THE BIG BEND Sentinel

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BURN BAN IN EFFECT, NO GROUND FIRES
by order of Presidio County

County approves new precinct boundaries

By SAM KARAS
sam@bigbendsentinel.com

PRESIDIO COUNTY — Presidio County commissioners Buddy Knight, Jose Cabezuela and Brenda Bentley voted Monday to approve slight changes to boundaries that will shift a few county residents' representation in commissioners court. Commissioner Eloy Aranda and Judge Cinderela Guevara were absent from the proceedings. The changes follow the late release of the 2020 Federal Census count, which reported an overall population decline in Presidio County.

All Texas counties are split up by population into four commissioner precincts that must be roughly equal in population, so their lines shift with each new federal census count. The commissioners court votes on county-level matters like taxes and roads. Those boundaries also affect electoral precincts, which are smaller than commissioner precincts and determine where individual voters can vote.

According to the new census, the largest underrepresentation in Presidio County is in Precinct 3, represented by Commissioner Eloy Aranda. The commissioners' challenge was to shift constituents in Knight's overrepresented Precinct 4, but there wasn't a straightforward way to do that because the two precincts overlap in the rugged and remote Sierra Vieja range in northwestern Presidio County. They decided to shift some of Knight's constituents to Precinct 1, represented by Bentley, who could then give up a few of her blocks in northeastern Presidio to precincts 2 and 3.

In Marfa, those living south of Waco Street in central Marfa and west of Edinburgh Street south of Highway 90 will now be considered Precinct 1 residents, represented by Bentley. In Presidio, the new maps split the city a little more cleanly along Erma Avenue, with most blocks to the west in Commissioner Aranda's Precinct 3 and the east in Precinct 1 or Precinct 2, represented by Commissioner Cabezuela. Presidio residents in the northeast part of town will likely notice the most changes; to achieve cleaner precinct lines, the commissioners chose Louvain Avenue as a convenient boundary where precincts 1, 2 and 3 meet.

Allison, Bass & Magee — the Austin-based law firm helping the commissioners to draw up the new maps — also drew up recommended updated justice of the peace precincts, but departing Justice of the Peace for Precinct 1 David Beebe and Justice of the Peace for Precinct 2 Juanita Bishop agreed that the current boundaries would be easiest on law enforcement and citizens. Justice of the Peace precincts differ from commissioner and electoral precincts because they aren't representative and don't have

(Continued on page 2)

INSIDE

NEWS P. 1 - 3
OPINIONS P. 4 - 5
COMMUNITY P. 6 - 7
CLASSIFIEDS P. 8

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Pete Gallego resigns from Sul Ross presidency after 16 months in office

By ABBIE PERRAULT
abbie@bigbendsentinel.com

ALPINE — Sul Ross State University President Pete Gallego resigned from his job in a Friday afternoon announcement last week. The Alpine-born, Sul Ross-educated attorney will have served just two years as president of the university when he leaves office in June 2022.

"After much reflection and discussion with family and friends, I have decided to step away from my responsibilities as president at the end of the academic year," Gallego said in a released statement. "This is not an easy decision, but it is the right decision for me and for Sul Ross, the university I dearly love."

"President Gallego's commitment to Sul Ross long preceded his tenure as president, and I know he will continue to serve the university long after he leaves the president's office," said Texas State University System Chancellor Brian McCall. "I'm particularly grateful for the way Pete has connected and cared for Sul Ross students, many of whom are the first in their families to attend college."

Gallego was appointed as the 13th president of SRSU in June 2020, after serving in public office previously as U.S. representative for TX-23 and for many years as a state representative in the Texas Legislature.

He faced a series of obstacles while at the helm of the university and its three satellite campuses in Del Rio, Eagle Pass and Uvalde. He inherited the school's chronically declining enrollment, faced a debate about moving the institution into a new university system, grappled with recommendations to reorganize departments and lay off staff, all while managing complications caused by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Gallego's office declined a request by The Big Bend Sentinel to interview the president and redirected questions to the communications department of the Texas State University System.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board showed enrollment declining at the Alpine campus from 1,644 in 2019 to 1,557 in 2020, and further down to a preliminary enrollment of 1,485 for the 2021 fall semester. At the satellite campuses, the school grew in 2020, dipping slightly this year, though still remaining higher than 2019 numbers.

The school was able to achieve a slight uptick of semester credit hour enrollment this year, despite the pandemic's effect of decreasing enrollment across many higher education institutions in the United States. "In any year that would be good news, but particularly through the lens of COVID it's extraordinary news," said Mike Wintemute, the vice chancellor for marketing and communications at the Texas State University System.

Enrollment numbers have exacerbated the financial challenges the school is facing. In the past year alone, 27 faculty have left or been fired, and the school has shuttered amenities like the school's childcare facility. Earlier this year, Gallego rebuffed recommendations made in a report by the Academic Planning Committee, which rattled employees as it recommended sizable layoffs and consolidations of departments.

(Continued on page 2)



Photo by Hannah Gentiles

Marfa Museum board member Terry Norman assesses cracks in the walls and ceilings in the Duncan photography room at the Marfa and Presidio County Museum. The historic adobe building is awaiting restoration after the city allocated half a million dollars for the repair. READ MORE ON PAGE 7.

Presidio County's candidate filing period: Open positions and how to run for local office

By MARY CANTRELL
mkcantrell@bigbendsentinel.com

PRESIDIO COUNTY — For those wishing to occupy public office, it's time to apply to appear on the local ballot for the primary elections on March 1, 2022.

Positions up for election in Presidio County include County Judge, District/County Clerk, County Treasurer, County Commissioner Precinct 2, County Commissioner Precinct 4, Justice of the Peace Precinct 1 and Justice of the Peace Precinct 2. The open filing period lasts from November 13 to December 13, 2021.

To apply, candidates must go through Republican County Chair Dan Dunlap or Democratic County Chair Clark Childers. Candidates can either pay for entry on the ballot — fees range depending on the position from $375 to $1,250 — or receive a certain number of signatures. Signatures needed are 2% of people that voted in the 2018 general election, or around 34 signatures. County Clerk Florcita Zubia, who took office this past June after Virginia Pallarez retired, is up for election. She said she plans to get around 50 to 60 signatures in the event not all who signed are qualified as registered voters in the county.

Dina Jo Losoya-Marquez, who was recently appointed to serve as Justice of the Peace Precinct 1 after Judge David Beebe resigned, will also be on the ballot in the upcoming election this spring.

Candidates who succeed in the spring primary election will go on to the general election in November 2022 and will ultimately take office in January 2023 if elected. All open positions are four-year terms. Early voting will take place from February 14 to February 25, 2022, before Election Day on March 1. Helpful information on qualifications and how to apply can be found on the secretary of state's website: https://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/candidates/index.shtml.

Dan Dunlap, Republican county chair for Presidio County, said he has had three precinct chairs apply so far and plans to run again for Republican county chair. While his position will be up for public vote on the ballot, precinct chairs are voted on or appointed within the party. He says he has been in conversation with several members of his party interested in running for the open county positions, but no one had filed formally as of press time. Dunlap says in his experience candidates often wait to see who else is running, filing closer to the deadline.

Historically, local public office has been almost exclusively held by Democrats. According to Dunlap, the Republican Party is making strides toward giving Presidio County a two-party system by actively recruiting candidates.

"We're trying to make this a two county party and give people a choice," says Dunlap.

Dunlap has information packets and forms needed for filing for the Republican Party in the primary. He can be reached here: PO Box R, Marfa, Texas, 432-295-1668, dandunlap69@gmail.com.

(Continued on page 2)

County appoints Dina Jo Losoya-Marquez for interim justice of the peace

By SAM KARAS
sam@bigbendsentinel.com

MARFA — At the stroke of midnight on December 6, Presidio County's Precinct 1 will have a new justice of the peace. In October, current Precinct 1 Justice of the Peace David Beebe announced that he would be stepping down from his position a year early, after serving his post for seven years.

In Texas, the justice of the peace handles traffic fines and misdemeanors, small civil suits, landlord-tenant disputes, magistrate duties and more. Presidio County has two justices of the peace split into precincts that roughly divide the county at Elephant Rock along Highway 67.

At last Wednesday's commissioners meeting, the court entertained an agenda item to appoint Beebe's temporary replacement, serving from December 6, 2021 until the end of the term on December 31, 2022. The county put out a call for applicants in the newspaper and broke into executive session to make their final decision. After a long deliberation, they appointed Dina Jo Losoya-Marquez as the interim justice of the peace.

Losoya-Marquez has lived in Presidio County for 26 years — 6 years in Presidio "as a youngster," and 20 years in Marfa, where she currently works for Marfa ISD. "Presidio County has always been my home," she said in an interview with The Big Bend Sentinel. She has an educational background in criminal justice and hopes to use what she's learned over the years to serve her community.

For her first 16 years in Marfa, she worked as a juvenile probation officer. Four years ago she took a position in the school system. She started out in the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program & In-School Suspension, or DAEP/ISS, and more recently has taken on a role in special ed teaching contact mastery. Throughout her time working with young people, she's been a champion of the Red Ribbon program, which teaches drug awareness and prevention.

Losoya-Marquez is looking forward to spending more time face-to-face with her constituents as COVID restrictions in the county ease up, and invites the public to visit with her in her new office at the county courthouse. "Those doors are going to be open, with open arms," she said. "My job is to provide information to the public — I'm working for y'all."

She's planning to run for the office, in hopes that her term as justice of the peace will extend beyond the temporary year-long appointment. "I like to strive, I like to make positive impacts," she said. "Have faith in me — I will do the job, and I will do it honestly. Give me the opportunity to prove it, and I will prove it."

Judge recommends lower payout or new trial over damages in Sanchez's case against Presidio County, treasurer

By ABBIE PERRAULT
abbie@bigbendsentinel.com

PRESIDIO COUNTY — U.S. Magistrate Judge David Fannin has recommended that Katie Sanchez, the former director of the county's Office of Management and Budget, can either face a new trial to reconsider the payouts for compensatory and punitive damages, or accept a smaller damages package devised by Fannin. He also denied nearly all of the county and Garcia's post-trial motions in the same document.

Earlier this summer, a jury found that Presidio County and its treasurer Frances Garcia had retaliated against Sanchez, a former county employee, after she ran for office against Garcia in 2018.

Initially, the jury had given a verdict that the county and Garcia should pay $1 million in compensatory damages and another $1 million in punitive damages, but in recommendations made this month by Fannin, the judge wrote he believed "the amounts awarded by the jury as to compensatory damages as well as to punitive damages are excessive."

The court has the power to recommend a decrease in the jury's verdict, offering Sanchez the choice between a lower "remittitur" amount or a new trial on the subject of damages. While Presidio County had not asked for a reconsideration, Fannin went ahead, lowering the compensatory damages amount from $1 million to $365,362.03, citing case precedents and calculations that include factors like emotional distress, inflation and economic harm.

He also dropped the punitive damages from $1 million down to $5,000. Fannin said that for Garcia, the jury award of punitive damages beyond $5,000 was "excessive in proportion to the evidence provided."

In a motion to the courts, which Fannin had considered, Garcia had said that even if malice was proven, the damages assigned to her of $500,000 were "grossly excessive."

In his recommendations, Fannin wrote, "While 'trickery and deceit are more reprehensible than negligence,' Garcia's actions in inciting the elimination of the OMB are poised somewhat near a midpoint of the two," concluding that "Garcia's conduct was moderately reprehensible."

Sanchez's attorney, John Wenke, said he was surprised by the recommendations, especially since the county had not requested that he consider the amount the jury awarded. "Obviously we respectfully disagree with the magistrate judge's recommendation regarding remittitur," Wenke said in an email with The Big Bend Sentinel this week. "We believe his recommendations to reduce the amount of damages awarded was improper."

Wenke argued that the jury's high award of $2 million reflected the evidence and testimony presented at trial and was intended to send a message to public officials. "I'm not sure what type of message is being sent if a $1 million dollar punitive damage award is reduced to $5,000," the attorney said.

"Publicly elected officials retaliated against a single mom by eliminating her county job simply because she exercised her right to run for public office. You hear about government officials in foreign countries that retaliate against political opponents," Wenke said. "That should not happen in America."

(Continued on page 2)

New precinct

(Continued from page 1)

to abide by the same rules about population distribution, so they can be redistricted as needs change but aren't legally required to.

Redistricting at the county level happens every 10 years with the release of the decennial federal census. This year's census was late, putting a time crunch on the process, but the commissioners were able to draw up and approve the maps — with the required public hearings — over the span of a week. The quick turnaround will ensure that anyone who wishes to file for local office in the March 2022 primaries will be able to do so in the correct precinct.

The City of Presidio is working with the state demographer to challenge the 2020 Census results, which many officials feel dramatically undercounted the border city's population. It's possible that the county could redistrict before the next census if the revised population counts aren't adequately represented by the new boundaries, but there isn't extensive legal precedent for that process. For now, the new boundaries will hold. Despite the rush, commissioners Bentley, Knight and Cabezuela agreed that the process was "pretty painless."



Candidate filing

(Continued from page 1)

Democratic Chair Clark Childers announced recently he will be stepping down after three years in the role. He said he hopes to find someone equally as passionate to take up his responsibilities and plans to train his replacement. Reflecting on his time, he stressed the importance of local citizens in making elections happen. Like Dunlap, Childers has been in contact with people interested in running for public office but no one has filed as of this time. For more information on how to get on the ballot for the Democratic Party, contact presidiodemocrats@gmail.com.

CORRECTIONS: An article on the most recent Marfa City Council meeting that ran last week stated the council accepted an invitation from the company Parkhill to perform seal coating on Lincoln and Columbia streets. While they did accept an invitation from Parkhill to perform seal coating, the actual streets which will undergo the improvements have not been chosen. Lincoln and Columbia streets were discussed, but the decision is not final.

An article last week stated the Center for Big Bend Studies conference took place virtually in 2020. The conference was actually canceled and did not occur at all, either online or in person.

The Big Bend Sentinel reported that at October 28's city council meeting, the council's approval of applying for Operation Lone Star funds was "the final moving piece in securing … funding," when in fact it was the last step in applying for the funds. Funding has not been secured yet.

The Sentinel regrets the errors.

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Gallego resigns

(Continued from page 1)

Meanwhile at the state level, the local senator of District 19, Roland Gutierrez, introduced a bill to move Sul Ross into the A&M University system after over 100 years in the Texas State University System. While the effort gained little traction in the Legislature, a vote taken by the faculty senate of the Sul Ross satellite campuses in April resulted in the faculty senate approving a resolution in support of the move to Texas A&M — an opinion at odds with Gallego's decision to stand firm with Texas State.

As news broke of the resignation last week, the university was also in the final stages of its search for a new provost. That process was seemingly uninhibited by the sudden resignation. On Monday, SRSU announced the hiring of finalist Bernardo Joaquin Canteñs, Ph.D, who currently serves as associate provost and chair of philosophy at Morovian University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Canteñs "accepted the offer after hearing of the news" of Gallego's impending departure, a spokesperson from the president's office said.

Wintemute, the university system spokesperson, said, "We are obviously sad to see President Gallego moving on, but excited for the opportunity to continue momentum on some of the challenges facing the university."

The university system will continue to improve Sul Ross' online offerings, and this week the board of regents will consider allocating $59 million for capital construction projects at the Alpine and middle Rio Grande campuses. "All of those initiatives will continue unimpeded," he said.

In light of Gallego's announcement, the Texas State University System will develop a transition plan to search out and identify its next SRSU president.

Gallego wrote in his statement Friday, "We're building a new Sul Ross. I'm proud of what we have accomplished, ensuring the university's financial stability, laying the foundation for a more robust recruitment and retention program, enhancing the college experience for our students, and taking the necessary steps to ensure a smooth and successful SACS accreditation process in 2023.

"I am grateful to Chancellor McCall and the TSUS Board of Regents for giving me the opportunity to serve Sul Ross as its 13th president."

Sanchez's case

(Continued from page 1)

Sanchez's team will file objections to a portion of the magistrate's recommendations for U.S. District Court Judge Counts' consideration, and there will be a new hearing, unless Sanchez accepts the package.

Along with contesting the jury's damages total, the county and Garcia made post-trial motions calling other parts of the case into question. In his recommendations this month, Fannin denied a long list of motions for judgement by the county and Garcia, siding with the jury's findings in favor of Sanchez.

In legal code, courts will "uphold a jury verdict unless the facts and inferences point so strongly and so overwhelmingly in favor of one party that reasonable [jurors] could not arrive at any verdict to the contrary." But if a rational jury couldn't reach the verdict that was announced, the court can accept the county and Garcia's renewed motion for judgement.

In those motions Fannin considered, Garcia argued that she did not have budget-making power when the county voted to eliminate the Office of Management and Budget which employed Sanchez. She claimed she could not be held liable personally for violating Sanchez's constitutional rights since she didn't have official decision-making power.

Fannin however, determined that the jury was given sufficient evidence that Garcia not only had "known personal problems" with Sanchez, but "she specifically made several efforts to bring to the Commissioners Court's attention the OMB and Plaintiff's performance," noting that most of the evidence in the trial came from Garcia herself.

He also pointed to case law that established those without final decision making power can still be liable for being a "link in the causal chain" of violating constitutional rights.

Fannin believed a reasonable jury would see evidence of Garcia's discussions and relationships with commissioners ahead of the vote to eliminate the OMB and determine she was a link in the chain.

Fannin recommended that all of Garcia's motions be denied.

The county also sought a motion for judgement as to whether Sanchez proved Presidio County had acted in a retaliatory manner, since they had a reason to abolish the OMB department to save money, which was non-retaliatory.

Judge Fannin said Sanchez had brought evidence that County Attorney Rod Ponton had informed commissioners in a speech and a letter that their actions could be construed as retaliatory.

The county also claimed they can't be liable unless the commissioners as a whole, not just some commissioners, "acted with unconstitutional motive."

Fannin said the testimony by Judge Cinderela Guevara that she had developed "suspicions as to [Commissioner Loretto] Vasquez's and [Commissioner Brenda] Bentley's motivation," made it so a jury could reasonably believe two of the four commissioners acted with animus. However, that didn't meet a majority of the court, where four commissioners and the judge all have a vote.

Judge Fannin wrote in his recommendations that he believed the jury could have reasonably believed Aranda possessed a substantial retaliatory motive, because Ponton had warned commissioners ahead of the vote.

Overall, the judge denied nearly all of the motions, only making a recommendation that would change the status quo when it came to the punitive and compensatory damages.



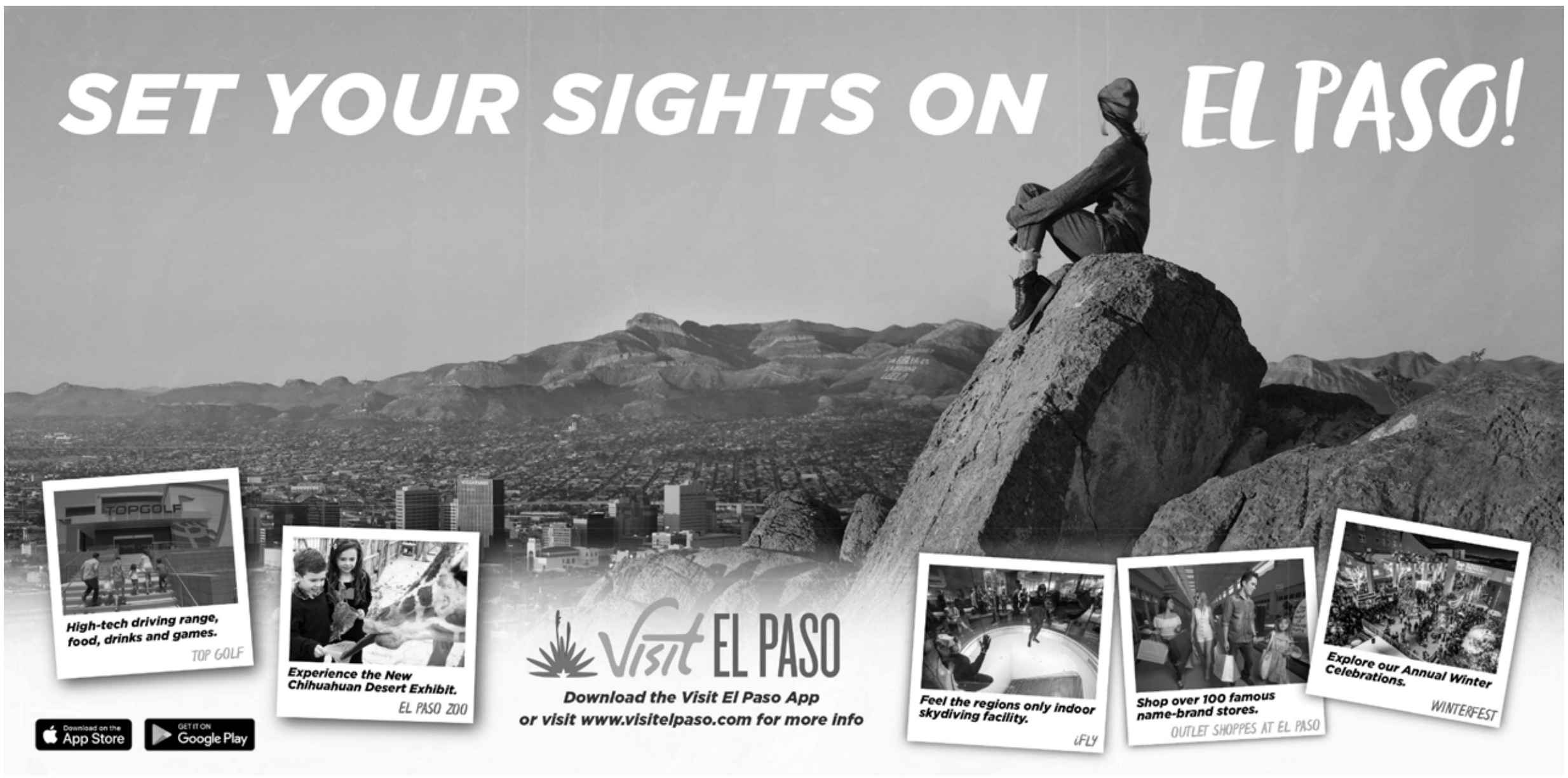
PRESIDIO COUNTY IS HONORED TO ANNOUNCE THAT THE COURTHOUSE CHRISTMAS TREE WILL BE DEDICATED TO ALL VETERANS.

The tree will be decorated in red, white and blue and it will be a great honor to have pictures of veterans living and deceased as ornaments.

Please bring pictures to the county judge's office preferably no later than December 10th.

Pictures will be accepted after that date also and returned after the Christmas holidays.

All are welcome to decorate the tree at 4:00 pm on December 10th.



67 undocumented migrants apprehended in box truck in Alpine

ALPINE — A box truck concealing 67 undocumented migrants was apprehended by Border Patrol at the Highway 118 checkpoint in Alpine on November 9.

A K-9 alerted Border Patrol agents to the presence of humans in the rear of the truck where they found two false wooden walls hiding the individuals. Four of the undocumented migrants were classified as minors ranging from 8 to 13 years old, and an additional 17-year-old was identified as an unaccompanied minor.

"Immigration checkpoints are an essential tool in the U.S. Border Patrol's mission to protect our nation's borders," said Big Bend Sector Chief Patrol Agent Sean McGoffin in a statement to the press. "Transnational Criminal Organizations put profit over human life, often, with devastating consequences."

Background checks were run on all individuals at the Highway 118 station, where three were revealed to have been previously removed from the United States due to crimes of rape, possession with intent to distribute dangerous drugs, and crimes involving moral turpitude. All individuals will be processed under Big Bend sector guidelines, said U.S. Customs and Border Protection in a press release. The majority of the undocumented migrants originated from Mexico, with others from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

"That unscrupulous smugglers put lives in danger to support their criminal activity is reprehensible," said Taekuk Cho, acting special agent in charge for Homeland Security Investigations El Paso, Texas, in a statement to the press. "Homeland Security Investigations continues to collaborate with our law enforcement partners to prevent Transnational Criminal Organizations from putting greed and profit before human life."

The box truck was driven by 22-year-old Javier Duarte of Las Cruces, New Mexico. Duarte is charged with one count of transportation of noncitizens and one count of aiding or assisting noncitizens to enter the U.S. who were previously convicted of felonies. Duarte faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison on both counts if convicted. Homeland Security Investigations and the U.S. Border Patrol will continue to follow the case.

Weatherization services expand to the Big Bend area

FAR WEST TEXAS — Community Council of South Central Texas was granted eight new counties by the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs for weatherization assistance, bringing the tri-county into the service area now eligible for the Weatherization Assistance Program.

The Weatherization Assistance Program prioritizes service to the elderly, persons with disabilities and households with children. Since its inception in 1976, more than 7 million households have received energy efficiency improvements, such as heating and cooling upgrades, the addition of insulation, air sealing, improved home air quality and safety gains. The program comprises a comprehensive series of energy efficiency measures that are based on sophisticated analyses of individual homes. These analyses take the whole-house approach, which maximizes energy and dollar savings. Because of this rigorous approach and analyses backing it up, WAP has become a leader in advancing home energy science, delivering energy-efficiency services to low-income households. WAP serves every county in the nation through its network of state and local agencies.

The Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs moved Brewster, Crane, Culberson, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis, Pecos, Presidio and Terrell counties under the jurisdiction of the Community Council of South Central Texas. This increases CCSCT's weatherization service area from 9 counties to 17.

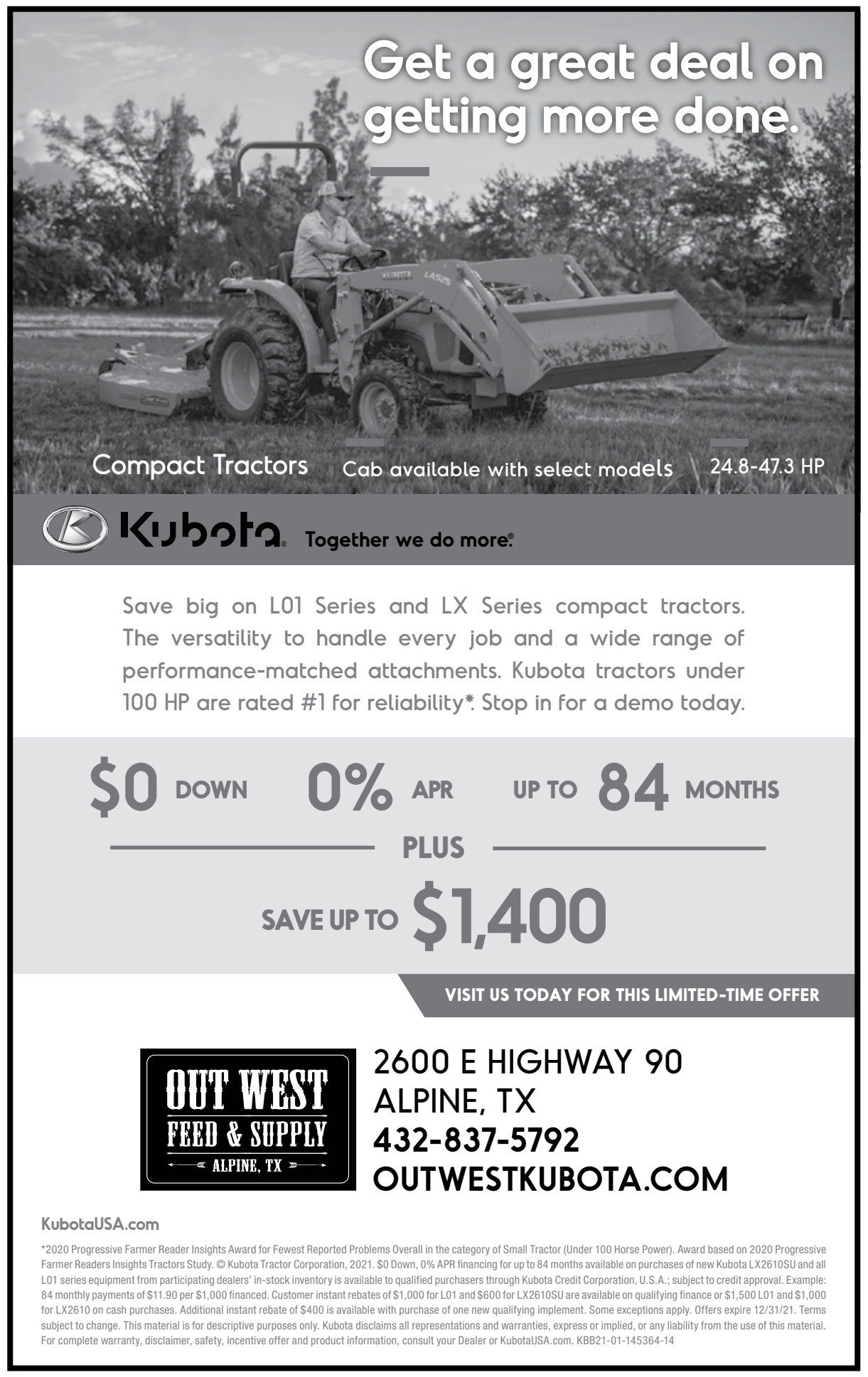
"On behalf of the CCSCT Board of Directors and Weatherization Assistance Program staff, we looking forward to the opportunity to serve the Big Bend area of Texas," stated CCSCT Executive Director Bobby Deike, " … Our organization has a very good track record for delivering quality services and reducing the energy burden for low income clients by installing allowable energy saving measures in their homes. In addition, we look forward to developing community partnerships in our efforts to make this program available to eligible low-income households."

Application processing for Big Bend individuals and families that wish to apply are tentatively on hold until the finalization of the TDHCA contract, which may conclude by mid-November. Applications are available online at: http://www.ccsct.org/weatherization-apply-for-services/

The Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs is committed to expanding fair housing choices and opportunities for Texans through the administration and funding of affordable housing and homeownership opportunities, weatherization, and community-based services with the help of for-profits, nonprofits and local governments. For more information about fair housing, funding opportunities or services in your area, please visit www.tdhca.state.tx.us or the Learn about Fair Housing in Texas page.

CCSCT is a nonprofit community action agency that empowers vulnerable families and individuals in the greater South Central Texas area to achieve self-sufficiency by eliminating barriers through innovative programs and strong community partnerships. For more information, visit www.ccsct.org or follow us on the socials at https://linktr.ee/ccsct_cares







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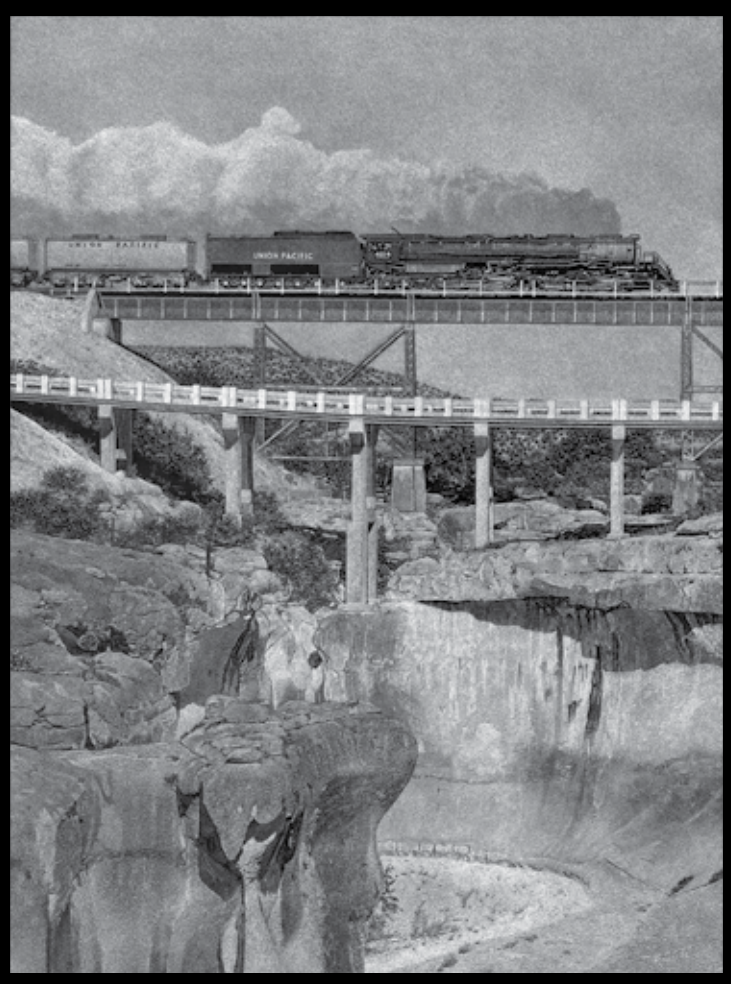
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Opinions

OP-ED

Property taxes: We need relief

By SENATOR CÉSAR J. BLANCO

Property taxes in Texas are higher than all but a handful of other states. Far West Texans and people across the state have struggled to keep up with rising property tax rates, especially during and after the financial hardship caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. People should not have to choose between keeping their home, affording their medication or putting food on their table. We need relief.

In the last few years, Marfa has experienced an increase in the appraisal of adobe houses. These high appraisals have led to a massive rise in property taxes, forcing residents out of homes that have been in their families for generations. Additionally, property taxes in Texas have far outpaced inflation and eroded the average Texan's purchasing power.

Given the economic impact of the pandemic and the subsequent rise in unemployment, relief is more important than ever. That is why I supported the bipartisan passage of several property tax relief bills to provide more purchasing power for Texans, reign in the sky-rocketing property tax rates, and help ensure Texans can continue to afford their homesteads.

I recently voted in favor of a constitutional amendment, SJR 2, and its enabling legislation, Senate Bill 1, to provide $2 billion of property tax relief to Texas homeowners. Homeowners can vote on this proposed constitutional amendment at the May 2022 ballot box. If the amendment passes, the homestead exemption for school district property taxes will increase from $25,000 to $40,000, and the average Texas homeowner will save roughly $176 on their property tax bill. That's an extra $176 Texans can use to pay for other necessities, such as healthcare and transportation.

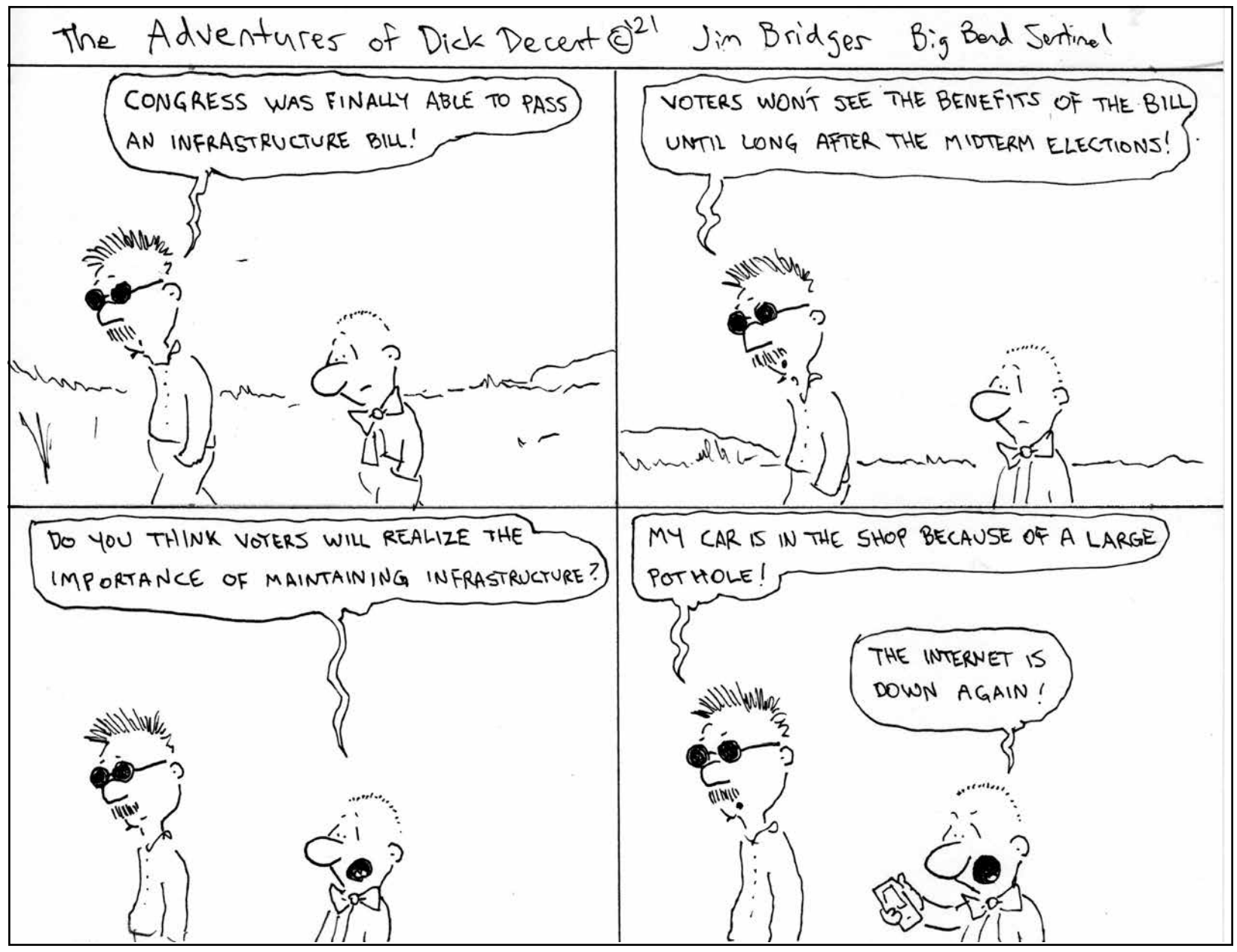
In addition to supporting the passage of SB 1 during the third special session, I co-authored Senate Bill 8 and Senate Bill 12 in the second special session to provide property tax relief to approximately 2.5 million Texans. SB 8 addresses a longstanding issue in Texas that prohibits homeowners from tax savings in their first year of home ownership. It is estimated that this bill will provide $600 million in relief per biennium to homeowners for first year homestead exemptions, allowing for more first-time buyers in Texas.

The proposed constitutional amendment in SJR 2 and its enabling legislation, SB 12, will provide tax rate reductions for over 65 or disabled homeowners. Homeowners can also vote on this amendment at the May 2022 ballot box. If the amendment passes, the average 65 over homeowner will save approximately $125 a year and see an increase in tax rate reduction every year after. SB8 helps to ensure disabled individuals and seniors continue to have a roof over their heads.

While the bills we passed were a good start, we have more work to do to reign in property taxes and fix the appraisal system in Texas. Homeowners across the state are concerned about being forced out of their homes due to the unaffordable property tax rates. This is not right. The state needs to invest more in public education and buy down school property taxes, and we need to continue increasing homestead exemptions. We need more bills like House Bill 3 from 2019 which provided property tax relief by buying down school property taxes.

We must continue our progress and push for solutions that will provide Texans with needed tax relief. As your state senator, I will keep fighting for lower property taxes for all Texans.

César J. Blanco is the Texas State Senator for District 29, covering El Paso and Far West Texas.



PATRIOTIC MILLIONAIRES

Donors must hold democrats sabotaging the president's agenda accountable

By STEPHEN PRINCE

The month-long showdown over taxes is finally nearing its end as the majority of congressional Democrats face off against a small group of their moderate colleagues in a fight over the future of the party and the country. While most Democrats are advocating for popular policies like prescription drug negotiation, paid leave and taxing the rich, centrists have continually dug their heels into the ground, derailing negotiations and endangering the party's success in the coming midterm elections. They've adopted the priorities of their wealthy donors and corporations over the American people's, threatening to kill the president's agenda to get their way.

Centrist Democrats have proposed an inadequate counter to the $3.5 trillion reconciliation package, drastically cutting key safety net expansions like a paid parental leave program that would bring America in line with the rest of the developed world, a Medicare expansion, and even eliminating the possibility of Medicare being able to negotiate prescription drug prices — a long promised Democrat policy. Moreover, centrists continue to cavil at the price tag while also rejecting significant tax increases on the wealthy that would pay for it. It makes no fiscal sense. The entire bill can and should be paid for by raising taxes on the richest Americans, it would add nothing to our debt, fund a massive and critical investment in our country and decrease inequality all at the same time. It's a win-win that every Democrat should support.

But, if these legislative hostage-takers remain opposed to overdue tax code reform and social investments then it's time for donors like myself who support the president's agenda to take action.

It's unfortunate that our campaign finance laws have been systematically attacked and weakened over the past decade, to the point where every subsequent election since 2008 has been more expensive than the last — and there are no signs of it slowing down. While we cannot change this broken system overnight, it can be used to our advantage. I encourage other like-minded wealthy donors to stop giving to the candidates who keep disappointing and serving the corporate interests at every turn and start funding their Democratic primary challengers that will uphold the popular will. It's about time that donors revolted.

While some of these moderate members come from swing districts, there are a few that come from safe blue seats. House members like Richard Neal (MA-01) and Ed Case (HI-01) both hail from Democratic strongholds that are at no risk of Republican takeover. The vast majority of the American people, Democratic voters, and the president of the United States support taxing the wealthy to invest in our communities, so why are both of these deep blue representatives so vehemently opposed to it? There is absolutely no reason for Biden's agenda to be challenged from deep blue seats.

Democrats have already conceded to the centrists. They split the original Build Back Better plan into the budget reconciliation bill and the infrastructure bill at the behest of senators Manchin and Sinema, all on the understanding that the two bills would be linked together. But now centrists are demanding more, and they will continue to do so until we draw a line in the sand and challenge them.

If Democrats and President Biden do not deliver on their promises to invest in America, then the 2022 midterms, and ultimately the 2024 presidential election, will be a total wash for the Democratic party. Democrats must make it clear that those in their ranks that are willing to remove trillions of dollars of aid for Americans struggling in the post-COVID economy in order to preserve tax breaks for their anti-tax donors cannot be tolerated. Centrist Democrats in Congress need to rise to the moment, not sabotage progress while paying lip service to the idea of tax fairness.

As our society is buckling under the pressure of unprecedented inequality, it is inexcusable for the government to continue to offer the ultra-wealthy and corporations special tax treatment. Our nation can easily afford a larger tax bill to fund overdue infrastructure and safety net expansions just as easily as we can afford the world's largest military budget. It all comes down to our priorities. Do we want bombs or bridges? If we can't get Republicans on board with prioritizing the needs of the American people, surely we can get all those who call themselves Democrats, progressive and moderates alike, to do so. And if we cannot, there must be electoral consequences.

There is something fundamentally wrong when a plurality of Americans support Biden's progressive tax agenda along with a vast majority of elected Democrats but yet the will of the people and a supportive legislature are still obstructed by a small handful of moderate Democrats working on behalf of their donors. Rather than coming to fight with the same old tactics, let's take the battle to these centrists and use their own playbook against them.

Stephen Prince founded Card Marketing Services in 1993 and is vice-chair of the Patriotic Millionaires. Proud "traitors to their class," members of the Patriotic Millionaires are high-net-worth Americans, business leaders and investors who are united in their concern about the destabilizing concentration of wealth and power in America. The mission of the Patriotic Millionaires organization is to build a more stable, prosperous and inclusive nation by promoting public policies based on the "first principles" of equal political representation, a guaranteed living wage for all working citizens and a fair tax system.

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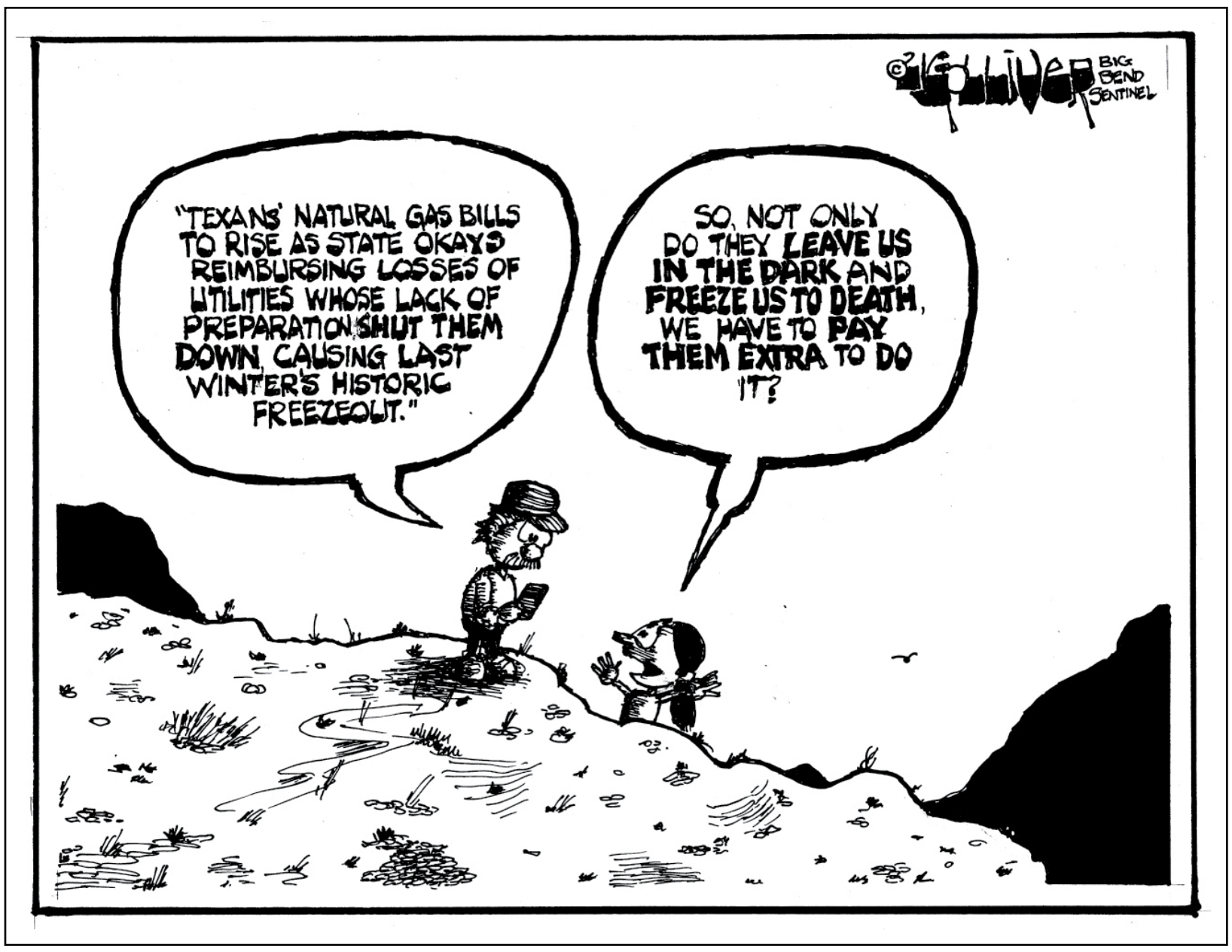
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Chinati follows COVID-19 precautions.
Masks and social distancing are required.

Visit chinati.org for more information and to book reservations.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Being a long-time reader of The Big Bend Sentinel (over 50 years), I noticed a recent article that said the church in Ruidosa might be renovated. If so, that is very good news.

My wife and I have spent many a great time in that country. Attached is a picture I took of the church in 1981. It might be of some interest to you.

You have a great paper. I especially enjoy Gary Oliver's cartoons. Keep up the good work.

Ardis McCasland Jr.
Big Spring



Photo by Ardis McCasland

We want to hear from YOU!

- Letters should be sent to editor@bigbendsentinel.com, and must provide the writer's full name, city of residence and an email or phone number, so that we may follow up and verify information as needed.
- Your letters may be edited for clarity and brevity. While opinions of all kinds are welcome, when it comes to claims of fact, we strive to only publish what is verifiable.
- We have limited staff capacity to fact check unsubstantiated claims, so letters that include those may be held or remain unpublished if information is not easily verifiable.
- We may reach out to ask questions and verify the identity of the sender. We do not run letters anonymously unless the sender is privately identified and has a reasonable claim to anonymity.
- We reserve the right to hold or refrain from publishing a letter for any reason and we thank you for always sharing your letters with us.

- ***The Big Bend Sentinel Editorial Staff***

HIGH DESERT SKETCHES

Are we watching the death of our democracy?

By GEORGE A. COVINGTON



I think everyone has heard the expression "Democracy dies in darkness," and in the past couple of weeks our state politicians have started spreading darkness around our educational system.

On October 25, Texas Republican State Representative Matt Krause sent a letter to the Texas Education Agency asking if any of the schools in the state have the books listed on a 16-page spreadsheet, as well as how much in funds schools had spent on these books.

The Texas Tribune was the first media outlet to obtain a copy of the 850 books and they reported that a quick survey indicated that the majority of books seem to cover women's issues, teen pregnancy and the legal rights of teenagers. None of the books, it appears, were on anybody's subversive list except state Rep. Matt Krause's.

Krause's list of titles includes a number of bestsellers and award winners, including the 1967 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel The Confessions of Nat Turner by William Styron and Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates. The list includes books that help kids respond to bullying and others that center on LGBTQ characters, in addition to telling stories about the Black Lives Matter movement.

The reaction of the general media across the state was one of incredulous doubt that we had apparently drifted back toward the days of Sen. Joseph McCarthy. The state representative was asked a number of questions he refused to answer. Among the questions were, "Where did you get the list?" "How many school districts did you send it to?" How many school districts have replied?" and "What was your inspiration?" He refused each and every question by saying he could not comment on a potential ongoing investigation. The school districts of Dallas, Austin and Houston have basically rebuffed Rep. Krause's advances.

Krause, by the way, has announced his intentions to challenge our so-called attorney general in next year's Republican primary.

The state-wide media outcry was so great that the Three Amigos had to get involved: the guv, the lt. guv, and the so-called attorney gen.

In a letter dated November 1, Texas Governor Greg Abbott warned the head of the Texas Association of School Boards that parents are worried that schools are exposing students to "pornography or other inappropriate content," even though the group has no role in approving what students read or study.

"A growing number of parents of Texas students are increasingly alarmed about some of the books and other content found in public school libraries that are extremely inappropriate in the public education system. The most flagrant examples include clearly pornographic images and substance that have no place in the Texas education system," the Republican governor wrote to association Executive Director Dan Troxell.

The guv doesn't seem to realize that teenage boys will not give up their digital games to go looking for pictures of naked ladies when they can find those pictures on any newsstand and they don't get points for looking. Guv, get more interested in this part of the 21st century.

Like Krause, the guv refused to state what he considered pornography. The lt. guv was equally nebulous when asked to explain which books were pornographic or inappropriate, and he was closely followed by the so-called attorney gen., who has been spending much of his time trying to refute whistle-blowers from his former top staff.

Krause's inspiration for this crusade into darkness appears to have been House Bill 3979 which states that school employees cannot include concepts in coursework where "an individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of the individual's race or sex." Of course, the bill — which is an overreach that has confused school districts about how to follow it — doesn't actually mention books in school libraries. It's about the curriculum. Nonetheless, with the increase of book bans and challenges recently, Krause appears to want to preemptively remove any books that could be challenged for causing "discomfort."

I would like to know why these guys never showed up in my six years at Grimm Elementary because every Friday for those six years we had a spelling test and I can assure you every child at Grimm Elementary felt great discomfort.

I have written several columns dedicated to Banned Books Week, an annual event in the last week of September, that highlights current and historical attempts to censor books in libraries and schools. If you have read them, you know that librarians are our first line of defense when it comes to the First Amendment and our right to read any book we choose.

My column illustrator, Crowcrumbs, who also holds a Master of Library Science degree says, "In many states school librarians are required to hold a master's degree in library science. They spend a lot of their time reviewing and consulting with other professionals and parents to provide the best and most current titles for their students. Librarians also provide an equitable process for parents to request reviews of any title that might pose concerns."

The Three Amigos and Rep. Krause will probably pass legislation to add their names to the consulting list for future library book selections.

Our only consolation is that they will never agree on any book that isn't the Bible.

George A. Covington has worked in the fields of law, education, journalism and disability rights. He considers himself retired from every one of them with the possible exception of journalism. He is a graduate of the University of Texas schools of Journalism and Law. He moved to West Texas – Alpine - in 1997 after a 20-year career in Washington, D.C. where he once served on the staff of the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives (Democrat) and shortly thereafter served as Special Assistant to the Vice President of the United States (Republican) 1989 to 1993.

Crowcrumbs is a Houston-based illustrator. Follow her on Instagram @crowcrumbs.

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OBITUARY



Gonzales

Helen Gonzales, 99, entered her eternal rest with our Lord and Savior on Novem-ber 1, 2021. She was born in Balmorhea, Texas, December 25, 1921, to the late Faustina and Marcus Tercero.

Helen was a loving wife, mother and housekeeper. She assisted her late husband Ben Gonzales with his construction business. One of her favorite hobbies included tending to rose bushes in her garden. Later in life she learned how to play the gui-tar. She also enjoyed baking. She enjoyed watching sports — baseball, basketball and football — and visiting her grandchildren and great-grandchildren in Arizona. Most of all she enjoyed praying and reading different scriptures.

Helen is survived by her son, Benny; daughter Loretta; granddaughter April; grandson Cliff; great-granddaughters Shelby and Melody; and two great-granddogs, Bella and Cole.

Funeral services will be held on Saturday November 27, 2021, at St. Mary's Catho-lic Church, Rosary starting at 10 a.m. proceeding with the funeral Mass, then the burial at Merced Catholic Cemetery

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New exhibition at Greasewood Gallery paints a lived experience from Chihuahuan Desert to Morocco

MARFA — Greasewood Gallery at the Hotel Paisano will host a new exhibit of paintings by David Loren Bass this month. The show will open with a reception from 6 to 8 p.m. on Friday, November 19.

Bass' career spans four decades beginning in 1975 and continues today with new paintings annually. He has created 6,000 pieces of art consisting mostly of paintings in oil and watercolor. His complete oeuvre also includes monotypes, lithographs, graphite drawings and oil pastel paintings.

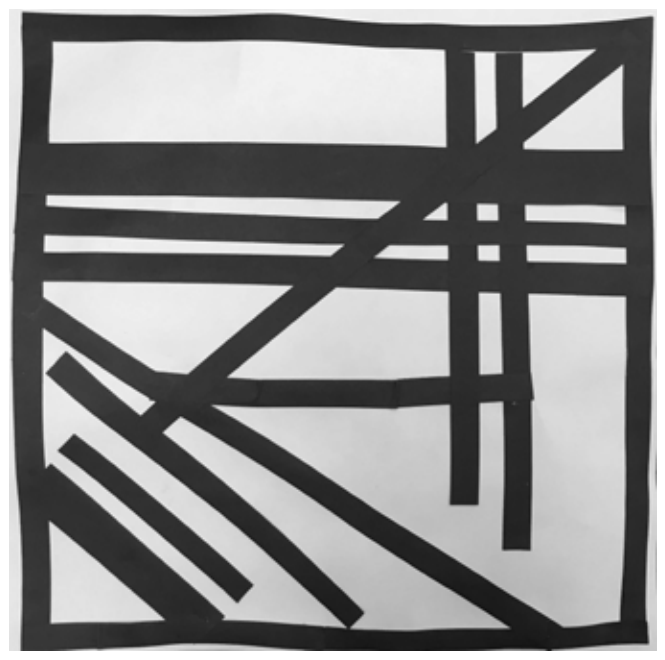
With this new exhibit, Bass says he "continues to paint a lived experience, either directly on site of the subject matter or recalled later in the studio through memory."

"My paintings have always been concerning paint and how, through its use, I could convey a lived experience of where I go, whether the Chihuahuan Desert, or the colorful, chaotic markets of Morocco, or the features in the landscape of northern New Mexico, or the whimsical forms and light of Key West. In short, I paint to experience life and I live to paint my experiences."

Bass will be on hand to visit with guests at the opening reception in the gallery on Friday evening. All are invited.

Greasewood Gallery is located in the Hotel Paisano at the corner of Highland and Texas Streets in Marfa. Gallery hours are 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday–Wednesday and 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Thursday–Friday. For more information, contact Gallery Director Vicki Lynn Barge at 432-729-4134.

DRAWING OF THE WEEK



Memo Guardiola
Cut Paper
9th grade

Students invited to participate in 2021-2022 Letters About Literature Texas contest

AUSTIN — The Texas Center for the Book has launched the 2021-2022 Letters About Literature Texas contest, a program that invites students to respond to authors of books or poetry who have touched their lives. The contest is open to Texas students in grades 4 through 12.

Participants select a book, book series, essay, play, poem, short story or speech that has made a lasting impact on their lives. They then write a personal letter to the author that reflects how they have been changed, inspired or motivated by the work they selected. State winners receive $100 and will be honored at the 2022 Texas Library Association Conference.

All submissions for the 2021-2022 contest must be submitted through the online platform by 5 p.m., Dec. 17, 2021 (CST). A permission form is required for all students who will be younger than 13 on Nov. 4, 2021.

To learn more about the contest, how to submit and to view winning entries from previous years, visit www.tsl.texas.gov/lettersaboutliterature.

Established in 1987, the Texas Center for the Book seeks to stimulate public interest in books, reading, literacy and libraries. The center builds partnerships with library professionals, educators, authors, publishers and booksellers who provide support to our shared mission of promoting a love of literature throughout the Lone Star State. The Texas Center for the Book is under the direction of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission at the Lorenzo De Zavala State Archives and Library Building in Austin, Texas.

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MARFA SHORTHORNS SPORTS CALENDAR

WED - SAT, NOV 17 - 20: Volleyball State Tournament at TBD

Did you know families with children in the local school discricts can qualify to save $50 on monthly broadband bills?

All families with children in Alpine, Marathon, Marfa and Presidio school districts qualify for the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program. EBBP is a FCC Program that provides a temporary discount of up to $50 on monthly broadband bills and a one-time device credit of $100 for the purchase of a FireHD10 Tablet with a $15 customer co-pay.

Follow these steps to start saving today!

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- Click "Apply Now" at the bottom of the page
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- Enroll for BBT broadband service with an optional tablet
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- Share your EBB Program approval email; csr@bigbend.com
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Sudoku & Crossword puzzles:

UNIVERSAL Sudoku Puzzle

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.

				7	3		2	
	5		8	2	4			
	2		5	1		3	7	
	1	5		4	7	6	3	
		2		6		5		
	4	6	3	5		8	1	
	9	1		8	6		4	
			4	3	1		5	
	6		7	9				

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

Solution from last week's puzzle:

SOLUTION:

1	6	7	5	4	3	9	2	8
9	3	4	7	8	2	6	5	1
5	2	8	1	6	9	3	7	4
3	5	1	6	9	7	4	8	2
6	8	2	4	5	1	7	9	3
4	7	9	3	2	8	5	1	6
8	1	6	9	7	4	2	3	5
7	4	3	2	1	5	8	6	9
2	9	5	8	3	6	1	4	7

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Universal Crossword

Edited by David Steinberg November 1, 2021

ACROSS
1 Unlike a green tomato
5 It can be crunched or massaged
9 Hoppy beer, briefly
12 Do as commanded
13 ___ borealis (northern lights)
15 Apple computer
16 Solemn ceremonies that may require Froot Loops?
18 Rocks, at the bar
19 Fight roughly
20 Not external
22 Column beside a decimal point
23 Alternative to a convertible
25 Book introduction written by singer Mariah?
30 Scares off
31 Part of UCLA
32 Part of UCLA?
33 "Woe is me!"
34 All the rage
35 Ga. neighbor
36 Confession subject
37 Balloon filler
38 Wheeled stretcher
40 Where Mozart's mentor would've kept his jet, if flying had been around?
44 It's a snap
45 "Tosca" solo
46 Monte ___
48 Dig like a mole
51 French for "yes"
52 Decelerating wildebeests?
57 "Yada, yada, yada": Abbr.
58 "Delicious!"
59 Connect
60 Anonymous John
61 Completely exhaust
62 Trendsetting

DOWN
1 Big bird in legends
2 "A likely story"
3 Andean land
4 You hate to see them
5 Coercion
6 MSNBC host Melber
7 "Sesame Street" watcher
8 "What ___ you waiting for?"
9 "Don't blame me!"
10 Runner's speed
11 Big name in computers
13 Side ways?
14 Comment to the audience
17 Late actor Ed
21 Opposite of "yep"
23 Chimney residue
24 Triage sites, briefly
25 Salsa singer Cruz
26 No matter what the cost
27 Plant life
28 Zellweger of "Jerry Maguire"
29 Refuse to accept
30 100-meter race, e.g.
34 Hawaii County's seat
35 Strongest architectural shape
37 Like a well-chosen name
38 Coming or going?
39 By means of
41 FedEx rival
42 Inexperienced gamers
43 Mali or Somalia
46 Like many dorms
47 Coupe, for example
49 Name hidden in "teen idol"
50 Breather?
53 Bar sometimes made of steel
54 Back in time
55 Ornamental fish in a pond
56 It's blue on a clear day

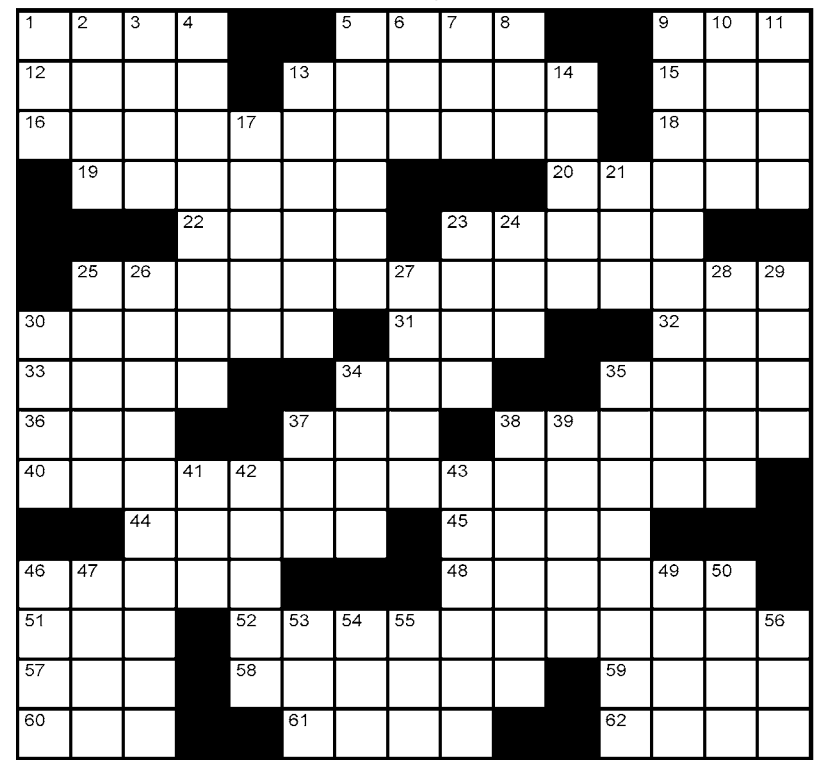
PREVIOUS PUZZLE ANSWER

S	T	A	I	D	■	L	A	W	S	■	M	A	S	T
A	R	E	N	A	■	A	S	O	F	■	O	R	E	O
M	A	R	K	R	O	T	H	K	O	■	N	E	A	R
E	P	I	■	W	W	I	■	■	■	A	G	A	M	E
■	S	A	P	I	E	N	T	■	U	N	O	■	■	■
■	■	L	I	N	D	A	H	A	M	I	L	T	O	N
S	T	Y	X	■	■	■	E	P	P	S	■	O	D	E
L	O	O	■	E	N	M	A	S	S	E	■	W	I	T
O	M	G	■	R	E	A	L	■	■	■	B	E	E	S
B	E	A	T	R	I	X	P	O	T	T	E	R	■	■
■	■	■	H	O	N	■	S	H	E	A	T	H	S	■
A	S	N	E	R	■	■	■	■	Y	E	T	■	E	A	R
C	H	U	M	■	E	A	T	E	N	A	L	I	V	E
D	O	L	E	■	W	H	O	A	■	M	A	S	O	N
C	O	L	D	■	W	I	T	H	■	I	N	T	R	O

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Double-Talk *by Paul Coulter*

11/1



DISPATCHES FROM JOURNALISM CLASS

Music program flourishes at MISD

By TORI AND AUBRIE

It's that time of year again; the holidays are right around the corner! Thanksgiving break starts a week from today, and then Christmas break begins three weeks after that! To celebrate the season, the Marfa High School Choir will head over to Sul Ross State University to sing during a Christmas Tree Lighting concert on December 4. They will perform beautiful songs and light up a Christmas tree! This will be the beginning of a busy schedule for the new choir program at MISD: on December 8, at 6:30 p.m. in the JE Gregg Auditorium, the MJH/HS choir will perform. The next week, on December 15, 3rd-6th grades will perform at 6:30 p.m. in the auditorium, and the next day, again at 6:30, the PK-2nd grade will perform their Christmas concert. Ms. Kerzee, the music teacher, is looking forward to the upcoming events. "My favorite part of teaching music is seeing it all come together," she said. She also mentioned that Christmas came early for her guitar class this year. The students were donated six new guitars by local Marfa business Convenience West and also were granted $1000 by the Marfa Education Foundation for four new guitars (for 10 total) and various accessories.

Aubrie and I decided to ask some fellow students that are in the choir and guitar classes about their experiences in MISD's new music program. We asked them about what they're learning, if they're enjoying it, and if they're nervous about the upcoming concerts.

Lesly Torres, a junior, is in both choir and guitar classes. She said, "We're learning how to read music notes as well as harmonize." She says that she enjoys the music and choir program a lot, "because it is new to us." She's nervous about upcoming performances "because I'm scared I'll mess up." Don't worry Lesly! You'll be fine!

Another student (who wishes to stay anonymous) is in choir. In choir, they are learning songs about Christmas. When asked if she's nervous about the upcoming concert the student replied, "Yes, because ain't nobody wants to hear me sing!" These reporters disagree and are excited to listen to our peers sing!

Chailyn Melendez, a senior, is in guitar class. She told us, "We're learning how to play a few songs." She enjoys the class a lot "because it's fun!" Like others, when we asked about pre-performance nerves, she said, "Oh yes very, I'm afraid to mess up because they'll hear me." But Aubrie and I are here to say, messing up is fine! Just keep going, you've got this!

Another anonymous student is participating in choir and wanted to answer questions. They're preparing for the presentation for Christmas. They enjoy the music class because they're learning new things. When asked if they were nervous for the concert, they replied "yes," in a nervous tone before adding, "It's taking place in Alpine!"

Samantha is also a student that's participating in choir. She explained to us that they're learning the National Anthem. She enjoys the class very much because it's fun, full of girls, and "we're all cute!" Finally, her response to the question if she was nervous for the concert was, "No, I'm not really nervous, just as long as Ummi is there." She finished with a big smile and a small laugh.

Ms. Kerzee thinks these students are building a solid foundation to grow a very strong music program at Marfa ISD as they soak up information like being able to read music and learn to sing and play together.

MISD college trip on Monday for juniors and seniors

By CHRIS

On Monday, November 15, ten seniors and juniors will embark on the trip of their lifetimes to San Angelo! The purpose of this trip is to visit colleges — perhaps colleges that we will attend in the near future! I, too, am going on this trip to see Angelo State University and consider what next year holds in store.

On Monday, we will depart Marfa around 1:45 p.m. to arrive in San Angelo around 6 in the evening.

The next morning we will tour San Angelo University and will later tour Howard College in the afternoon. For the final day we will travel to Sweetwater where we will tour the Texas State Technical College (TSTC). Afterwards, we will begin to travel back to Marfa.

Although I'm most excited about getting out of school, I'm also excited to stay at the Holiday Inn Express and have a pillow fight with my roommates, Cristian Ontiveros and Ian Marquez (the other senior boys coming on the trip). I can't wait, either, to tour ASU's business college, since I want to get my MBA one day so I can franchise my own Taco Bell right here in Marfa.

I am also excited to tour TSTC, because if college falls through, a good second choice would be to become a professional welder.

When asked what she's most excited about during the upcoming trip, senior Soraya Vallez said, "I am excited about touring Angelo State, which is one of my top college choices, and stuffing my face with Chick-Fil-A."

Ian Marquez said, "I am most excited for the free food and I am hoping to see my grandma."

Cristian said, "I'm excited to see and have new opportunities like meeting new people, to get out of school and have a pleasant time with my friends."

In conclusion, I can't wait to get out of town with this awesome group of lovable classmates!

November birthdays: A shared birthday.

By CARMEN

During the month of November, many important events are happening. National Carbonated Beverage with Caffeine day is November 20, Thanksgiving is November 25, Black Friday is November 26. But, the most important events are birthdays! And, no, not Mrs. Donaldson's birthday, not Annaka's birthday, not Lousia from Little Stripes' birthday, although those too are in November, no — the most important birthday by far approaches: Amber's and Carmen's (my) birthday! Mark your calendars for November 20!

"Oh, what's so exciting about two boring ol' birthdays, huh?" you may ask? Well, let me tell you! I mean, yeah, it's exciting because it's the day I was born. I get gifts, cake, ice cream, and practically everyone in my family gives me attention. But no, not just that, I get to share it with one of the first people I met here: my pal Amber.

Honestly, it was a bit of a shock when Amber and I found out we were born on the same day. Annaka, Amber, and I were walking in the hallways, heading towards Ms. Lara's room as I recall, when one of them asked my birthday. I replied, "November 20th, 2006," when Amber eagerly responded, "No way! Me too!" I thought she was messing around with me, so I questioned her, "Really!?" She nodded in confirmation.

This was the first time I'd found someone to share a birthday with. Sure, I've shared names with people, but trust me, that isn't the same as this. My excitement was too much for Amber to handle. She doesn't really want anyone to know when her birthday is, but I most definitely do! This ends up being a bit of a problem: whether accidentally or purposefully, I end up mentioning our birthday being the same a lot. To everyone.

Even after knowing each other for a while, it still makes me excited and happy to think about Amber and I being born on the same day. I like the thought of sharing our birthday. On the 20th, I'll probably spam text her and tell everyone to wish her a happy birthday whether she likes it or not. She's going to deal once a year with all the attention on her for the rest of our lifelong friendship.

Amber speaks up:

Sharing a birthday with a friend is pretty cool. What are the odds that you were born on the same day and same year as one of your friends? It feels special!

But there are some downsides to sharing a birthday, at least in my opinion. When it's my birthday, I generally don't want everyone to know. Being the center of attention is really awkward for me. Like when you're getting sung happy birthday, where am I supposed to look? Do I sing along? Where do I put my hands? And then when people say happy birthday to me there's about a 75% chance I'm going to say happy birthday back to them. Well, at least with Carmen, it won't be a mistake.

Recently, because of my friendship with Carmen, if I did want to keep my birthday a secret, it wouldn't really work out. Carmen thinks it's awesome that we share a birthday. I get reminded everyday of how many days away our birthday is, starting on November 1, when she exclaims, "It's 19 days till our birthday!"

On my birthday, I usually tell people not to sing to me (because, again, what do you do!?), and I usually don't tell anyone on the day. Don't get me wrong, I like my birthday. If my friends didn't remember I would be disappointed. Plus, Carmen would get very emotional if someone forgot her birthday; she started to tear up just by reading that I didn't want people to celebrate OUR birthday. For her, I'll try not to be so awkward on the day we turn 15.

Post-COVID-19 behavior update

By KASSANDRA

Ever since COVID-19 came upon Earth, things have changed dramatically. People wear masks, socially distance, and, last year, did online school. Now that COVID is starting to go down again, we're slowly transitioning back into our former lives.

Students this year are now acting up, being reckless, and are acting like kids again and going out again, instead of staying home and being lazy. Kids have become more disruptive in classrooms, and started to be more rebellious against teachers. Is this because they had no teachers who were able to properly punish them during online school? Is there really a difference between "normal" bad kid behavior two years ago and what's happening this year?

An article in the New York Times by Jessica Grose states that, "For older children and teens … some previously motivated kids are less engaged. Perhaps they fell behind during remote learning and feel discouraged now … Others have anxiety about the virus and may still be reeling from grief if they've lost family members." Grose interviewed teachers from all over the country and wrote, "Everyone said, overall, their students are happy to be back in the classroom … the other consistent response is that many kids in their classrooms are socially and emotionally anywhere from six to 18 months behind where they are in a normal year." Thus, ninth graders are acting more like eighth graders, seventh graders more like sixth graders, etc.

To see what my peers thought of this, I went around asking my friends how COVID affected them. My friend Amber stated, "COVID didn't really affect me. The masks. I didn't like wearing them. They caused me to get really bad acne. Um, yeah. Nothing has changed. I'm still failing my classes."

Another student said, "COVID sucked. Especially online school, it was bad and kind of annoying." After that, she pretty much just replied to everything as annoying and that she didn't really care about anything because nothing really changed.

Carmen said, "Yeah. COVID kinda stunk. I didn't like it at my old school, but this school was a bit lighter on the COVID stuff, but nevertheless, still annoying."

Marfa and Presidio County Museum continues to serve visitors despite failing structure

By MARY CANTRELL
mkcantrell@bigbendsentinel.com

MARFA — The Marfa and Presidio County Museum located in the center of Marfa off of Highway 90 operates out of a historic adobe structure that remains in grave need of repair. While the city allocated over half a million dollars this budget cycle to restore the Marfa mainstay, much progress has yet to be realized, and the museum has blocked off two rooms to prevent further structural damage to the site.

Without the Marfa and Presidio County Museum, decades of Marfa and the surrounding region's history would be lost to time. The museum's ever-growing collection of local artifacts spans vast subject matter, including ranching, mining, geology, military and, of note, archives of three early photographers that documented the region.

Because the museum building is owned by the city but leased to the museum, obtaining bids from firms qualified to repair the structure is the responsibility of the city. An earlier attempt to repair the structure, which cost the city $50,000, failed within a year. City officials did not respond to requests for comment for this story.

The museum runs out of the Humphris-Humphreys House, a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark built in 1883 by local builder Saturnino Naborette. So named for its previous owners, John and Mary Humphris, then later Sally Humphreys, the adobe building is an example of traditional building methods utilized by adoberos indigenous to the region. A central hallway leads to four rooms on either side, and an extension was later added on to the main structure.

The building has been on the decline for years and remains in need of both interior and exterior repairs. The rear east side of the original building is sinking due to exposed adobe getting wet and disintegrating. As a result, interior walls and ceilings appear to be separating and cracking, and wood floors are sloping. In order to keep weight off of the fragile area, display cabinets have been moved forward, acting as barriers for museum goers, closing off sections of the Duncan photography and medical artifact displays. Some items have been moved into the main hallway so they can still be appreciated by guests.

Museum board member Terry Norman said it is frustrating not being able to offer the full experience for visitors, especially the Duncan photography room, which is one of his favorites as a photographer himself.

"I'd like to get repairs done and get the museum back 100% so people can get everything out of it. We're missing two rooms here," said Norman.

In an effort to prevent further damage to the historic adobe, the city has recently replaced shingles on the roof and a portion of sheetrock in the ceiling of the storage room where a rain leak caused a large hole. They also patched holes near the gutter along the east wall where rain was reaching the exposed adobe wall and placed a piece of flashing along the roof near the gutter to divert water from landing along the deteriorating east wall.

Due to the structure's protected historical status, restoring the property will require the museum board and city to navigate specific rules and requirements laid out by the Texas Historical Commission. By law, if there is to be any exterior work performed on the building, the THC must be notified 60 days prior to any changes being made. Further detailed proposals and reports will also be needed. Due to the highly sensitive nature of the repairs, finding the right person for the job is the initial challenge. The city will likely seek help from out of town. The THC works frequently with a number of architecture firms in the state that specialize in historic preservation that could potentially be tapped for the project.

"Once we start this project, we really need people to look at it, assess what needs to be done, and the best way to do it. These people need to be historic architects, not just some contractor that works on buildings," said Marfa Museum Board Vice President and Secretary Mary Williams.

Williams, who also chairs the Jeff Davis County Historical Commission, has ample experience working closely with the THC and said they are still in the very early stages of the repair process. The building's roof is also of concern, said Williams, and the board hopes to work closely with the city to fortify the historic home so it will last well into the future.

In heated budget discussions this fall, council members debated whether or not to tear down the museum to create an entirely new building, but ultimately opted to allocate over half a million dollars to repair the existing adobe.

For now, the museum remains open six days a week and is free for visitors. In addition to donations and profits from the Marfa Museum Thrift Store, the museum also regularly receives funding from the city in the form of hotel occupancy tax grants. Those grants help the museum stay open Monday through Wednesday to offer more options for tourists.

"The city has been very generous in helping us keep the museum open," said Williams.

Important work to preserve and catalog the museum's photographic archives is ongoing. The entity was gifted the archival collections and life's work of regional photographers Nancy and Jimmy Keith, famous for their portraiture, as well as Frank Duncan, who documented landscapes of the Big Bend using panoramic photography. The Duncan collection, over 2,200 early 20th century glass negatives, has been fully digitized and is stored in fireproof cabinets at the museum. Nancy and Jimmy Keith's archives are well on their way to receiving similar treatment, with Norman heading up the effort to recatalog and properly store their materials.

Norman,v who has been involved with the museum since July 2020, estimates he's about a quarter of the way through transferring the Keiths' negatives and proof sheets from old, ragged envelopes to new dustproof, waterproof storage binders. The duo mostly shot portraits, specifically of local military personnel in the '40s and onward, as well as scenes of Marfa businesses, sports games, classrooms and birthday parties.

The two latest additions to the museum's collection of local historic antiquities are a prohibition-era radio bar that belonged to Colonel James Blackwell, a surgeon stationed at Fort DA Russell in 1938, and an original prop created for the movie Giant.

The holding pattern the museum has found themselves in while awaiting repairs is making progressing in other areas difficult. Norman said he'd like to attract more local and repeat visitors, but because they don't rotate out exhibits, there's no incentive to return. The ample archives and historic photographs containing everything from early images of Sul Ross' campus to ranch life could increase foot traffic, but with the Duncan room partially closed there's not a good space to show unseen works, said Norman.

"We could maybe change things up where people come to see the gallery of the day or whatever. But unfortunately it's this room here, which is shut off. So that's what's got me so frustrated. We gotta get the museum fixed and open up again so we can get something going here," said Norman.

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John L. Nau III donates $1 million for West Texas habitat research

ALPINE — Thanks to a generous donation from a longtime supporting donor, the Borderlands Research Institute is enhancing West Texas habitat research efforts that will benefit native wildlife. John L. Nau III has committed $1 million over the next five years to support BRI's Habitat Enhancement Project.

"BRI is committed to promoting meaningful habitat conservation in West Texas, but best management practices aren't always apparent when you combat drought, invasive species, brush encroachment, changes in hydrology, and the other factors landowners typically face in the Trans-Pecos," said Dr. Louis Harveson, who is the Dan Allen Hughes Jr., BRI endowed director and professor of wildlife management at Sul Ross State University. "If we are to be successful in restoring rangelands to functioning systems, we must evaluate different and novel techniques. The Habitat Enhancement Project is designed to develop best management practices for a variety of natural resource conditions, and the generous gift from John Nau is an investment in using good science to combat the natural resource challenges that landowners face in the region."

Research studies indicate that habitat degradation due to brush encroachment, invasive plants, desertification, severe drought and overgrazing causes reductions in wildlife populations. Because of this, effective restoration requires land stewards to recognize the amount of disturbance or management intervention needed to cause habitats to shift to a required state that meets the needs of wildlife. BRI's ongoing research efforts will provide the data land managers need to improve land stewardship efforts.

"Our goal is to employ an adaptive management strategy to assess habitat improvements on flora and fauna of the region using site-specific, science-driven management recommendations," said Dr. Carlos (Lalo) Gonzalez, assistant professor of natural resource management and the Nau endowed professor in habitat research and management at BRI. "We will continue our research efforts to learn more, and will share what we learn with land stewards across West Texas."

Nau is chairman and chief executive officer of Silver Eagle Beverages, one of the largest distributors of Anheuser-Busch products in the United States. He owns a ranch in West Texas and has been actively involved with the BRI for more than a decade.

Since 2007, the Borderlands Research Institute has encouraged effective land stewardship of the Chihuahuan Desert. Housed at Sul Ross State University, the Borderlands Research Institute builds on a long-lasting partnership with private landowners, the university's range and wildlife program, and cooperating state, federal and non-governmental organizations. Through research, education and outreach, the Borderlands Research Institute is helping to conserve the last frontier of Texas and the Southwest.

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PUBLIC NOTICES

The Marfa Parks and Recreation Board meets every third Thursday of the month at 6:00pm in the Casner Room at City Hall. The public is invited to attend.

The Moderna booster vaccine is available at the Presidio County Medical Clinic located at 1501 N. Erma Ave in Presidio, TX., on Mondays from 10am-1pm. An appointment is needed. Please call **432-229-3030** to schedule your appointment.



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Manny Baeza, City of Marfa Mayor
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Presidio Mayor John Ferguson:
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Office: 209 1/2 W. El Paso St., Marfa, Texas
Mail: Drawer P, Marfa, TX 79843
Telephone: 432.729.4342
Contact: editor@bigbendsentinel.com
Advertising Inquiries: ads@bigbendsentinel.com
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