 8:30 a.m. “The National Guard soldiers saw a group of immigrants crossing, and one of them, a lady – it appeared that she was drowning,” Schmerber said. “The National Guardsman jumped into the river and tried to rescue, and he never came out. So they called us and said, ‘We’re still looking for him.’”

Updates on the investigation “will be provided as additional details become available,” the governor's office said.

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Texas National Guard Releases Name Of Missing Soldier

By Giulia Heyward
The New York Times

The identity of the National Guard member who went missing on Friday near the Rio Grande has been released by the Texas Military Department. The guardsman, Specialist Bishop E. Evans, 22, is feared to have drowned, though the authorities are still searching for him.

Specialist Evans is believed to have gone missing “following his selfless efforts to rescue two migrants who appeared to be drowning while crossing the river from Mexico into the U.S.,” the department said in a statement on Sunday.

Specialist Evans is a field artilleryman from Arlington, Texas, who was part of a regiment in New Braunfels, the department said. His career includes service in Kuwait and in Iraq, where he supported Special Operations Forces for a time. He joined the National Guard three years ago, according to the statement.

Officials said that Specialist Evans had been near the Rio Grande as part of a mission, Operation Lone Star, that was ordered by Gov. Greg Abbott with the aim of reducing illegal border crossings. The Texas Military Department said on Saturday that the two migrants Specialist Evans was trying to rescue were drug traffickers and had survived. They were being held in custody by the U.S. Border Patrol, the department said.

The authorities began an exhaustive search for the guardsman on Friday morning, the department said. Over the weekend, the multiday search was halted when the river's current made it impossible for dive teams to enter the river. By Sunday morning, the search had resumed. The Texas Rangers are leading the effort, working with several other state agencies.

The Rio Grande is considered by experts to be a treacherous river to cross. Maverick County, where Mr. Evans had been serving, has recently seen about two drownings per week, according to Sheriff Tom Schmerber of Maverick County, who is also a former U.S. Border Patrol officer.

The incident involving Specialist Evans comes amid a brewing political debate between Mr. Abbott and President Biden over immigration policy. Most recently, Mr. Abbott has criticized the White House after it announced that next month it would repeal Title 42, a pandemic-era immigration policy that allowed migrants to be turned away at the border.

Federal officials have been preparing for an influx of as many as 18,000 migrants a day after Title 42 ends. On Friday, the attorney general of Texas, Ken Paxton, sued the Biden administration over its decision to end the Title 42 process, seeking an emergency order to keep the policy in place.

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Missing Texas Army National Guard Member Is 22-Year-Old Man From Arlington, Authorities Say

By Hojun Choi

Dallas Morning News

The Texas Army National Guard member who was reported missing Friday was identified on Sunday as a 22-year-old Arlington man, according to the Texas Military Department.

Texas Army National Guard Spc. Bishop E. Evans went missing after trying to save two migrants who appeared to be drowning in the Rio Grande while crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, according to the military department. Evans' family has been notified, the department said.

The department on Sunday said it is continuing to search for Evans with the help of the Texas Department of Public Safety, Texas Parks and Wildlife, and U.S. Border Patrol. The Texas Rangers are leading the investigation, the department said Sunday in a news release.

Investigators with the Texas Rangers believe that the two migrants were trafficking narcotics, the military department announced Saturday. The migrants are in the custody of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the department added.

The Texas Military Department did not provide further details or respond to a request for comment related to the two migrants.

Dive teams and airboats have been deployed as part of ongoing search efforts, the department said.

Evans is a field artilleryman and part of the A Battery, 4-133 Field Artillery Regiment in New Braunfels, according to the department. He joined the Texas Army National Guard in May 2019, according to the news release. He served in Kuwait and in Iraq, the department said.

Evans was near Eagle Pass as part of Operation Lone Star. Gov. Greg Abbott has described the operation, which began more than a year ago and involves the DPS and the Texas National Guard, as an attempt to stop the flow of migrants from illegally entering the country through the U.S.-Mexico border.

But the initiative has been criticized by civil rights groups and his political opponents.

Earlier this month, Abbott announced that he would expand the operation on May 23. He pointed to President Joe Biden's plans to end Title 42 — a Trump-era policy used to turn away migrants during the coronavirus pandemic.

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The Battle Over 'Remain In Mexico' Shows How U.S. Immigration Policy Has Reached 'Peak Confusion'

By Madeleine Carlisle

TIME

On April 26, the Biden Administration will argue before the U.S. Supreme Court that it has the authority to end a controversial Trump-era policy that requires migrants seeking asylum in the United States to wait in Mexico while their claims are reviewed—even as it has signaled a possible increase of the use of that same policy in the interim.

The Biden Administration has attempted to end the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP)—often referred to as the “remain in Mexico” policy—since June 2021. Texas and Missouri challenged the move, arguing the Administration does not have the authority to end the policy the way that it did. Now, the Supreme Court will decide whether the Administration must continue implementing the policy until Congress takes action.

MPP is not the only Trump-era immigration policy the Administration is seeking to end. On April 1, the Biden Administration announced plans to lift Title 42, a public health policy that allows the federal government to immediately expel anyone who attempts to make an unauthorized crossing into the U.S. in the name of preventing the spread of COVID-19. Unlike under MPP, migrants can be expelled en masse under Title 42 without being given the right to file an asylum claim.

States have challenged the Biden Administration's authority to end both policies, and ongoing litigation has complicated whether the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) can lift the policies the way it wants to. In an April 1 call with reporters, a DHS official told reporters that they will "employ" MPP in "much greater numbers post-Title 42" to manage the flow of migrants at the border. "We are under a court order to reimplement MPP in good faith," the official continued, "and as part of those good faith efforts, we have been systematically increasing our enrollment under MPP."

Immigrants' rights groups have criticized that position as hypocritical. Karen Tumlin, director and founder of the advocacy group Justice Action Center, says she is "extremely disappointed," adding that increasing MPP in the wake of Title 42 seems "worse than one step forward in two steps back." Nicole Ramos, the director of the Border Rights Project at Al Otro Lado, says an increase in MPP is "nothing more than a deterrent and an attempt to undermine the right to seek asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border."

But the Administration says its hands are tied. In December, the 5th Circuit ordered DHS to continue implementing MPP, and it remains bound by that court order. Recent data shows the Administration has increased enrollment in MPP by several thousand since the order.

"Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas has repeatedly stated that MPP has endemic flaws, imposed unjustifiable human costs, pulled resources and personnel away from other priority efforts, and failed to address the root causes of irregular migration," a DHS spokesperson tells TIME. "DHS, however, is under a court order to reimplement MPP, which it continues to fight in the courts including in a challenge before the Supreme Court. In the interim, the Department is required to abide by the order to re-implement the program in good faith. As it does so, the Department is committed to implementing MPP in the most humane way possible."

The Supreme Court could determine whether that order stays in effect. But regardless of what ultimately happens to MPP, the back and forth over its fate is indicative of a larger trend in U.S. immigration policy. Theresa Cardinal Brown, the managing director of immigration and cross-border policy at the Bipartisan Policy Center, argues that after the last near-decade of immigration lawsuits over federal government policies from both sides of the aisle, "We're now at, I think, peak confusion." Often as soon as a policy is put in place, a lawsuit is filed to stop it, a court may block it, and then a higher court reverses that order, and so on all the way up through the ponderous legal system.

"If you're trying to figure out what the policy is on any given day, it's a big question mark—much less what the policy is going to be in the future," Brown says. "Because it's not being decided by Congress that makes the laws. It's not being decided by the executive branch that is supposed to implement the laws. It's being decided in judiciary. And that is creating a whole lot of confusion for everybody."

'Hindenburg crashing into the Titanic'

If the Biden Administration gets its wish and courts affirm it can end both contested immigration policies, lawmakers in both parties worry there could be a surge in people arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Without Title 42 or MPP in place, America's immigration policy would largely return to what

it looked like during the Obama years. Prior to 2019, migrants arriving at the border were either processed in immigration court or subject to expedited removal. Whether or not they were detained was subject to availability of detention facilities and discretion. But now there is a much greater volume of people arriving at the border, Brown says, and more diversity of nationalities seeking to enter the country, which can complicate the deportation process.

Republicans and some centrist Democrats have expressed alarm, arguing that lifting Title 42 and MPP, which supporters argue have functioned as deterrents to migration, could lead to a surge of people at the southern border. Mark Morgan, a visiting fellow at the Heritage Foundation and former acting commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) under President Donald Trump who enforced both policies, tells TIME he thinks ending MPP and Title 42 will be like the “Hindenburg crashing into the Titanic.” Immigrants’ rights advocates, on the other hand, argue the programs have failed to deter asylum seekers, pointing to the close to two million times Title 42 has been used to expel people since March 2020, stranding many migrants in dangerous conditions in Mexico.

Even if the Biden Administration wins before the Supreme Court, MPP won’t go away overnight. The case will go back down to the federal district judge in Texas, who will decide whether the Biden Administration’s October 2021 attempt to end MPP was valid. So realistically, even if the Supreme Court sides with the Administration, MPP will still be around for at least several more months. And if the Biden Administration loses before the Supreme Court, MPP would likely stay in place until Congress takes action, which probably wouldn’t be any time soon, as the midterms loom and border security once again appears to be a key issue for voters.

Regardless of what happens to MPP, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have also pushed against the Biden Administration’s move to end Title 42, arguing there could be a crisis at the border at the end of May. On April 7, five Democrats and six Republican Senators introduced a bill that would prevent DHS from lifting Title 42 without a detailed plan to prevent a wave of migration in its wake. And over 20 states have joined a lawsuit initially filed by Arizona, Louisiana, and Missouri on April 3 asking a judge to immediately block the Administration from ending the policy, arguing Title 42 is a crucial tool stopping a “catastrophe” at the border.

Ramos of Al Otro Lado says her organization is encouraging asylum seekers to wait for “clearer information” and not to “all arrive at the border on May 24,” to try to avoid perpetuating the narrative that there will be chaos come the end of May.

But courts could shake up the system again even sooner. Oral arguments in the case over whether the Biden Administration can end Title 42 may happen in a Louisiana district court next month, and the states very well could win a temporary injunction on the Administration’s attempt to lift the policy until the litigation is completed—just as they did with attempts to end MPP. “We have seen so far that judges are very willing to step in and stop the Biden Administration from lifting any Trump-related policies. And there is certainly a chance that that happens again,” says Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, senior policy counsel at the American Immigration Council, which filed a brief supporting the government’s request to end MPP.

Meaning that right as the fate of MPP is decided, the same cycle could begin again with Title 42, and the options available to asylum seekers would once again hinge on what the most recent federal court has ruled.

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Opinion/Editorial

Analysis: Every So Often, Texas Government Needs A Reboot

By Ross Ramsey

Texas Tribune

One parable about problem-solving is about how to load rocks into a truck, or a big box. Start with the boulders, then the stones, then the pebbles. Get the order wrong, and the container gets full before the rocks are all in. Get the order right, and the pebbles fill in spaces around the stones, and the stones fill in spaces around the boulders.

Do the big stuff first. The little stuff, last.

What if government worked like that? It happens once in a while, just as a reminder of the power of collective community action — the basic idea behind government — and of what’s possible.

But it doesn’t happen often enough in the normal course of government business. It happens when the normal course of business is interrupted, either by events or on purpose.

Texas has a 30-year-old example to consider. Comptroller Bob Bullock, running for lieutenant governor, proposed a “performance review” of state government, and his successor, John Sharp, actually put it together and made it a full-time operation in his agency. Sharp also made a public appeal for government that “works better and costs less,” a way to involve voters and raise the stakes for lawmakers who might be reluctant to go along.

The idea was simple: Reconsider everything the state is doing, try to make it more efficient, weed out things that don’t work, propose new ideas, save money where possible and remake it all into something better. The first review included recommendations to consolidate state agencies and privatize some state services, among other things. Sharp, who is now the chancellor of the Texas A&M University System, said adopting all of it would free more than \$8 billion for savings or other state programs. The Legislature didn’t like all of the ideas but went along with a lot of it.

Political work is about vision, about setting goals, about winning public support so you can make laws with those goals in mind. The performance reviews were more about how things work, partly to free up money and other resources that could be used for other government and services, partly just to make things work better.

It’s an exercise in separating the operation of government — how things work — from the direction of government — what, in broader terms, government should do. The nuts and bolts on one hand, the vision thing on the other.

Big organizations need a kick in the pants every so often. Spring cleaning. Reconsideration. A good, hard questioning about what’s working, what’s not, whether the goals now are what they used to be. A shakeup.

“I think it is always a good idea to review the efficiency and cost effectiveness of state programs,” says Billy Hamilton, the deputy chancellor and chief financial officer of the Texas A&M University System. He was Sharp’s deputy comptroller in 1991, and managed the first and subsequent reviews.

“The performance review made state government better. It introduced new ideas and approaches. It shook things up and became a national model. Over time, programs build up ‘plaque.’ There’s always a need to remove the buildup — or at least ask hard questions.”

They saved some money, freeing up billions that were tangled in various programs for use in other parts of the state budget — a critical selling point at the time, because state finances were pinched and the Legislature was trying to write a budget that didn’t cut programs dear to voters.

There was a lot of squirming in the executive branch of government — that’s where most of the state’s programs and services are — but it was useful enough that the federal government and other state governments copied it. California even borrowed Hamilton to help run its effort.

It gradually played out, as the offerings became less and less bold. You can make a splash with the first set of recommendations, but each subsequent effort is a little weaker than its predecessor. And deals made to pass various ideas also get in the way: An idea shelved in trade for something else — give up this idea and we’ll approve that one — can’t be brought back two years later. A deal is a deal.

When Sharp moved on, the next comptroller, Carole Keeton Rylander, picked up the performance reviews. But she was considered — properly — as a political competitor to then-Gov. Rick Perry, and lawmakers had grown weary of the biennial flood of proposals from the comptroller’s office.

The Legislature took them away, putting performance reviews in the hands of the Legislative Budget Board, where they have faded into an all-but-forgotten exercise largely ignored by lawmakers.

The state’s performance reports have been effectively buried, but there are lots of places where state government operations could use a scrubbing. That might free up some money. It might just make things work better, get rid of some underperforming programs and add some things policymakers would like to do.

It’s a way to get away from the small rocks — the noisy little ideas of most political campaigns — and on to the big stuff every Texan knows about and hopes will be addressed by the elected folks in Austin: good schools, good roads, a strong safety net, fair taxes and all the rest. The boulders.

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