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Webb Co. in process of adopting central polling, highlights voting concerns

Christian Alejandro Ocampo

Laredo Morning Times

April 18, 2022

<https://www.lmtonline.com/local/article/Webb-County-in-process-of-adopting-central-17083880.php>

While discussing the approval of the early voting sites for the upcoming May runoff elections, the Webb County elections administrator discussed the move toward central polling and changes to certain sites throughout the county.

For the upcoming joint-primary runoff elections, Jose Luis Castillo noted that it will last for one week and the polling sites will see a similar schedule to the primary elections of 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. The changes will see 65 precincts open for the runoff elections -- three less than the primary elections -- and those three will be consolidated to a respective site.

The three consolidated sites were chosen as Castillo said that there was little-to-no participation per site, or they were having a hard time finding workers. Furthermore, he answered questions regarding concerns brought up in the last election period, specifically about voter privacy.

Commissioner John Galo said that complaints were made, and he noticed that the voting computer angles allowed for surrounding voters to see who voted for who during the process. He believes that longer view plates were needed to obstruct voters from seeing one another's screen. Additionally, traffic concerns at the Laredo Fire Administration building brought up the idea to move it for the short-term.

Castillo said that the fire station site had an academy training during the election, resulting in more congested traffic, but feels that under regular circumstances, there isn't much traffic. As for the view-obstruction items, supply issues made it difficult to find them.

As for the primaries, the county is in process and sent a notice to the Secretary of State to inform them that Webb will be participating in the November general election. Currently, he is working on setting up a committee and scheduling public hearings before the August cutoff date. After which, to move forward, the commissioners will have to approve it during a meeting.

Central polling on Election Day would allow the county to open up one central polling site per commissioner precinct, which at the minimum would allow for four. Castillo explained that this would allow residents from any precinct to vote at the sites, regardless of the location they choose. However, to allocate the necessary manpower to the sites, he said that certain, previously unused polling sites will be shut down.

"That's why we need a committee to see where it will be located, what is the cutoff criteria for someone to travel. Will it be three miles? The statute says it can't be more than 20, but I'm thinking our cutoff should be no more than three," Castillo said.

Additionally, Castillo said that similar to early voting, residents will be able to vote at the polling sites without issue.

The move to central polling may also alleviate Galo's concern regarding voter privacy, as Castillo said that moving to central polling would change the site from the fire station to a site that accommodates the equipment needed.

Commissioner Cindy Liendo said that as she voted, she noticed that when workers moved the voting machines to be facing a wall, it helped the situation regarding voters seeing other voter's screens.

Castillo said that while it may work, the conditions of where the machines will be placed will depend on the site and its accommodations toward the machine size.

Furthermore, Liendo had concerns regarding the closure of some sites. She said that the election administrator's office would have to find a way to promote the upcoming changes, as residents who gravitate to their usual voting site may become discouraged from voting if they find their site closed in November.

Castillo told her that it will be an item for the following commissioners court meeting to discuss budgetary options for a promotional campaign. This may include commercials or advertisements.

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Beaumont schools to seek feedback on voting district realignment

Olivia Malick

Beaumont Enterprise

April 18, 2022

<https://www.beaumontenterprise.com/news/article/Beaumont-schools-to-seek-community-feedback-on-17088905.php>

Beaumont ISD is seeking feedback from community members on the school board's redistricting process through three upcoming public meetings.

Realignment of Beaumont's five districts is based on the 2020 Census and ensures that each of the districts and the two at-large board positions are balanced, according to a statement from the district.

School board members and the redistricting firm Bickerstaff Heath Delgado Acosta LLP will be available to present information and receive feedback.

Feedback from the three meetings will be utilized by the board as they work to finalize the districts in May, in preparation for the 2023 election cycle.

The three meetings are:

- 6:30 p.m., April 19 at Beaumont United Jackson Center, located at 3443 Fannett Rd
- 6:30 p.m., April 20 at Smith Middle School Auditorium, located at 4415 Concord Rd
- 6:30 p.m., April 25 at West Brook Performing Arts Center, located at 8750 Phelan Blvd

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Mexico's president slams enhanced Texas border trucking inspections as 'despicable'

Reuters

April 18, 2022

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexican-president-slams-texas-over-border-trucking-disruptions-2022-04-18/>

MEXICO CITY, April 18 (Reuters) - Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador on Monday criticized the Texas government over its imposition of enhanced commercial truck inspections earlier this month, which disrupted trade at the Mexico-U.S. border.

"Legally they can do it, but it's a very despicable way to act," Lopez Obrador said at a regular news conference.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott, a Republican, had described the stepped-up truck inspections as part of a broader effort to deter illegal immigration and counter what he characterized as the "open borders" policies of Democratic President Joe Biden.

Lopez Obrador said Abbott was trying to drum up support among voters.

Abbott is running for a third four-year term as governor in November.

Abbott's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The inspections snarled traffic and sparked protests by Mexican truckers. The traffic jams caused millions of dollars in losses and prompted pressure from business groups. [read more](#)

The White House last week criticized the enhanced inspections as unnecessary and said they had disrupted food and automobile supply chains, driving up prices amid already surging inflation.

Abbott also chartered buses to carry migrants from Texas to Washington last week to send a message to Biden, according to the governor's office and news reports.

Texas on Friday said it would halt the inspections after concluding deals with the four Mexican states bordering Texas under which the states would increase security efforts to target illegal immigration and drug smuggling along the border.

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\$1B lost due to South Texas bridge closure, truck inspections, city officials say

Sandra Sanchez

Border Report

April 18, 2022

<https://www.borderreport.com/regions/texas/1b-lost-due-to-south-texas-bridge-closure-truck-inspections-city-officials-say/>

PHARR, Texas (Border Report) — The trucker shutdown and increased wait times for commercial vehicles crossing into South Texas last week via the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge — the nation's No. 1 port for fruits and vegetables from Mexico — caused an economic toll that exceeds \$1 billion, Pharr city officials said.

Economic losses were estimated at \$202 million per day and began mounting on April 8 after Gov. Greg Abbott ordered enhanced state inspections of all commercial trucks crossing the international bridge from Reynosa, Mexico.

Abbott ordered the stepped-up inspections after the Biden administration announced it was lifting Title 42 at the end of May, which Abbott believes will send a surge of migrants to illegally enter the country from Mexico through Texas.

The stepped-up inspections caused wait times of up to 20 hours and lines of up to 10 miles long snaking through Reynosa, and eventually prompted truckers to protest and form a blockade that prevented access to the bridge starting April 11. The Pharr bridge closure lasted three days.

Traffic was flowing again Thursday, although much less than normal. But it has picked up significantly after Abbott on Friday signed a pact with Tamaulipas Gov. Francisco Javier García Cabeza de Vaca, who agreed to “enhanced border security enforcement measures” on the Mexico side to help curb illegal crossings into Texas.

In exchange, Abbott promised to ease inspections by Department of Public Safety officers back to more manageable levels.

Abbott also signed similar agreements on Wednesday in Laredo with Nuevo Leon Gov. Samuel Garcia, and Thursday in Austin with the governors from the Mexican states of Coahuila and Chihuahua.

Normally, only about 2% of all commercial trucks that cross from Mexico are subjected to Level 1 comprehensive safety inspections by DPS troopers.

Critics said the enhanced screenings were unnecessary since U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials screen all incoming vehicles, and U.S. Department of Agriculture officers also open every commercial truck carrying produce and inspect the contents. And because DPS troopers are only allowed to inspect the mechanics of the trucks, such as brakes, engine parts and tires, and are not allowed to open or inspect inside the trailers unless they suspect nefarious activity.

The Level 1 DPS screenings that 100% of all incoming trucks faced last week took 45 minutes to an hour to complete per truck, resulting in truckers idling for days with loads and putting an economic hardship on the trucking and produce industry in South Texas, experts told Border Report.

“We completely understand the need for safety and security at the border. When we saw the impact that the governor’s directive was having on our international commerce, causing significant delays and millions in economic losses, we knew we had to take immediate action and work with our partners to promote a swift resolution of the issue,” Pharr Mayor Ambrosio Hernandez said in a statement.

Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller was the first Republican to openly break with Abbott last week calling the situation a “catastrophe” and asking Abbott to halt inspections in order to get trucks moving and produce to markets and dinner tables.

“You cannot solve a border crisis by creating another crisis at the border. These Level 1 inspections serve as a ‘clog in the drain’ and divert commerce and jobs to more western ports of entry,” Miller said.

Miller said that the delays and bridge closure came as the U.S. Labor Department reported the indicators for energy, gasoline, natural gas and electricity increased 32%, 48%, 21.6% and 11.1% respectively over last year.

The Labor Department also reported that wholesale food prices are up 12.8% since March 2021. Wholesale food prices jumped 2.4% from February to March, with the cost of fresh and dry vegetables climbing by 42%.

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Abbott's inspections have cost Texas millions. Consumers could now see empty shelves

Sergio Martinez-Beltran

KUT-FM

April 18, 2022

<https://www.keranews.org/texas-news/2022-04-18/abbotts-inspections-have-cost-texas-millions-consumers-could-now-see-empty-shelves>

Traffic on all the bridges connecting Mexico to Texas is expected to get back to normal after Gov. Greg Abbott signed a fourth security agreement with a Mexican governor Friday afternoon.

Abbott, who is up for reelection in November, has agreed to end additional inspections on commercial vehicles crossing into Texas from Tamaulipas after that state's governor, Francisco Javier García Cabeza de Vaca, promised to increase security on the Mexican side.

Tamaulipas is the last Mexican state to sign a deal with Abbott. None of the Mexican governors implemented anything new; they had already been doing what they pledged to do to enhance security at the border.

So, Abbott's decision, although welcomed by many, comes after the state — and the nation — lost millions of dollars due to the searches, which have clogged up the international checkpoints.

"With the volume of reduction we've seen, you are costing the U.S. economy in total economic impact almost a billion dollars a day," Ray Perryman, president of the economic research firm Perryman Group, said.

The Waco-based firm has researched the economic impact of previous border slowdowns, the most recent in 2019.

Using that same model, Perryman said, his group estimates Texas has lost about \$470 million a day due to the slowdowns.

The National Grocers Association said in a statement the inspections have affected their membership.

"We have received reports of fresh produce being lost due to the shipping delays, adding to the growing list of factors impacting the movement of goods," Greg Ferrara, the president of the association, said. "Food should not be used as a bargaining chip, especially at a time when supply chain pressures continue to be acute."

Consumers will feel the impact of Abbott's inspection policies at the grocery store. They might see higher costs or even shipment delays, said Perryman.

The Fresh Produce Association of the Americas has warned “food shortages will rise as we head into Easter.”

In an interview with The Washington Post, the chief executive of the Texas International Produce Association said people headed to the grocery store this weekend should expect empty shelves in the vegetable and fruit sections.

Perryman said the economy is likely to rebound quickly, however, once the flow of traffic on the international bridges improves.

“The difficulty is even before this we already had inadequate infrastructure at the border,” he said. “So we don’t start from a place where it automatically becomes seamless, but it does go back to the way it was and we’ve managed to adapt and work with that.”

Abbott has gotten backlash for the searches from Democrats, but also from members of his own Republican Party. Leaders on both sides have said it’s all political theater.

Sid Miller, the Texas agriculture commissioner, characterized Abbott’s inspections as a “clog in the drain.

“You cannot solve a border crisis by creating another crisis at the border,” he said.

Every year, billions of dollars in two-way trade passes between Texas and Mexico.

According to U.S. census data analyzed by WorldCity, in 2021 the Laredo customs district saw the highest amount of trade, with about \$243 billion. Ports of entry in Pharr, Eagle Pass and Brownsville also saw billions of dollars in trade last year.

Late Friday morning, Democratic gubernatorial candidate Beto O’Rourke called the inspections nothing but a political stunt that hurt the border. He said it was time for communities along the Rio Grande to start fighting back.

“It is time that we stand up for ourselves. This is a beautiful, amazing, extraordinary community,” he said during a news conference blocks away from the Bridge of the Americas in El Paso. “We do not deserve these political stunts. We don’t deserve this abuse. We deserve so much better.”

He reiterated that the so-called agreements with the Mexican governors were over measures already in place and that Abbott is trying to take the credit.

“This fake news that he’s trafficking to the people of Texas, we are not buying it,” O’Rourke said. “We are never going to forget what he has done to us and we will remember that we can do much better.”

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Mexican president fails in bid to limit foreign energy firms

Associated Press

April 18, 2022

<https://www.beaumontenterprise.com/news/article/Mexican-president-fails-to-pass-limits-on-foreign-17087397.php>

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador failed to find enough votes late Sunday to pass a constitutional reform limiting private and foreign firms in the electrical power industry, marking the first major legislative setback for the president.

The defeat may set the tone for an angrier, more hard-line and polarizing president in the last 2 1/2 years of his administration.

However, on a simple majority the lower house later passed López Obrador's proposal to nationalize the mining of lithium, a mineral used in electric car batteries and other devices.

No longer able to ride on a legislative super-majority as he did in the first half of his term, López Obrador was stung by the failure of the electrical-power bill, and may now resort to harsher attacks on opponents and regulatory bodies like the courts and electoral authorities.

The reforms that failed to pass Sunday would have undone much of the market opening in power generation carried out by his predecessor in 2013, but also raised concerns among U.S. officials and companies, who worried they would violate trade pacts and guarantees for foreign investors.

On Monday, López Obrador called the opposition members of congress who voted against the reform traitors, claiming foreign firms “bought the legislators.”

The lower house of Congress voted 275 to 223 in favor of the measure, which would have given more power to the state-owned electrical utility, but that was well short of the 332 votes needed for constitutional changes.

Ana Vanessa Cárdenas Zanatta, a political science professor at the Monterrey Technological and Anahuac universities, said the vote marked the first legislative setback López Obrador has suffered since taking office in late 2018.

“Today he couldn't hide the fact that he was very angry,” said Cárdenas Zanatta, noting he had continued pushing the project despite warnings from the U.S. government.

“Yesterday a group of legislators committed an act of treason,” López Obrador said Monday. “Instead of defending the interests of the nation, of the people, they openly defended foreign firms that rob and prey.”

Alejandro Moreno, the leader of the old ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party, shot back “they are the traitors, and they haven't solved the crime problem and have left women abandoned,” referring to increasing homicides against women in Mexico.

Political analyst José Antonio Crespo said López Obrador was a victim of his own refusal to negotiate any of his proposals, preferring instead to divide the country into camps of “traitors” and patriots.

“For him, sitting down to negotiate with the opposition is betraying the cause, because he is used to doing things the way he says they should be done, or not at all,” Crespo said. “I think this is going to hurt him in the second half of his term, because he no longer has the majority to do his bidding.”

“I think the final half of this administration is going to be very tough, very tense, forced, very risky,” Crespo said.

After the setback Sunday, López Obrador submitted separately a bill on lithium, which had been part of the reform bill that failed Sunday.

The bill approved in the lower house Monday would create a state-owned company for lithium mining, something López Obrador said would “nationalize lithium.” The bill must still win approval in the Senate.

Only one lithium mine in Mexico, operated by a Chinese firm, is anywhere near close to starting production. That would presumably be taken over by the government if the bill passes on a simple majority.

The electricity reform had sought to limit foreign-built renewable energy plants and guarantee at least 54% of electricity would be bought from government-owned generating plants, which are dirtier. Private and foreign companies, which have built wind and gas-fired generating plants, would have been allowed to keep up to 46% of the market.

Critics said the reform would hurt investors and their confidence in Mexico. The companies could have sought court injunctions, and the U.S. government could have complained under a free trade agreement and then put compensatory tariffs on Mexican products.

Pro-government legislators have already passed a law giving the state utility more discretion in deciding whose electricity to buy, but it remains stalled by court challenges.

The debate Sunday began with nearly all 500 deputies present. The ruling party and its allies needed a two-thirds majority to pass the constitutional reform.

Some pro-government legislators chanted “Traitors” at the opposition, which objects to the reform. Opposition lawmakers shouted: “It won’t happen.”

Given the atmosphere, López Obrador's Morena party failed to win over any significant number of opposition legislators. The vote appeared to promise 2 1/2 more years of polarization in Mexico.

“Now, families and couples are divided, I have friends I no longer see, good friends, because we are going to wind up fighting,” Crespo said. “I have never seen this level of polarization, above all, one that is promoted from the top.”

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StartUp Texas pitch summit helps small businesses launch in Brownsville

Stefany Rosales

KRGV-TV

April 18, 2022

<https://www.krgv.com/news/startup-texas-pitch-summit-helps-small-businesses-launch-in-brownsville>

If you're ready to start a business, the Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation is offering you a chance to make your pitch to industry experts.

BCIC is now accepting applications for their third annual Startup Texas Pitch Summit. The event will be the first in-person summit since it began in March 2020.

If you're interested, you will be able to participate and pitch your product or service to industry experts, venture capitalists, and high-profile journalists.

The winner will get \$25,000 in startup financing and mentorship and support from BCIC. The director of business development Nathan Burkhart says BCIC would like to offer that opportunity for businesses that have a hard time starting because they don't have access to capital.

"We wanted to address that capital attainment and also kind of highlight and give some exposure to the entrepreneurial ecosystem we have here," Burkhart said.

Applications will close on May 13 and the live in-person pitch is expected to happen on June 1.

For more information, visit <https://www.startuptexas.com/>

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'Election integrity summits' aim to fire up Trump activists over big lie

Peter Stone

The Guardian

April 18, 2022

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/18/election-integrity-summits-conservative-partnership-institute>

An influential conservative group that includes two Trump allies who helped push lies about voter fraud in 2020 is spearheading "election integrity" summits in battleground states, advocating for expanded poll watching, "clean" voter rolls and other measures watchdogs say could curb voting rights to help Republican candidates.

The Conservative Partnership Institute (CPI) "election integrity network" is run by the veteran GOP lawyer Cleta Mitchell, who helped to spread misinformation about supposed election fraud in 2020.

Mark Meadows, Donald Trump's last White House chief of staff, is a senior partner of the CPI and reportedly had a lead role in at least one of its summits.

Mitchell, CPI's senior legal fellow, has hosted multi-day summits, seeking to mobilize hundreds of conservative activists for elections this year in Georgia, Arizona and Pennsylvania, all states that Trump lost to Joe Biden, and Florida, which he won.

CPI is slated to hold summits this spring in Virginia, Michigan and Wisconsin, as it seeks to build "election integrity" infrastructure in swing states.

Powerful groups on the right such as Heritage Action and Tea Party Patriots Action have participated in previous summits.

Ties between CPI and Trump were underscored last July, when the former president's Save America leadership Pac donated \$1m to the group weeks after the House voted to create a committee to investigate the attack on the US Capitol on 6 January 2021 by Trump loyalists seeking to disrupt certification of Biden's election victory.

Mitchell's election summits began in February this year. Previously, she and other conservatives worked with legislators in states such as Arizona, Georgia, Michigan and Texas to spur the passage

of voting laws, including new voter ID requirements and curbs on absentee voting, that seem heavily aimed at Black voters, voting rights advocates say.

A participant at the CPI Arizona event said falsehoods about voter fraud in 2020 were voiced to gin-up enthusiasm for more aggressive election monitoring in 2022.

“The event definitely used the false allegations of fraud in 2020 as a call to action to rally support for vigilant engagement this year in the election process,” the participant told the Guardian, speaking on condition of anonymity.

“There was a large focus on recruiting precinct officials to watch the polls and all of the other processes associated with elections.”

Voting rights watchdogs voiced strong concern about the CPI summits.

“Ongoing efforts to promote false claims of widespread voter fraud are dangerous and damaging to our democracy,” Wendy Weiser, vice-president for democracy at the Brennan Center for Justice, said.

“There is a multi-pronged attack on the core principles of our democracy in the name of election integrity. The country’s history with these kinds of so-called ‘election integrity’ operations makes clear that they create a serious risk of racial targeting, voter intimidation, and vote suppression.”

The push to forge state election “integrity” networks is occurring while Mitchell and Meadows face congressional scrutiny and other investigation of their efforts to help Trump stay in power.

Mitchell participated in a 2 January 2021 call with the Georgia secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, in which Trump urged the state official to “find” 11,780 votes, in order to overturn Biden’s win in the state.

The Fulton county district attorney and a special grand jury are investigating whether Trump and others broke laws barring the solicitation of election fraud and other statutes in Georgia. Last month, Mitchell was subpoenaed by the House January 6 committee that is investigating the Capitol attack.

Meadows was a “keynote speaker” at a two-day CPI Georgia summit in February, where he was scheduled to discuss “what happened in Georgia in 2020 and what we must do to protect future elections”, according to the Citizen Times, a paper in Meadows’ home state, North Carolina.

Meadows is now under scrutiny for alleged voter fraud in 2020. North Carolina officials announced last week the four-term congressman had been removed from voter rolls pending the outcome of an investigation prompted by a New Yorker report that in 2020 he registered to vote using an address he never lived at.

In March, several days before the North Carolina inquiry was announced, Meadows pulled out of the CPI’s Arizona summit, where he had been billed as a top speaker. He has reportedly not participated in other events.

Meadows also faces a criminal contempt of Congress referral to the US justice department, for refusing to comply fully with requests from the January 6 committee.

‘Capitalizing on confusion’

CPI declined to answer queries about the summits and about Meadows' role.

Watchdog groups say the summits are sham efforts based on the lie that the 2020 election was subject to widespread fraud.

"The people who perpetrated the fraudulent notion that the 2020 election was stolen are capitalizing on the confusion they deliberately sowed to undermine the safety and security of future elections and, not coincidentally, rake in money in the process," Melanie Sloan, a senior adviser to the government watchdog group American Oversight, said.

Some details of CPI's gameplan for the 2022 elections have been revealed by websites promoting state summits.

In Pennsylvania, a three-day summit in late March was advertised to include sessions on how to form a "local election integrity taskforce"; how to protect "vulnerable voters from leftist activists"; "researching your local election office"; "monitoring voting equipment and systems"; and more.

Some "election integrity" meetings have drawn powerful conservative groups such as FreedomWorks and Americans for Prosperity that have to varying degrees amplified false claims about the 2020 elections.

Some groups at the summits have been bankrolled by donors including the oil and gas billionaire Charles Koch, billionaire businessman Richard Uihlein and the conservative Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, where Mitchell is a board member.

CPI gatherings have also been attended by GOP figures including candidates running for governor in Pennsylvania and the sitting Florida governor, Ron DeSantis.

According to the Center for Media and Democracy, at a secretive January meeting with leaders of Tea Party Patriots and conservative groups from several states, Mitchell and CPI distributed a "citizens' guide to building an election integrity infrastructure" to promote the summits and her message.

Mitchell was also tapped last March by FreedomWorks to spearhead what it billed as a \$10m drive to push tougher voting laws in more than half a dozen states and to fight Democratic proposals to make voting easier.

Some watchdog groups say the CPI summits pose several threats to voting rights in 2022.

Sloan, of American Oversight, said the CPI agenda had echoes of "Jim Crow-style voter suppression techniques, and a recipe for more verbal and physical threats against election administration officials", similar to ones that occurred in Georgia and other states after the 2020 elections.

Weiser, of the Brennan Center, warned: "There is a growing risk that in the name of election integrity, partisans and vigilantes will mobilize to intimidate voters and thwart their participation."

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He thinks Trump won in 2020. Now, he wants to oversee Ohio's elections

Ben Orner

Nexstar

April 18, 2022

<https://www.valleycentral.com/news/national-news/he-thinks-trump-won-in-2020-now-he-wants-to-oversee-ohios-elections/>

COLUMBUS, Ohio (WCMH) — As John Adams watched the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election, in which finalized tallies, audits and investigations confirmed Joe Biden’s wins in key states, he still felt there were “shenanigans.”

“It was clearly not legitimate,” he told WCMH in a recent phone interview. “You can say stolen; I really don’t care how you phrase it.”

Adams, a former state lawmaker, is acting on that debunked belief. In the May 3 primary election, he’s running for Secretary of State — Ohio’s top election official — trying to defeat Republican incumbent Frank LaRose for a once-overlooked position that now holds unique weight as disproven voting fraud claims persist after Donald Trump’s presidency.

A small business owner and a former Navy SEAL, Adams, 62, served in the Ohio House from 2007 to 2014. His core view that “the election was stolen” from Trump, however, stands before a mountain of evidence to the contrary.

The U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency said after the election, “There is no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes, or was in any way compromised.” Adams dismisses that: “I don’t care what department it comes from,” he said, because “voters don’t trust their election process currently.”

The Trump campaign and its allies, however, lost more than 60 lawsuits contesting election processes, including in swing states Adams singled out such as Arizona, Georgia, and Wisconsin. But to those court failures, he said plaintiffs “were never able to present the evidence.”

To voting experts, Adams’ candidacy points to a coordinated effort nationwide to undermine elections, as people falsely believing the 2020 election was stolen are running for office themselves.

“In two out of three races for governor and secretary of state across the country right now, there’s an Election Denier running,” Joanna Lydgate, CEO of States United Action, told WCMH in a statement.

Her nonpartisan watchdog group is tracking 2020 election deniers running in 2022. Adams is one of 23 secretary of state candidates in 19 states who have denied Biden’s victory, States United Action found.

Overseeing elections is the Ohio Secretary of State’s most notable duty, along with registering businesses and other functions. He or she supervises election laws, investigates fraud, reviews statewide petitions, appoints county board members, canvasses votes, trains election officials and polices campaign finance.

“(Secretaries of state) make sure our votes are counted and the will of the American people is respected,” Lydgate said. “People who don’t believe in our elections shouldn’t be in charge of them.”

How Adams would run Ohio’s elections

Primary challenges for Secretary of State, especially against incumbents, are rare.

LaRose, 42, and former state Rep. Kathleen Clyde (D-Kent) ran unopposed in 2018 for an open seat, and the last party to have a contested Secretary of State primary was the Republicans in 2010. Then, however, a Democrat was the incumbent.

The last time Ohio's incumbent elections chief faced a primary challenge was 1948, when Republican Secretary of State Edward Hummel fended off Ted Brown.

Adams wants to "tighten our election laws," he said. That includes eliminating early voting (all three to four weeks of it); requiring a reason for absentee ballots (such as hospitalization or being out of town); getting rid of ballot drop boxes, and requiring a specific, state-issued ID for voting.

Ohioans can currently prove their identity with one of six documents.

Adams also wants an in-person canvass of Ohio's registered voters — about 8 million people — to fully clear dead people and former residents off the voter rolls, which he acknowledged would be "time-consuming and expensive."

"Who's actually living there? Who's actually voting in those locations?" he said.

These proposals contrast with what LaRose said in a recent interview contributed to "the most successful election in our state's history." He mentioned a record number of ballots cast in 2020, record absentee votes, and record early votes.

"It's unfortunate that politicians on the right claim that there's widespread voter fraud when, in fact, there's not," LaRose said. "It's also unfortunate that politicians on the left claim widespread voter suppression when, in fact, that's not true, either. The bottom line is this: We make it easy to vote and hard to cheat."

Along with failed court efforts to overturn the last presidential election, Trump pressured Georgia's secretary of state in a January 2021 phone call to "find 11,780 votes" that would give him the victory.

When asked what he would do if Trump lost Ohio in 2024 and urged him to intervene as secretary of state, Adams said: "I have two years to put into place election processes that I think will prevent and help that we don't have to go down that road."

Trump won Ohio in 2016 and 2020 by more than 8 percentage points in each election.

Adams' latest claim; Voting fraud rare

Adams cited multiple disproven claims from the 2020 election while speaking to WCMH, but the latest relevant allegation he mentioned and has promoted on social media is ballot trafficking.

Pushed by conservative political commentators like Charlie Kirk, Dinesh D'Souza, and The Gateway Pundit, a group called True The Vote claims cellphone tracking data they collected shows a ring of people nefariously dropping off mail-in ballots in five key states Biden won.

That includes 138 people, they claim, shuttling ballots in Wisconsin, where Biden beat Trump by 20,682 votes.

But despite True The Vote alleging these people were improperly collecting, distributing and submitting absentee ballots, the group's founder told Wisconsin lawmakers last month that "we're not suggesting that the ballots that were cast were illegal ballots."

True The Vote also declined to make its data available to lawmakers, so its research could not be independently verified.

“Data allegedly showing cell phones that were tracked multiple times near absentee ballot drop boxes is, alone, not evidence of a crime,” the Wisconsin Elections Commission said in a statement.

Systematic voting fraud of all forms has consistently been found to be rare.

The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, tracks election fraud in every state. But the group lists only 1,353 “proven instances” since 2000 out of hundreds of millions of votes cast. LaRose’s office found just 27 Ohio ballots that were potentially cast illegally in the 2020 general election, just 0.0005% of nearly 6 million cast statewide.

“Ohioans knew it was honest,” LaRose said of the 2020 election. “And whether your favorite candidate won or lost, you could look at that and say Ohio just had an honest election.”

Adams said he believes LaRose is not searching hard enough for fraud and that he would levy stiffer penalties if elected.

“People need to go to jail,” he said. “When people start going to jail, this stuff will stop.”

At least 53 people, however, have been criminally convicted of election fraud in Ohio since 2000, per the Heritage Foundation. One of those convictions happened under LaRose, in which a Delaware County man pleaded guilty to three days in jail and a fine for illegally submitting an absentee ballot on behalf of his dead father.

What are Adams’ chances?

There has been no independent polling of the secretary of state race, but name recognition and campaign donations heavily favor LaRose, one of the most visible state officials this year as Ohio slogs through redistricting.

The first campaign finance reports for 2022 aren’t due until Thursday, but records show LaRose outraised Adams by \$887,000 to \$55,000 last year, a 16-to-1 margin.

The Ohio Republican Party has also endorsed LaRose over Adams. Both candidates supported Trump in the 2020 election.

More than 6 in 10 likely Ohio GOP primary voters say a Trump endorsement would make them more likely to vote for that candidate, per a February Emerson College poll commissioned by NBC4.

A third Republican secretary of state candidate, podcaster Terpsichore Maras, who has also alleged the 2020 election was stolen from Trump, did not get enough signatures to appear on the ballot, so it will be just Adams and LaRose on GOP tickets.

On the Democratic side, Cincinnati-area businesswoman Chelsea Clark is running unopposed to face the Republican winner in November. Clark has been a city councilor in Forest Park (pop. 19,000) since 2017.

Her policy proposals include automatic voter registration, expanding early voting, allowing voter registration online, and stopping voter roll purges.

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American businesses should wise up. Republicans endanger capitalism

Jennifer Rubin

Washington Post

April 18, 2022

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/04/18/business-should-wise-up-republicans-endanger-capitalism/>

Open Secrets reports that from 2019 to 2020, business PACs poured more than \$21.3 million into Republican coffers. (Covering their bets, they also gave roughly \$15.8 million to Democrats.) The rotten return on their largesse should prompt corporate executives to rethink their political giving.

After the Jan. 6 insurrection — and after many Republicans voted to overturn the 2020 election — many corporations declared they would no longer give to Republicans. Many have since reconsidered. Did business leaders think these Republicans have turned over a new leaf?

If so, they were terribly naive, given Republicans' subsequent conduct. In continuing to fund antidemocratic Republicans, corporations are courting disaster not only for the country but also for their corporations, which depend on the rule of law, functional democracy and peaceful transfers of power.

At the state level, Republicans have continued to undermine democracy with a tsunami of voting suppression and election suppression laws. When Major League Baseball and other businesses objected to Georgia's voter suppression bill last year, the Republican governor and state lawmakers — not to mention Republicans inside the Beltway — threatened to retaliate.

Texas has been no more hospitable to business. Republicans there also passed a massive bill to undermine voting, resulting in thousands of rejected absentee ballots. Meanwhile, a flurry of legal challenges contend that Texas's new election maps seek to maximize GOP power at the expense of non-White voters. Democratic legitimacy is illusive if partisans run the election machinery and some voters are systematically denied a voice.

Aside from destabilizing elections, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) has proved a hapless leader. He failed to keep the power on during 2021's frigid winter. And this year, in a stunt to prove his anti-immigrant credentials, he enacted onerous trucking inspections at the border that slowed commerce and aggravated the nation's supply chain problems. He was forced to withdraw his edict on Friday. Though he imagined it would extort Mexico into beefing up its border security, instead he wounded Texas businesses and consumers.

And let's not forget Abbott's abortion bounty bill, which entices people to report women who seek an abortion after six weeks of pregnancy with financial incentives. When Citigroup and other employers in Texas said they would provide benefits for employees who seek abortion services out of state, Republicans introduced a bill to ban the government from doing business with companies that provide such benefits. Apparently, state legislators want to run the benefits departments of private companies.

What sort of recruitment efforts will Texas businesses now need to persuade educated, diverse workers to move to the state? (Ignore the man behind the curtain!) Investors might prefer to park their capital in democratically stable, inclusive states instead.

In Florida, Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) has spent his time promoting the state's "don't say gay" bill and devising ways to go after schools that make White people feel uncomfortable. To boot, the state now is banning dozens of math books that allegedly violate rules banning critical race theory.

Moreover, DeSantis has decided that he should be running corporations in his state, not managers or shareholders. He sued to prevent cruise lines from enacting covid protections. And he went to war with Disney over the company's objections to the "don't say gay" bill. The Post reports, "He said the legislature is reevaluating Disney's special tax status in Florida, scrutinizing 'some of the things that are really unique to Disney over many, many decades.'" That's how Republicans treat one of the state's largest employers, which contributes more than \$75 billion to Central Florida's economy and gives "millions to politicians in the state, mostly Republicans." Supporting a party with that outlook seems to have been a misjudgment.

To recap, red-state Republicans continue to undermine democracy and are setting the stage for future voting conflicts. They are politicizing their schools (which already lagged blue states) and persecuting LGBTQ students. They are willing to risk commerce (not to mention reliable elections) to keep their MAGA supporters happy.

Recall also that vaccination rates for covid-19 are much lower and death rates much higher in states run by Republicans. Potential and current residents might want to reconsider their options. Meanwhile, Democrats should make clear that they offer a stable business environment, eschew anti-business stunts, want effective covid protections and support public schools. Oh, and they don't support post-election violence.

Business leaders should get a clue. In supporting lawless bullies who want to micromanage their companies, they enable a threat to democracy and increase the risk to their companies' profitability and reputations. If it's their bottom line they're concerned about, CEOs should recognize Republicans have shown repeatedly that they are not on their side.

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Biased AP story ignores voters being able to correct rejected ballots

Temple Daily Telegram

April 18, 2022

https://www.tdtnews.com/news/letters_to_the_editor/article_c64016ae-bd06-11ec-8de7-475b19f2c981.html

I want to thank the Telegram for publishing an Associated Press story on March 17 about the 23,000 illegal mail-in ballots found in the 2022 Texas primary. According to AP, historical comparisons are lacking, but the unusually high mail-in ballot rejection focuses attention on the new ballot rules being unfair. How was this "unusually high" opinion arrived at without a known historic baseline?

Nowhere do they say the ballots were rejected because the voters failed to provide the ID clearly outlined on the ballot instructions and that each voter was allowed to correct their vote. Apparently, 23,000 declined the offer. Makes me think those voters were all fraudulent.

It's interesting that the majority of the bad votes came from Democrat counties. The AP implied they were likely for Democrat candidates. Deeply Democrat Harris County, Houston, had the most illegal ballots.

Makes me conclude Trump was correct about rampant fraud in Texas. He has been proven correct big time in Arizona, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Michigan in the 2020 election.

Once again, the AP proves itself the purveyor of fake and biased news. The Telegram is apparently OK with this blatant fraud. Texas is not turning blue. God bless Texas.

Peter Jessup

Belton

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Texas Secretary of State

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April 19, 2022

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Webb Co. in process of adopting central polling, highlights voting concerns

Christian Alejandro Ocampo

Laredo Morning Times

April 18, 2022

<https://www.lmtonline.com/local/article/Webb-County-in-process-of-adopting-central-17083880.php>

While discussing the approval of the early voting sites for the upcoming May runoff elections, the Webb County elections administrator discussed the move toward central polling and changes to certain sites throughout the county.

For the upcoming joint-primary runoff elections, Jose Luis Castillo noted that it will last for one week and the polling sites will see a similar schedule to the primary elections of 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. The changes will see 65 precincts open for the runoff elections -- three less than the primary elections -- and those three will be consolidated to a respective site.

The three consolidated sites were chosen as Castillo said that there was little-to-no participation per site, or they were having a hard time finding workers. Furthermore, he answered questions regarding concerns brought up in the last election period, specifically about voter privacy.

Commissioner John Galo said that complaints were made, and he noticed that the voting computer angles allowed for surrounding voters to see who voted for who during the process. He believes that longer view plates were needed to obstruct voters from seeing one another's screen. Additionally, traffic concerns at the Laredo Fire Administration building brought up the idea to move it for the short-term.

Castillo said that the fire station site had an academy training during the election, resulting in more congested traffic, but feels that under regular circumstances, there isn't much traffic. As for the view-obstruction items, supply issues made it difficult to find them.

As for the primaries, the county is in process and sent a notice to the Secretary of State to inform them that Webb will be participating in the November general election. Currently, he is working on setting up a committee and scheduling public hearings before the August cutoff date. After which, to move forward, the commissioners will have to approve it during a meeting.

Central polling on Election Day would allow the county to open up one central polling site per commissioner precinct, which at the minimum would allow for four. Castillo explained that this would allow residents from any precinct to vote at the sites, regardless of the location they choose. However, to allocate the necessary manpower to the sites, he said that certain, previously unused polling sites will be shut down.

“That’s why we need a committee to see where it will be located, what is the cutoff criteria for someone to travel. Will it be three miles? The statute says it can’t be more than 20, but I’m thinking our cutoff should be no more than three,” Castillo said.

Additionally, Castillo said that similar to early voting, residents will be able to vote at the polling sites without issue.

The move to central polling may also alleviate Galo’s concern regarding voter privacy, as Castillo said that moving to central polling would change the site from the fire station to a site that accommodates the equipment needed.

Commissioner Cindy Liendo said that as she voted, she noticed that when workers moved the voting machines to be facing a wall, it helped the situation regarding voters seeing other voter’s screens.

Castillo said that while it may work, the conditions of where the machines will be placed will depend on the site and its accommodations toward the machine size.

Furthermore, Liendo had concerns regarding the closure of some sites. She said that the election administrator’s office would have to find a way to promote the upcoming changes, as residents who gravitate to their usual voting site may become discouraged from voting if they find their site closed in November.

Castillo told her that it will be an item for the following commissioners court meeting to discuss budgetary options for a promotional campaign. This may include commercials or advertisements.

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Beaumont schools to seek feedback on voting district realignment

Olivia Malick

Beaumont Enterprise

April 18, 2022

<https://www.beaumontenterprise.com/news/article/Beaumont-schools-to-seek-community-feedback-on-17088905.php>

Beaumont ISD is seeking feedback from community members on the school board's redistricting process through three upcoming public meetings.

Realignment of Beaumont's five districts is based on the 2020 Census and ensures that each of the districts and the two at-large board positions are balanced, according to a statement from the district.

School board members and the redistricting firm Bickerstaff Heath Delgado Acosta LLP will be available to present information and receive feedback.

Feedback from the three meetings will be utilized by the board as they work to finalize the districts in May, in preparation for the 2023 election cycle.

The three meetings are:

- 6:30 p.m., April 19 at Beaumont United Jackson Center, located at 3443 Fannett Rd
- 6:30 p.m., April 20 at Smith Middle School Auditorium, located at 4415 Concord Rd
- 6:30 p.m., April 25 at West Brook Performing Arts Center, located at 8750 Phelan Blvd

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Mexico's president slams enhanced Texas border trucking inspections as 'despicable'

Reuters

April 18, 2022

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexican-president-slams-texas-over-border-trucking-disruptions-2022-04-18/>

MEXICO CITY, April 18 (Reuters) - Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador on Monday criticized the Texas government over its imposition of enhanced commercial truck inspections earlier this month, which disrupted trade at the Mexico-U.S. border.

"Legally they can do it, but it's a very despicable way to act," Lopez Obrador said at a regular news conference.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott, a Republican, had described the stepped-up truck inspections as part of a broader effort to deter illegal immigration and counter what he characterized as the "open borders" policies of Democratic President Joe Biden.

Lopez Obrador said Abbott was trying to drum up support among voters.

Abbott is running for a third four-year term as governor in November.

Abbott's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The inspections snarled traffic and sparked protests by Mexican truckers. The traffic jams caused millions of dollars in losses and prompted pressure from business groups.
read more

The White House last week criticized the enhanced inspections as unnecessary and said they had disrupted food and automobile supply chains, driving up prices amid already surging inflation.

Abbott also chartered buses to carry migrants from Texas to Washington last week to send a message to Biden, according to the governor's office and news reports.

Texas on Friday said it would halt the inspections after concluding deals with the four Mexican states bordering Texas under which the states would increase security efforts to target illegal immigration and drug smuggling along the border.

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\$1B lost due to South Texas bridge closure, truck inspections, city officials say

Sandra Sanchez

Border Report

April 18, 2022

<https://www.borderreport.com/regions/texas/1b-lost-due-to-south-texas-bridge-closure-truck-inspections-city-officials-say/>

PHARR, Texas (Border Report) — The trucker shutdown and increased wait times for commercial vehicles crossing into South Texas last week via the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge — the nation's No. 1 port for fruits and vegetables from Mexico — caused an economic toll that exceeds \$1 billion, Pharr city officials said.

Economic losses were estimated at \$202 million per day and began mounting on April 8 after Gov. Greg Abbott ordered enhanced state inspections of all commercial trucks crossing the international bridge from Reynosa, Mexico.

Abbott ordered the stepped-up inspections after the Biden administration announced it was lifting Title 42 at the end of May, which Abbott believes will send a surge of migrants to illegally enter the country from Mexico through Texas.

The stepped-up inspections caused wait times of up to 20 hours and lines of up to 10 miles long snaking through Reynosa, and eventually prompted truckers to protest and form a blockade that prevented access to the bridge starting April 11. The Pharr bridge closure lasted three days.

Traffic was flowing again Thursday, although much less than normal. But it has picked up significantly after Abbott on Friday signed a pact with Tamaulipas Gov. Francisco Javier García Cabeza de Vaca, who agreed to “enhanced border security enforcement measures” on the Mexico side to help curb illegal crossings into Texas.

In exchange, Abbott promised to ease inspections by Department of Public Safety officers back to more manageable levels.

Abbott also signed similar agreements on Wednesday in Laredo with Nuevo Leon Gov. Samuel Garcia, and Thursday in Austin with the governors from the Mexican states of Coahuila and Chihuahua.

Normally, only about 2% of all commercial trucks that cross from Mexico are subjected to Level 1 comprehensive safety inspections by DPS troopers.

Critics said the enhanced screenings were unnecessary since U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials screen all incoming vehicles, and U.S. Department of Agriculture officers also open every commercial truck carrying produce and inspect the contents. And because DPS troopers are only allowed to inspect the mechanics of the trucks, such as brakes, engine parts and tires, and are not allowed to open or inspect inside the trailers unless they suspect nefarious activity.

The Level 1 DPS screenings that 100% of all incoming trucks faced last week took 45 minutes to an hour to complete per truck, resulting in truckers idling for days with loads and putting an economic hardship on the trucking and produce industry in South Texas, experts told Border Report.

“We completely understand the need for safety and security at the border. When we saw the impact that the governor’s directive was having on our international commerce, causing significant delays and millions in economic losses, we knew we had to take immediate action and work with our partners to promote a swift resolution of the issue,” Pharr Mayor Ambrosio Hernandez said in a statement.

Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller was the first Republican to openly break with Abbott last week calling the situation a “catastrophe” and asking Abbott to halt inspections in order to get trucks moving and produce to markets and dinner tables.

“You cannot solve a border crisis by creating another crisis at the border. These Level 1 inspections serve as a ‘clog in the drain’ and divert commerce and jobs to more western ports of entry,” Miller said.

Miller said that the delays and bridge closure came as the U.S. Labor Department reported the indicators for energy, gasoline, natural gas and electricity increased 32%, 48%, 21.6% and 11.1% respectively over last year.

The Labor Department also reported that wholesale food prices are up 12.8% since March 2021. Wholesale food prices jumped 2.4% from February to March, with the cost of fresh and dry vegetables climbing by 42%.

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Abbott's inspections have cost Texas millions. Consumers could now see empty shelves

Sergio Martinez-Beltran

KUT-FM

April 18, 2022

<https://www.keranews.org/texas-news/2022-04-18/abbotts-inspections-have-cost-texas-millions-consumers-could-now-see-empty-shelves>

Traffic on all the bridges connecting Mexico to Texas is expected to get back to normal after Gov. Greg Abbott signed a fourth security agreement with a Mexican governor Friday afternoon.

Abbott, who is up for reelection in November, has agreed to end additional inspections on commercial vehicles crossing into Texas from Tamaulipas after that state's governor, Francisco Javier García Cabeza de Vaca, promised to increase security on the Mexican side.

Tamaulipas is the last Mexican state to sign a deal with Abbott. None of the Mexican governors implemented anything new; they had already been doing what they pledged to do to enhance security at the border.

So, Abbott's decision, although welcomed by many, comes after the state — and the nation — lost millions of dollars due to the searches, which have clogged up the international checkpoints.

“With the volume of reduction we've seen, you are costing the U.S. economy in total economic impact almost a billion dollars a day,” Ray Perryman, president of the economic research firm Perryman Group, said.

The Waco-based firm has researched the economic impact of previous border slowdowns, the most recent in 2019.

Using that same model, Perryman said, his group estimates Texas has lost about \$470 million a day due to the slowdowns.

The National Grocers Association said in a statement the inspections have affected their membership.

“We have received reports of fresh produce being lost due to the shipping delays, adding to the growing list of factors impacting the movement of goods,” Greg Ferrara, the president of the association, said. “Food should not be used as a bargaining chip, especially at a time when supply chain pressures continue to be acute.”

Consumers will feel the impact of Abbott's inspection policies at the grocery store. They might see higher costs or even shipment delays, said Perryman.

The Fresh Produce Association of the Americas has warned “food shortages will rise as we head into Easter.”

In an interview with The Washington Post, the chief executive of the Texas International Produce Association said people headed to the grocery store this weekend should expect empty shelves in the vegetable and fruit sections.

Perryman said the economy is likely to rebound quickly, however, once the flow of traffic on the international bridges improves.

“The difficulty is even before this we already had inadequate infrastructure at the border,” he said. “So we don’t start from a place where it automatically becomes seamless, but it does go back to the way it was and we’ve managed to adapt and work with that.”

Abbott has gotten backlash for the searches from Democrats, but also from members of his own Republican Party. Leaders on both sides have said it’s all political theater.

Sid Miller, the Texas agriculture commissioner, characterized Abbott’s inspections as a “clog in the drain.

"You cannot solve a border crisis by creating another crisis at the border," he said.

Every year, billions of dollars in two-way trade passes between Texas and Mexico.

According to U.S. census data analyzed by WorldCity, in 2021 the Laredo customs district saw the highest amount of trade, with about \$243 billion. Ports of entry in Pharr, Eagle Pass and Brownsville also saw billions of dollars in trade last year.

Late Friday morning, Democratic gubernatorial candidate Beto O’Rourke called the inspections nothing but a political stunt that hurt the border. He said it was time for communities along the Rio Grande to start fighting back.

“It is time that we stand up for ourselves. This is a beautiful, amazing, extraordinary community,” he said during a news conference blocks away from the Bridge of the Americas in El Paso. “We do not deserve these political stunts. We don’t deserve this abuse. We deserve so much better.”

He reiterated that the so-called agreements with the Mexican governors were over measures already in place and that Abbott is trying to take the credit.

“This fake news that he’s trafficking to the people of Texas, we are not buying it,” O’Rourke said. “We are never going to forget what he has done to us and we will remember that we can do much better.”

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Mexican president fails in bid to limit foreign energy firms

Associated Press

April 18, 2022

<https://www.beaumontenterprise.com/news/article/Mexican-president-fails-to-pass-limits-on-foreign-17087397.php>

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador failed to find enough votes late Sunday to pass a constitutional reform limiting private and foreign firms in the electrical power industry, marking the first major legislative setback for the president.

The defeat may set the tone for an angrier, more hard-line and polarizing president in the last 2 1/2 years of his administration.

However, on a simple majority the lower house later passed López Obrador's proposal to nationalize the mining of lithium, a mineral used in electric car batteries and other devices.

No longer able to ride on a legislative super-majority as he did in the first half of his term, López Obrador was stung by the failure of the electrical-power bill, and may now resort to harsher attacks on opponents and regulatory bodies like the courts and electoral authorities.

The reforms that failed to pass Sunday would have undone much of the market opening in power generation carried out by his predecessor in 2013, but also raised concerns among U.S. officials and companies, who worried they would violate trade pacts and guarantees for foreign investors.

On Monday, López Obrador called the opposition members of congress who voted against the reform traitors, claiming foreign firms “bought the legislators.”

The lower house of Congress voted 275 to 223 in favor of the measure, which would have given more power to the state-owned electrical utility, but that was well short of the 332 votes needed for constitutional changes.

Ana Vanessa Cárdenas Zanatta, a political science professor at the Monterrey Technological and Anahuac universities, said the vote marked the first legislative setback López Obrador has suffered since taking office in late 2018.

“Today he couldn't hide the fact that he was very angry,” said Cárdenas Zanatta, noting he had continued pushing the project despite warnings from the U.S. government.

“Yesterday a group of legislators committed an act of treason,” López Obrador said Monday. “Instead of defending the interests of the nation, of the people, they openly defended foreign firms that rob and prey.”

Alejandro Moreno, the leader of the old ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party, shot back “they are the traitors, and they haven't solved the crime problem and have left women abandoned,” referring to increasing homicides against women in Mexico.

Political analyst José Antonio Crespo said López Obrador was a victim of his own refusal to negotiate any of his proposals, preferring instead to divide the country into camps of “traitors” and patriots.

“For him, sitting down to negotiate with the opposition is betraying the cause, because he is used to doing things the way he says they should be done, or not at all,” Crespo said. “I think this is going to hurt him in the second half of his term, because he no longer has the majority to do his bidding.”

“I think the final half of this administration is going to be very tough, very tense, forced, very risky,” Crespo said.

After the setback Sunday, López Obrador submitted separately a bill on lithium, which had been part of the reform bill that failed Sunday.

The bill approved in the lower house Monday would create a state-owned company for lithium mining, something López Obrador said would “nationalize lithium.” The bill must still win approval in the Senate.

Only one lithium mine in Mexico, operated by a Chinese firm, is anywhere near close to starting production. That would presumably be taken over by the government if the bill passes on a simple majority.

The electricity reform had sought to limit foreign-built renewable energy plants and guarantee at least 54% of electricity would be bought from government-owned generating plants, which are dirtier. Private and foreign companies, which have built wind and gas-fired generating plants, would have been allowed to keep up to 46% of the market.

Critics said the reform would hurt investors and their confidence in Mexico. The companies could have sought court injunctions, and the U.S. government could have complained under a free trade agreement and then put compensatory tariffs on Mexican products.

Pro-government legislators have already passed a law giving the state utility more discretion in deciding whose electricity to buy, but it remains stalled by court challenges.

The debate Sunday began with nearly all 500 deputies present. The ruling party and its allies needed a two-thirds majority to pass the constitutional reform.

Some pro-government legislators chanted “Traitors” at the opposition, which objects to the reform. Opposition lawmakers shouted: “It won’t happen.”

Given the atmosphere, López Obrador's Morena party failed to win over any significant number of opposition legislators. The vote appeared to promise 2 1/2 more years of polarization in Mexico.

“Now, families and couples are divided, I have friends I no longer see, good friends, because we are going to wind up fighting,” Crespo said. “I have never seen this level of polarization, above all, one that is promoted from the top.”

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StartUp Texas pitch summit helps small businesses launch in Brownsville

Stefany Rosales

KRGV-TV

April 18, 2022

<https://www.krgv.com/news/startup-texas-pitch-summit-helps-small-businesses-launch-in-brownsville>

If you're ready to start a business, the Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation is offering you a chance to make your pitch to industry experts.

BCIC is now accepting applications for their third annual Startup Texas Pitch Summit. The event will be the first in-person summit since it began in March 2020.

If you're interested, you will be able to participate and pitch your product or service to industry experts, venture capitalists, and high-profile journalists.

The winner will get \$25,000 in startup financing and mentorship and support from BCIC. The director of business development Nathan Burkhart says BCIC would like to offer that opportunity for businesses that have a hard time starting because they don't have access to capital.

"We wanted to address that capital attainment and also kind of highlight and give some exposure to the entrepreneurial ecosystem we have here," Burkhart said.

Applications will close on May 13 and the live in-person pitch is expected to happen on June 1.

For more information, visit <https://www.startuptexas.com/>

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'Election integrity summits' aim to fire up Trump activists over big lie

Peter Stone

The Guardian

April 18, 2022

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/18/election-integrity-summits-conservative-partnership-institute>

An influential conservative group that includes two Trump allies who helped push lies about voter fraud in 2020 is spearheading “election integrity” summits in battleground states, advocating for expanded poll watching, “clean” voter rolls and other measures watchdogs say could curb voting rights to help Republican candidates.

The Conservative Partnership Institute (CPI) “election integrity network” is run by the veteran GOP lawyer Cleta Mitchell, who helped to spread misinformation about supposed election fraud in 2020.

Mark Meadows, Donald Trump’s last White House chief of staff, is a senior partner of the CPI and reportedly had a lead role in at least one of its summits.

Mitchell, CPI’s senior legal fellow, has hosted multi-day summits, seeking to mobilize hundreds of conservative activists for elections this year in Georgia, Arizona and Pennsylvania, all states that Trump lost to Joe Biden, and Florida, which he won.

CPI is slated to hold summits this spring in Virginia, Michigan and Wisconsin, as it seeks to build “election integrity” infrastructure in swing states.

Powerful groups on the right such as Heritage Action and Tea Party Patriots Action have participated in previous summits.

Ties between CPI and Trump were underscored last July, when the former president’s Save America leadership Pac donated \$1m to the group weeks after the House voted to create a committee to investigate the attack on the US Capitol on 6 January 2021 by Trump loyalists seeking to disrupt certification of Biden’s election victory.

Mitchell’s election summits began in February this year. Previously, she and other conservatives worked with legislators in states such as Arizona, Georgia, Michigan and Texas to spur the passage of voting laws, including new voter ID requirements and curbs on absentee voting, that seem heavily aimed at Black voters, voting rights advocates say.

A participant at the CPI Arizona event said falsehoods about voter fraud in 2020 were voiced to gin-up enthusiasm for more aggressive election monitoring in 2022.

“The event definitely used the false allegations of fraud in 2020 as a call to action to rally support for vigilant engagement this year in the election process,” the participant told the Guardian, speaking on condition of anonymity.

“There was a large focus on recruiting precinct officials to watch the polls and all of the other processes associated with elections.”

Voting rights watchdogs voiced strong concern about the CPI summits.

“Ongoing efforts to promote false claims of widespread voter fraud are dangerous and damaging to our democracy,” Wendy Weiser, vice-president for democracy at the Brennan Center for Justice, said.

“There is a multi-pronged attack on the core principles of our democracy in the name of election integrity. The country’s history with these kinds of so-called ‘election integrity’ operations makes clear that they create a serious risk of racial targeting, voter intimidation, and vote suppression.”

The push to forge state election “integrity” networks is occurring while Mitchell and Meadows face congressional scrutiny and other investigation of their efforts to help Trump stay in power.

Mitchell participated in a 2 January 2021 call with the Georgia secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, in which Trump urged the state official to “find” 11,780 votes, in order to overturn Biden’s win in the state.

The Fulton county district attorney and a special grand jury are investigating whether Trump and others broke laws barring the solicitation of election fraud and other statutes in Georgia. Last month, Mitchell was subpoenaed by the House January 6 committee that is investigating the Capitol attack.

Meadows was a “keynote speaker” at a two-day CPI Georgia summit in February, where he was scheduled to discuss “what happened in Georgia in 2020 and what we must do to protect future elections”, according to the Citizen Times, a paper in Meadows’ home state, North Carolina.

Meadows is now under scrutiny for alleged voter fraud in 2020. North Carolina officials announced last week the four-term congressman had been removed from voter rolls pending the outcome of an investigation prompted by a New Yorker report that in 2020 he registered to vote using an address he never lived at.

In March, several days before the North Carolina inquiry was announced, Meadows pulled out of the CPI’s Arizona summit, where he had been billed as a top speaker. He has reportedly not participated in other events.

Meadows also faces a criminal contempt of Congress referral to the US justice department, for refusing to comply fully with requests from the January 6 committee.

‘Capitalizing on confusion’

CPI declined to answer queries about the summits and about Meadows’ role.

Watchdog groups say the summits are sham efforts based on the lie that the 2020 election was subject to widespread fraud.

“The people who perpetrated the fraudulent notion that the 2020 election was stolen are capitalizing on the confusion they deliberately sowed to undermine the safety and security of future elections and, not coincidentally, rake in money in the process,” Melanie Sloan, a senior adviser to the government watchdog group American Oversight, said.

Some details of CPI’s gameplan for the 2022 elections have been revealed by websites promoting state summits.

In Pennsylvania, a three-day summit in late March was advertised to include sessions on how to form a “local election integrity taskforce”; how to protect “vulnerable voters from leftist activists”; “researching your local election office”; “monitoring voting equipment and systems”; and more.

Some “election integrity” meetings have drawn powerful conservative groups such as FreedomWorks and Americans for Prosperity that have to varying degrees amplified false claims about the 2020 elections.

Some groups at the summits have been bankrolled by donors including the oil and gas billionaire Charles Koch, billionaire businessman Richard Uihlein and the conservative Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, where Mitchell is a board member.

CPI gatherings have also been attended by GOP figures including candidates running for governor in Pennsylvania and the sitting Florida governor, Ron DeSantis.

According to the Center for Media and Democracy, at a secretive January meeting with leaders of Tea Party Patriots and conservative groups from several states, Mitchell and CPI distributed a “citizens’ guide to building an election integrity infrastructure” to promote the summits and her message.

Mitchell was also tapped last March by FreedomWorks to spearhead what it billed as a \$10m drive to push tougher voting laws in more than half a dozen states and to fight Democratic proposals to make voting easier.

Some watchdog groups say the CPI summits pose several threats to voting rights in 2022.

Sloan, of American Oversight, said the CPI agenda had echoes of “Jim Crow-style voter suppression techniques, and a recipe for more verbal and physical threats against election administration officials”, similar to ones that occurred in Georgia and other states after the 2020 elections.

Weiser, of the Brennan Center, warned: “There is a growing risk that in the name of election integrity, partisans and vigilantes will mobilize to intimidate voters and thwart their participation.”

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He thinks Trump won in 2020. Now, he wants to oversee Ohio's elections

Ben Orner

Nexstar

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<https://www.valleycentral.com/news/national-news/he-thinks-trump-won-in-2020-now-he-wants-to-oversee-ohios-elections/>

COLUMBUS, Ohio (WCMH) — As John Adams watched the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election, in which finalized tallies, audits and investigations confirmed Joe Biden's wins in key states, he still felt there were "shenanigans."

"It was clearly not legitimate," he told WCMH in a recent phone interview. "You can say stolen; I really don't care how you phrase it."

Adams, a former state lawmaker, is acting on that debunked belief. In the May 3 primary election, he's running for Secretary of State — Ohio's top election official — trying to defeat Republican incumbent Frank LaRose for a once-overlooked position that now holds unique weight as disproven voting fraud claims persist after Donald Trump's presidency.

A small business owner and a former Navy SEAL, Adams, 62, served in the Ohio House from 2007 to 2014. His core view that "the election was stolen" from Trump, however, stands before a mountain of evidence to the contrary.

The U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency said after the election, "There is no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes, or was in any way compromised." Adams dismisses that: "I don't care what department it comes from," he said, because "voters don't trust their election process currently."

The Trump campaign and its allies, however, lost more than 60 lawsuits contesting election processes, including in swing states Adams singled out such as Arizona, Georgia, and Wisconsin. But to those court failures, he said plaintiffs "were never able to present the evidence."

To voting experts, Adams' candidacy points to a coordinated effort nationwide to undermine elections, as people falsely believing the 2020 election was stolen are running for office themselves.

"In two out of three races for governor and secretary of state across the country right now, there's an Election Denier running," Joanna Lydgate, CEO of States United Action, told WCMH in a statement.

Her nonpartisan watchdog group is tracking 2020 election deniers running in 2022. Adams is one of 23 secretary of state candidates in 19 states who have denied Biden's victory, States United Action found.

Overseeing elections is the Ohio Secretary of State's most notable duty, along with registering businesses and other functions. He or she supervises election laws, investigates fraud, reviews statewide petitions, appoints county board members, canvasses votes, trains election officials and polices campaign finance.

"(Secretaries of state) make sure our votes are counted and the will of the American people is respected," Lydgate said. "People who don't believe in our elections shouldn't be in charge of them."

How Adams would run Ohio's elections

Primary challenges for Secretary of State, especially against incumbents, are rare.

LaRose, 42, and former state Rep. Kathleen Clyde (D-Kent) ran unopposed in 2018 for an open seat, and the last party to have a contested Secretary of State primary was the Republicans in 2010. Then, however, a Democrat was the incumbent.

The last time Ohio's incumbent elections chief faced a primary challenge was 1948, when Republican Secretary of State Edward Hummel fended off Ted Brown.

Adams wants to "tighten our election laws," he said. That includes eliminating early voting (all three to four weeks of it); requiring a reason for absentee ballots (such as hospitalization or being out of town); getting rid of ballot drop boxes, and requiring a specific, state-issued ID for voting.

Ohioans can currently prove their identity with one of six documents.

Adams also wants an in-person canvass of Ohio's registered voters — about 8 million people — to fully clear dead people and former residents off the voter rolls, which he acknowledged would be "time-consuming and expensive."

"Who's actually living there? Who's actually voting in those locations?" he said.

These proposals contrast with what LaRose said in a recent interview contributed to "the most successful election in our state's history." He mentioned a record number of ballots cast in 2020, record absentee votes, and record early votes.

"It's unfortunate that politicians on the right claim that there's widespread voter fraud when, in fact, there's not," LaRose said. "It's also unfortunate that politicians on the left claim widespread voter suppression when, in fact, that's not true, either. The bottom line is this: We make it easy to vote and hard to cheat."

Along with failed court efforts to overturn the last presidential election, Trump pressured Georgia's secretary of state in a January 2021 phone call to "find 11,780 votes" that would give him the victory.

When asked what he would do if Trump lost Ohio in 2024 and urged him to intervene as secretary of state, Adams said: "I have two years to put into place election processes that I think will prevent and help that we don't have to go down that road."

Trump won Ohio in 2016 and 2020 by more than 8 percentage points in each election.

Adams' latest claim; Voting fraud rare

Adams cited multiple disproven claims from the 2020 election while speaking to WCMH, but the latest relevant allegation he mentioned and has promoted on social media is ballot trafficking.

Pushed by conservative political commentators like Charlie Kirk, Dinesh D'Souza, and The Gateway Pundit, a group called True The Vote claims cellphone tracking data they collected shows a ring of people nefariously dropping off mail-in ballots in five key states Biden won.

That includes 138 people, they claim, shuttling ballots in Wisconsin, where Biden beat Trump by 20,682 votes.

But despite True The Vote alleging these people were improperly collecting, distributing and submitting absentee ballots, the group's founder told Wisconsin lawmakers last month that "we're not suggesting that the ballots that were cast were illegal ballots."

True The Vote also declined to make its data available to lawmakers, so its research could not be independently verified.

"Data allegedly showing cell phones that were tracked multiple times near absentee ballot drop boxes is, alone, not evidence of a crime," the Wisconsin Elections Commission said in a statement.

Systematic voting fraud of all forms has consistently been found to be rare.

The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, tracks election fraud in every state. But the group lists only 1,353 "proven instances" since 2000 out of hundreds of millions of votes cast. LaRose's office found just 27 Ohio ballots that were potentially cast illegally in the 2020 general election, just 0.0005% of nearly 6 million cast statewide.

"Ohioans knew it was honest," LaRose said of the 2020 election. "And whether your favorite candidate won or lost, you could look at that and say Ohio just had an honest election."

Adams said he believes LaRose is not searching hard enough for fraud and that he would levy stiffer penalties if elected.

“People need to go to jail,” he said. “When people start going to jail, this stuff will stop.”

At least 53 people, however, have been criminally convicted of election fraud in Ohio since 2000, per the Heritage Foundation. One of those convictions happened under LaRose, in which a Delaware County man pleaded guilty to three days in jail and a fine for illegally submitting an absentee ballot on behalf of his dead father.

What are Adams’ chances?

There has been no independent polling of the secretary of state race, but name recognition and campaign donations heavily favor LaRose, one of the most visible state officials this year as Ohio slogs through redistricting.

The first campaign finance reports for 2022 aren’t due until Thursday, but records show LaRose outraised Adams by \$887,000 to \$55,000 last year, a 16-to-1 margin.

The Ohio Republican Party has also endorsed LaRose over Adams. Both candidates supported Trump in the 2020 election.

More than 6 in 10 likely Ohio GOP primary voters say a Trump endorsement would make them more likely to vote for that candidate, per a February Emerson College poll commissioned by NBC4.

A third Republican secretary of state candidate, podcaster Terpsichore Maras, who has also alleged the 2020 election was stolen from Trump, did not get enough signatures to appear on the ballot, so it will be just Adams and LaRose on GOP tickets.

On the Democratic side, Cincinnati-area businesswoman Chelsea Clark is running unopposed to face the Republican winner in November. Clark has been a city councilor in Forest Park (pop. 19,000) since 2017.

Her policy proposals include automatic voter registration, expanding early voting, allowing voter registration online, and stopping voter roll purges.

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American businesses should wise up. Republicans endanger capitalism

Jennifer Rubin

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<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/04/18/business-should-wise-up-republicans-endanger-capitalism/>

Open Secrets reports that from 2019 to 2020, business PACs poured more than \$21.3 million into Republican coffers. (Covering their bets, they also gave roughly \$15.8 million to Democrats.) The rotten return on their largesse should prompt corporate executives to rethink their political giving.

After the Jan. 6 insurrection — and after many Republicans voted to overturn the 2020 election — many corporations declared they would no longer give to Republicans. Many have since reconsidered. Did business leaders think these Republicans have turned over a new leaf?

If so, they were terribly naive, given Republicans' subsequent conduct. In continuing to fund antidemocratic Republicans, corporations are courting disaster not only for the country but also for their corporations, which depend on the rule of law, functional democracy and peaceful transfers of power.

At the state level, Republicans have continued to undermine democracy with a tsunami of voting suppression and election suppression laws. When Major League Baseball and other businesses objected to Georgia's voter suppression bill last year, the Republican governor and state lawmakers — not to mention Republicans inside the Beltway — threatened to retaliate.

Texas has been no more hospitable to business. Republicans there also passed a massive bill to undermine voting, resulting in thousands of rejected absentee ballots. Meanwhile, a flurry of legal challenges contend that Texas's new election maps seek to maximize GOP power at the expense of non-White voters. Democratic legitimacy is illusory if partisans run the election machinery and some voters are systematically denied a voice.

Aside from destabilizing elections, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) has proved a hapless leader. He failed to keep the power on during 2021's frigid winter. And this year, in a stunt to prove his anti-immigrant credentials, he enacted onerous trucking inspections at the border that slowed commerce and aggravated the nation's supply chain problems. He was forced to withdraw his edict on Friday. Though he imagined it would extort Mexico into beefing up its border security, instead he wounded Texas businesses and consumers.

And let's not forget Abbott's abortion bounty bill, which entices people to report women who seek an abortion after six weeks of pregnancy with financial incentives. When Citigroup and other employers in Texas said they would provide benefits for employees who seek abortion services out of state, Republicans introduced a bill to ban the government from doing business with companies that provide such benefits. Apparently, state legislators want to run the benefits departments of private companies.

What sort of recruitment efforts will Texas businesses now need to persuade educated, diverse workers to move to the state? (Ignore the man behind the curtain!) Investors might prefer to park their capital in democratically stable, inclusive states instead.

In Florida, Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) has spent his time promoting the state's "don't say gay" bill and devising ways to go after schools that make White people feel uncomfortable. To boot, the state now is banning dozens of math books that allegedly violate rules banning critical race theory.

Moreover, DeSantis has decided that he should be running corporations in his state, not managers or shareholders. He sued to prevent cruise lines from enacting covid protections. And he went to war with Disney over the company's objections to the "don't say gay" bill. The Post reports, "He said the legislature is reevaluating Disney's special tax status in Florida, scrutinizing 'some of the things that are really unique to Disney over many, many decades.'" That's how Republicans treat one of the state's largest employers, which contributes more than \$75 billion to Central Florida's economy and gives "millions to politicians in the state, mostly Republicans." Supporting a party with that outlook seems to have been a misjudgment.

To recap, red-state Republicans continue to undermine democracy and are setting the stage for future voting conflicts. They are politicizing their schools (which already lagged blue states) and persecuting LGBTQ students. They are willing to risk commerce (not to mention reliable elections) to keep their MAGA supporters happy.

Recall also that vaccination rates for covid-19 are much lower and death rates much higher in states run by Republicans. Potential and current residents might want to reconsider their options. Meanwhile, Democrats should make clear that they offer a stable business environment, eschew anti-business stunts, want effective covid protections and support public schools. Oh, and they don't support post-election violence.

Business leaders should get a clue. In supporting lawless bullies who want to micromanage their companies, they enable a threat to democracy and increase the risk to their companies' profitability and reputations. If it's their bottom line they're concerned about, CEOs should recognize Republicans have shown repeatedly that they are not on their side.

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Biased AP story ignores voters being able to correct rejected ballots

Temple Daily Telegram

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https://www.tdtnews.com/news/letters_to_the_editor/article_c64016ae-bd06-11ec-8de7-475b19f2c981.html

I want to thank the Telegram for publishing an Associated Press story on March 17 about the 23,000 illegal mail-in ballots found in the 2022 Texas primary. According to AP, historical comparisons are lacking, but the unusually high mail-in ballot rejection

focuses attention on the new ballot rules being unfair. How was this “unusually high” opinion arrived at without a known historic baseline?

Nowhere do they say the ballots were rejected because the voters failed to provide the ID clearly outlined on the ballot instructions and that each voter was allowed to correct their vote. Apparently, 23,000 declined the offer. Makes me think those voters were all fraudulent.

It’s interesting that the majority of the bad votes came from Democrat counties. The AP implied they were likely for Democrat candidates. Deeply Democrat Harris County, Houston, had the most illegal ballots.

Makes me conclude Trump was correct about rampant fraud in Texas. He has been proven correct big time in Arizona, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Michigan in the 2020 election.

Once again, the AP proves itself the purveyor of fake and biased news. The Telegram is apparently OK with this blatant fraud. Texas is not turning blue. God bless Texas.

Peter Jessup

Belton

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