

BURN BAN IN EFFECT, NO GROUND FIRES

by order of Presidio County

Big Bend Sentinel takes several 1st prizes in statewide newspaper contest

TRI-COUNTY — The Texas Press Association honored *The Big Bend Sentinel* this weekend with several first place awards based on the newspaper's 2024 news coverage, features and photography for the association's annual "Texas Better Newspaper Contest."

The Sentinel was awarded in Division 6, which includes smaller weekly newspapers, while other divisions are reserved for newspapers — like the big urban dailies — with higher circulations and more staff.

The Sentinel placed first in News Writing for "Holland Avenue fire prompts building inspection crackdown," by Mary Cantrell, and "It's no gold mine": Commissioners consider tolling the Presidio International Bridge," by Sam Karas.

A team of photographers also took first place for News Photography for: "Alpine community mourns loss of businesses, historic downtown structure in wake of devastating fire" (Mary Cantrell); "Fort Davis ISD raises state allotment from \$70K to \$1.5M through private, early childhood school partnerships" (Maisie Crow); "Longtime taxidermy business closing its doors" (Jennifer Pittinger); "Blackwell School ribbon cutting provides reflection on importance of new park" (Rob D'Amico); and "Biden administration to roll out 'parole-in-place' for undocumented family members of citizens" (Rob D'Amico).

Of the news photos, a judge wrote: "These photos invite the reader into the story, sharing emotional, engaging perspectives that made me want to learn more. Well done!"

A team of photographers won first place in Feature Photography for: "A tenacious, family-owned printing press brings the news to Far West Texas despite industry decline" (Maisie Crow); "Non-profit restoring Marfa ISD's Hunter Gym seeks alumni stories" (Mary Cantrell); "A place with everything" (Mary Cantrell); "A 'catastrophe of idiocy'" (Jennifer Pittinger); and "Shafter getting boost in historic preservation, new restaurant" (Rob D'Amico).

A judge noted. "This photography is far beyond the other entries in this category and division. ... The Chicken George photo was one of the best and funniest environmental portraits I have seen in a while. The detail shot of the gym was also excellent. It told so much with so little. People often forget those detailed images."

The Sentinel reporters took second place in Feature Writing with "A tenacious, family-owned printing press brings the news to

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West Texan Media Group, LLC



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Photo by Carlton Ward Jr. for NatGeo Explorer / Foto de Carlton Ward Jr. for NatGeo Explorer

Fabiola Baeza Tarin, born in Ojinaga, holds North America's most endangered bird — the Florida grasshopper sparrow — in a documentary for National Geographic. Read more on page 2.

Fabiola Baeza Tarin, originaria de Ojinaga, asegura que el ave más amenazada de América del Norte, es el gorrión chapulín de Florida, en un documental para National Geographic. Más en la página 2.

Mexican consul raises concerns about Trump tax on immigrant remittances

By Sam Karas
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PRESIDIO — National headlines hit close to home during last week's Presidio City Council meeting, when Gamaliel Bustillos Muñoz of the local Mexican Consulate gave a presentation about a provision in a federal tax bill that could add a 3.5% fee to all money that non-citizens send home — a practice sometimes called "remittances." Bustillos anticipated that the measure could have a big impact in Far West Texas and Northern Chihuahua, where millions of people cross the border looking for work in industries like agriculture and fossil fuels.

At the end of May, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a massive tax bill — affectionately referred to by President Trump and his allies as the "Big Beautiful Bill" — that could have massive implications for the borderlands. Apart from the remittance tax, the Big Beautiful Bill could more than double the size of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement police force and fund "900 miles of river barriers" in a state hemmed in by 1,200 miles of the Rio Grande.

Consul Bustillos' office serves 14 counties in Far West Texas and serves nearly 150,000 Mexicans who call this part of the border home. "The Mexican community in the United States is big, and one of their most important

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Presidio residents launch petition to stop \$5.5 million bond

County's plan to issue bonds for courthouse repairs and other projects without a vote could be thwarted

By Rob D'Amico and Sam Karas
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PRESIDIO COUNTY — Some Presidians are speaking out against the county's plan to go out for a \$5.5 million bond, organizing a petition to put the measure to a vote among county residents. At the center of the issue is the Presidio County Courthouse in Marfa — which has been widely considered to be in need of emergency repairs for years — but the bond would also include capital investments in the form of county annex renovations and new equipment for the road and bridge department, which hemorrhages money trying to work with outdated and broken equipment.

The county began the latest push to renovate the courthouse in 2022, chasing funding from nonprofits and other entities to try to pay up front. After years of frustrating and less-than-fruitful grant cycles, the county decided to take a completely different financial approach — issuing millions of dollars in certificates of obligation (CO) bonds that don't require voter approval under state law.

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Cónsul mexicano expresa preocupación por impuesto de Trump a remesas de inmigrantes

Por Sam Karas
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PRESIDIO — Los titulares nacionales causaron conmoción durante la reunión del Ayuntamiento de Presidio la semana pasada, cuando Gamaliel Bustillos Muñoz, del Consulado Mexicano local, presentó una disposición en un proyecto de ley fiscal federal que podría añadir una tasa del 3.5% a todo el dinero que los extranjeros envían a casa, una práctica a veces llamada "remesas". Bustillos anticipó que la medida podría tener un gran impacto en el extremo oeste de Texas y el norte de Chihuahua, donde millones de personas cruzan la frontera en busca de trabajo en industrias como la agricultura y los combustibles fósiles.

A finales de mayo, la Cámara de Representantes de Estados Unidos aprobó un proyecto de ley fiscal masivo —afectuosamente llamado por el presidente Trump y sus aliados como el "Gran y Hermoso Proyecto de Ley"— que podría tener enormes implicaciones para la zona fronteriza. Además del impuesto a las remesas, el Proyecto de Ley Grande y Hermoso podría duplicar con creces el tamaño de la fuerza policial del Servicio de Inmigración y Control de Aduanas (ICE) y financiar la construcción de 1450 kilómetros de barreras fluviales en un estado rodeado por 1900 kilómetros

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Residentes de Presidio lanzan petición para detener bono de \$5.5 millones

El plan del condado de emitir bonos para reparaciones del juzgado y otros proyectos sin votación podría verse frustrado.

Por Rob D'Amico y Sam Karas
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CONDADO DE PRESIDIO — Algunos residentes de Presidio se están manifestando en contra del plan del condado de solicitar un bono de \$5.5 millones, organizando una petición para someter la medida a votación entre los residentes del condado. El centro del problema es el juzgado del condado de Presidio en Marfa, que durante años se ha considerado ampliamente que necesita reparaciones de emergencia. Sin embargo, el bono también incluiría inversiones de capital en forma de renovaciones del anexo del condado y nuevo equipo para el departamento de carreteras y puentes, que desperdicia dinero al intentar trabajar con equipos obsoletos y averiados.

El condado inició el último esfuerzo para renovar el juzgado en 2022, buscando financiación de organizaciones sin fines de lucro y otras entidades

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Big Bend Sentinel gana varios primeros premios en concurso estatal de periódicos

TRI-COUNTY — La Asociación de Prensa de Texas (TPA por sus siglas en inglés) premió a *The Big Bend Sentinel* este fin de semana con varios primeros premios por su cobertura informativa, artículos y fotografía de 2024 en el Concurso Anual "Texas Better Newspaper Contest" de la asociación.

The Sentinel fue premiada en la División 6, que incluye semanarios más pequeños, mientras que otras divisiones están reservadas para periódicos, como los grandes diarios urbanos, con mayor circulación y más personal.

The Sentinel obtuvo el primer lugar en Redacción de Noticias por "El incendio de Holland Avenue provoca la represión de la inspección de edificios", de Mary Cantrell, y "No es una mina de oro: Los comisionados consideran el peaje del Puente Internacional Presidio", de Sam Karas.

Un equipo de fotógrafos también obtuvo el primer lugar en Fotografía de Noticias por: "La comunidad alpina lamenta la pérdida de negocios y una estructura histórica del centro tras el devastador incendio" (Mary Cantrell); "El Distrito Escolar Independiente de Fort Davis aumenta la asignación estatal de \$70,000 a \$1.5 millones mediante colaboraciones con escuelas privadas y de educación infantil" (Maisie Crow); "Un negocio de taxidermia de larga trayectoria cierra sus puertas" (Jennifer Pittinger); "La inauguración de la Escuela Blackwell ofrece una reflexión sobre la importancia del nuevo parque" (Rob D'Amico); y "La administración Biden implementará la 'libertad condicional en el lugar' para familiares indocumentados de ciudadanos" (Rob D'Amico).

Sobre las fotos de noticias, un juez escribió: "Estas fotos invitan al lector a sumergirse en la historia, compartiendo perspectivas emotivas y atractivas que me hicieron... Quiero saber más. ¡Bien hecho!"

Un equipo de fotógrafos ganó el primer lugar en Fotografía de Reportaje por: "Una imprenta familiar y tenaz lleva las noticias al lejano oeste de Texas a pesar del declive de la industria" (Maisie Crow); "Organización sin fines de lucro que restaura el Gimnasio Hunter del Distrito Escolar Independiente de Marfa busca historias de exalumnos" (Mary Cantrell); "Un lugar con todo" (Mary Cantrell); "Una catástrofe de idiotéz" (Jennifer Pittinger); y "Shafter recibe impulso en preservación histórica, nuevo restaurante" (Rob D'Amico).

Un juez comentó: "Esta fotografía supera con creces a las demás en esta categoría y división. ... La foto de Chicken George fue uno de los mejores y más divertidos retratos ambientales que he visto en mucho tiempo. La toma de detalle del gimnasio también fue excelente. Dijo mucho con tan poco. La gente suele olvidar esas imágenes detalladas".

Los reporteros del Sentinel obtuvieron el segundo lugar en Redacción de Artículos con "Una imprenta familiar y tenaz lleva las noticias al lejano oeste de Texas a pesar del declive de la industria", de Mary Cantrell, y "¿Quién demonios es H.

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Newspaper contest

(Continued from page 1)

Far West Texas despite industry decline,” by Mary Cantrell, and “‘Who the hell is H. Allen Smith?’” by Sam Karas.

Trey Gerfers placed first for Column Writing with his “Our Water Matters” series of columns every two weeks — including “Soil for Water” and “Restoring Riparian areas to improve aquifer health.” A judge com-

mented: “Two great columns about life-sustaining resources and why we should all care about them. No water = no town. Well written.” *The Sentinel* also took second place for Overall Excellence in its division.

Remittances

(Continued from page 1)

contributions to the economy here is that they spend most of their income here in the United States,” Bustillos said.

Bustillos went on to explain that Mexican nationals working in the United States spend about 80% of their income on this side of the border, and the other 20% goes to support family members back home. That money — about \$66.2 billion dollars in 2023 — represents about 4% of Mexico’s total GDP. “Mexican people, especially in the rural areas, live on remittances,” Bustillos explained.

Experts worry that if remittances are taxed or overly regulated, folks will

abandon legal means of sending money abroad. “They might use alternative ways like carrying cash through the border, which is going to be even more dangerous for this specific area,” Bustillos said.

The tax is mainly intended to impact undocumented immigrants. If the bill goes through the Senate unchanged, the tax will apply to green card holders, though Bustillos said a credit may be available to folks that have been issued social security numbers.

Across all races and nationalities, undocumented immigrants paid \$96.7 billion in taxes into the American economy in 2023. In the state of Texas

alone, that number was \$4.87 billion.

The impact isn’t just purely financial. The presentation included data collected by the office of Mexico’s secretary of foreign relations, which suggested that immigrants have grown the American workforce in the new millennium by having 8 million U.S.-born children.

In a year where anti-immigrant rhetoric has dominated political discussion, Bustillos hoped that Congress could adopt a more measured approach. “In the big picture, if they start taxing the Mexican community, it’s probably going to be harmful and dangerous for both countries,” he said.

By Sam Karas
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PRESIDIO — Presidio High School graduate Fabiola Baeza Tarin recently made her National Geographic debut in *The Little Brown Bird*, a documentary about North America’s most endangered avians and the unlikely coalition of people working to bring them back from the brink. The short and sweet film dropped last week on streaming and is currently free to watch on YouTube.

Baeza went to school to study biology, not to portray a captivating heroine on the silver screen — but viewers might be fooled into thinking the opposite, thanks to breathtaking shots and tender storytelling served up by director KT Bryden and a team of producers from Wildpath and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

The budding biologist’s interest in creatures large and small was a natural extension of her childhood on a ranch in Ojinaga. In the documentary, she remembers her father’s motto: “lo que es bueno para el pájaro es bueno para el ganado,” or in English, “What’s good for the bird is good for the herd.” From a young age, she learned that all living things are connected, and even small losses in the ecosystem can have devastating impacts on the survivors.

Baeza developed a passion for protecting grassland birds working in the field at Sul Ross State University — a passion that’s sustained her for the better part of a decade. Learning about birds in the Trans-Pecos eventually led her to join a team making groundbreaking strides in protecting the Florida grasshopper sparrow, a stubborn little bird from the dry prairies of the Sunshine State that has had 90% of its natural habitat destroyed by development.

As of last summer, 1,000 Florida grasshopper sparrows have been reintroduced to the wild as a part of this project, supported by unlikely partners including the United States Air Force and a local ranching family. With those numbers, every bird matters, and learning their unique habits turned out to be equal parts frustrating and rewarding. “I’ve developed a bond with every single one of them, even the ones I don’t like,” Baeza jokes in the film.

Making it from a small town to the big screen would be an accomplishment for anyone, but Baeza had to bust down barriers and stereotypes along the way. In 2022, a Pew research study found that just 3% of Latinos in the workforce are women in STEM.

Over the documentary’s runtime, Baeza’s big heart



Photo by Carlton Ward, Jr. for NatGeo Explorer

“The Little Brown Bird”, starring Fabiola Baeza Tarin, premiered on YouTube last week.

and tenacity as a researcher shine through — and after watching her wrestle a stubborn trailer jack in a muddy field, it’s clear that women from the rancho are a natural fit in wildlife conservation.

The Sentinel caught up with Baeza over the phone on her way home from an early morning in the field.

I’m sure you get asked this question all the time, but how did you get interested in birds?

I was born in Ojinaga and grew up with my siblings on my dad’s ranch. We learned to love and appreciate the land from a very young age — the land gave us what we needed to sustain ourselves because my dad was a cattle rancher, but I was always interested in all sorts of wildlife.

It didn’t click right away that it was my calling to be a wildlife biologist. It wasn’t until my senior year of my

bachelor’s that I was falling behind because I thought I wanted to do something in the medical field, but I couldn’t get into a radiology program in El Paso that I wanted. Then I transferred to Sul Ross, and I thought I wanted to do the nursing program, but at that time it was in a period of transition, so they were like, “Well, you can just take biology classes and it’ll help with your curriculum.”

I think the class that did it for me was herpetology, which is reptiles and amphibians. I had this professor that was very passionate about conservation, and he would take us on field trips and show us survey methods. I realized that I really liked it.

Entering this super technical, academic field, what are some of the advantages and disadvantages of being from Presidio and Ojinaga?

I had no knowledge that this kind of career existed.

At the time that I was in school, there was nobody to show me that there was something in that field that was possible, especially for a brown girl from Mexico.

I want to say that one of the big advantages of being from Presidio is that we are in one of the most diverse regions of Texas. It’s one of the most remote, and you get a lot of raw ecosystem that a lot of people never see. Some people have to travel a long way to observe wildlife, and we have it right at our back door — Big Bend Ranch State Park, the National Park, Fort Davis. Anywhere we go, we’re out there and we’re experiencing it.

I want to talk about the term “little brown bird,” which I learned out here and associate with Chihuahuan Desert grasslands. Can you tell me how our local little brown birds and the Floridian little brown bird in the film are connected?

I actually did my master’s on grassland birds out in Marfa, and I worked on overwintering habitat of grasshopper sparrows and Baird sparrows. The Florida grasshopper sparrow is a subspecies of the grasshopper sparrow we have in Marfa and Presidio and all the desert grasslands, but the difference is that the Florida grasshopper sparrow is a subspecies that is geographically restricted to Florida, which means that it doesn’t migrate. The grasshopper sparrows that we have around Marfa spend their wintering season there, and then during the breeding season, they migrate north to the Great Plains.

Grasslands are one of the most imperiled ecosystems on Earth because they’re just so easy to transform, compared to something like a forest, for example. You can just clear grassland right away and build on it or do agriculture. The presence of grassland birds is an indicator of ecosystem health because if you do any sort of habitat change — like overgrazing or the introduction of invasive species — the birds get displaced because they’re such grassland specialists.

What are some of the other messages you hope folks take away from the film?

One of the things I like to say is that as a species, humans are weird in the sense that we feel like we want to dominate everything. We see something and we just want to clear it and build a supermarket on it. But I think that it’s very important for us to understand that we are part of a bigger ecosystem, and whatever we do to the land we’re going to get the same thing in return. What we decide to protect today is going to be very telling for what future generations are going to have.

Presidio bond

(Continued from page 1)

Conversations about taking on debt began at a Commissioners Court meeting last August after county officials reached a point of total burnout. Year after year, they passed bare-bones budgets while pressure to make major repairs and invest in new equipment mounted. Simultaneously, the county’s financial leadership had taken a conservative, zero-debt approach in the name of getting the government’s finances back on track after the county repeatedly failed to complete audits on time.

At the time, County Judge Joe Portillo seemed supportive of adding a few pennies to the tax rate, and the commissioners went to work setting their wish lists for overdue repairs. “It’s something that previous commissioners courts have never really done, and I admire them for it,” Portillo told *The Sentinel* last summer of the prospect of taking on debt. “But what they’ve done is they’ve denied themselves a lot of the things that they need.”

Commissioners (with the exception of a “no” vote from Portillo) voted on June 11 to give notice to the public of its intent to issue \$5.5 million in COs, and the county auditor published the notice in *The Big Bend Sentinel* on June 12 and 19.

Presidio residents said, “Not so fast,” and now hope to put a kibosh on the plan, circulating a Facebook post with information about the bond and a petition. At a special Presidio County City Council meeting Monday, a couple dozen residents joined city officials in criticizing the bonds — which they feel are unfairly slanted to benefit Marfa.

Residents also brought a petition to stop the COs and encouraged everyone at the meeting to sign it, and Portillo said he was hearing plenty of objections from residents. “I’m hoping that we can just have an honest discussion about how you guys feel about this,” Portillo said. “I know what I’ve heard in the last two weeks has been, ‘Maybe [the courthouse] should just be a museum. Maybe we shouldn’t have that building anymore.’ I’ve heard, ‘Maybe we should change the designation of the county seat. Maybe it’s time for us to be looking at something else. Maybe we should buy another building. Do we really need an opulent building if we can’t afford it?’”

State law says that if 5% of a county’s registered voters sign a petition against the issuance of COs, the county will be forced to have an election on the bond. According to the Presidio County Tax Assessor’s Office, the county has 4,286 registered voters, which means that the petition will need 215 signatures. Presidio City Councilmember Fernando Juarez, who has helped spearhead the opposition to the bonds, said Tuesday that he and fellow activists had already gathered more than the required signatures.

County commissioners attended the city council virtually, and, at the advice of County Attorney Blair Park, avoided any discussion of the issue — particularly with other commissioners — to stay within bounds of the state’s Open Meetings Act. That left Park in the role of explaining the reasoning for the COs and the projects that they would fund.

Park said the numbers are not certain — because an engineering firm is still working on final estimates — but initial estimates include a new heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system for the courthouse at \$3 mil-

lion, a new courthouse elevator at \$220,000, renovation of the county annex at \$1 million, with the rest of the funds allocated to new Road and Bridge Department equipment and other infrastructure improvements. Park lauded Commissioner Franky Ortiz for working to get the annex on the project list.

Park and other county employees have noted that without a functional elevator, the county could be sued for not meeting the Americans with Disabilities Act, or for an injured visitor to the courthouse or a trial. County employees have objected to working in offices where the temperatures sometimes rise into the 90s in the summer and drop to the 40s in the winter.

Jurors in the summer 2023 trial of Jim White in the lawsuit against him by his siblings over Brite Ranch trusts recalled that it was a sweltering and possibly dangerous environment for the two-week trial. A retrial of the lawsuit is set for August 18 in the courthouse, unless Jim’s son succeeds with a motion — to be heard today — to change the venue.

Park said counties often use COs for large capital projects to pay them over, typically, 15-20 years, depending on the terms of the loan.

Several residents brought up a possible tax increase to pay for the bonds, but until the county budget process moves forward and terms of the COs are known, it’s uncertain if an increase would be needed. But Park indicated that with the current majority of commissioners supporting the projects, if the petition succeeds and stops the COs, the county would still move ahead and pay for the projects with its reserves — which stand at about \$6 million.

“We don’t have to raise taxes because we dip into reserves,” Park said. “But if we spend all of our reserves and we’re going into the red, then we have to raise taxes in order for the county to stay afloat. That’s why we don’t want to spend through our reserves, which is why we would like to be able to take a loan from a bank to facilitate all of these projects.”

On Wednesday morning, protests against the COs continued at a special meeting of the Presidio County Commissioners Court, which had an agenda item to contract with a financial consultant who would take bids on bank loans.

A motion to approve that item failed, with Portillo, and commissioners Ortiz and Margarito Hernandez — joining forces as Presidio residents — voting “no” and commissioners David Beebe and Deirdre Hisler voting “aye.” While the denial of that item doesn’t technically kill the county’s call for COs, it takes out an important part of the process.

Presidio residents at the meeting called for commissioners to reconsider the entirety of the proposals and start the process of looking at capital projects again.

Commissioner David Beebe told *The Big Bend Sentinel* that courthouse repairs and renovations have been discussed for more than two years in court. Everything seemed in sync among commissioners for how to pay for the project until Judge Portillo threw a wrench in the process because he was upset about his peers not being supportive enough of a combined law enforcement center to be constructed in Presidio and a recent setback in his attempt for TxDOT to turn over the International Bridge to the county. “We’re

supposed to move forward as a commissioners court and get something done — until one person decided that he wants his name on the law enforcement center and after his bridge project has been stymied,” Beebe said of the judge.

County Commissioner Deirdre Hisler said in a phone interview that she also believes the judge’s mindset has changed from being a supporter — and even originator — of the projects and COs to a naysayer. “The fact that David Beebe and [County Auditor] Alicia [Sanchez] had been working on these certificates of obligation for over a year now, Joe had every right to attend those meetings and to get projects in, but he was so focused on the bridge that he had no input into it.”

Presidio City Councilmember Juarez said in a phone interview that his city’s residents felt the COs were approved in an underhanded way and noted that the legally-required notice from the county was only published in *The Big Bend Sentinel* and not *The Presidio International*. (The law only requires publishing in one paper.) “It would’ve helped to have better representation from our commissioners — maybe the commissioners reaching out to the locals here and saying, ‘Hey, this is coming up.’”

“I think there’s a lot of frustration going around with the way money is divided up between North County and South County,” Juarez said. “And, this is just one of those examples where they’ll want to give South County \$1 million and the other four and half million up there. ... And my question to Blair [Park] yesterday was, ‘Have you thought of any other options?’ I mean, we’re not trying to have Marfa employees without an air conditioner. We’re just saying that the courthouse is inadequate. It’s old, it’s small.”

Commissioner Ortiz, who lives in and represents portions of Presidio, said he voted to issue the COs because of the dire need to protect visitors and employees. “The commissioners that were there years back ... they wouldn’t fix anything,” he said. “They would just put on a little bandaid, and the little bandaid gets soggy, so they put on another bandaid.”

“I work in construction,” Ortiz said. “That [courthouse] breaker box, it’s so old. In the winter, the ladies that are in there, each of them have [space] heaters on all day. Then the breaker box pops, boom. So the girls go and pop the breaker back on. It’s going to get to a point where that breaker box, it’s going to blow up and it’s going to cause a fire. And that courthouse is just all wood. If someone dies in there because of a fire or someone is stuck inside the elevator and a fire starts ... I don’t wanna have that in my conscience if someone dies. And because we all know that that courthouse needs repairs, in the end, we’re going to be paying a lawsuit, plus everybody’s taxes are still gonna go up.”

However, Ortiz, Beebe and Hisler said they understand the frustration of Presidians and say it’s likely that their petition will result in a ballot-box decision — something they all said is part of the public process. Judge Portillo did not respond to a request for comment by deadline, but he said in the Presidio City Council meeting that he didn’t object to the CO process without a vote but wanted to ensure there was equity across the county’s communities for investments.

Big Bend area free healthcare clinics start Saturday

BIG BEND — Free healthcare clinics, hosted by the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine of the University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth, will take place across the Big Bend region this weekend and early next week.

Insurance and documentation are not required. Services provided include sports and work physicals, muscle and joint therapy, ultrasound imaging, diabetes - A1C testing, blood pressure checks, medication reviews, adult and pedi-

atric care and wellness exams.

All clinics will take place from 1 to 6 p.m. The Van Horn clinic will be on June 28 at the Convention Center, the Marathon clinic will be on June 29 at the Marathon Health Clinic, the Sanderson clinic will be on June 30 at St. James Hall, and the Terlingua clinic will be on July 1 at Big Bend High School.

MMT Collaborative Care provided by advanced medical students, physicians, physical therapists, and pre-med students.

Clínicas de salud gratuitas en el área de Big Bend comienzan el sábado

BIG BEND — Clínicas de salud gratuitas, organizadas por el Colegio de Medicina Osteopática de Texas del Centro de Ciencias de la Salud de la Universidad del Norte de Texas en Fort Worth, se llevarán a cabo en toda la región de Big Bend este fin de semana y a principios de la próxima semana.

No se requiere seguro médico ni documentación. Los servicios ofrecidos incluyen exámenes físicos deportivos y laborales, terapia muscular y articular, ecografías, pruebas de diabetes (A1C), control de presión arterial, revisión de medicamentos, atención para adultos y niños, y exámenes de bienestar.

Todas las clínicas se realizarán de 1 a 6 p. m. La clínica Van Horn se realizará el 28 de junio en el Centro de Convenciones, la clínica Marathon el 29 de junio en la Clínica de Salud Marathon, la clínica Sanderson el 30 de junio en St. James Hall y la clínica Terlingua el 1 de julio en la Escuela Secundaria Big Bend.

Atención Colaborativa MMT brindada por estudiantes de medicina avanzados, médicos, fisioterapeutas y estudiantes de premedicina.

PO Box fees to increase starting July 13

TRI-COUNTY — USPS customers are being notified about price changes to P.O. Box rental rates and related fees. For P.O. Box renewal fees that are due in July, payments must be received before July 13, 2025, to renew at the existing rate. Payments received on or after July 13, 2025, will be charged at the new P.O. Box rate.

The changes are as follows:		
	New price	Old price
Deposit for the keys	\$5.50	\$10.00
Key duplicate	\$13.00	\$17.00
Lock replacement	\$27.00	\$35.00

NEW RATES		
6 months	P.O. Box Rates	

Size 1	Size 2	Size 3	Size 4
\$39.00	\$53.00	\$81.00	\$140.00
1 Year			
Size 1	Size 2	Size 3	Size 4
\$78.00	\$106.00	\$162.00	\$280.00
CURRENT RATES			
6 months			
Size 1	Size 2	Size 3	Size 4
\$36.00	\$50.00	\$77.00	\$133.00
1 Year			
Size 1	Size 2	Size 3	Size 4
\$72.00	\$100.00	\$154.00	\$266.00

OUR WATER MATTERS

89th Texas Legislature delivers on water infrastructure funding

By Trey Gerfers
tgerfers@pcuwcd.org

In his State of the State Address earlier this year, Gov. Greg Abbott called on lawmakers “to make the largest investment in water in Texas history.” The 89th Legislature delivered.

While water is traditionally an issue that the Texas Legislature has been reticent to tackle, lawmakers swam against that proverbial current this session by filing over 300 water-related bills. Senate Bill 7 and House Joint Resolution 7, which the governor signed into law last week, are perhaps the most consequential of these bills because they fulfill the promise of the Texas Water Fund, which was previously created by the 88th Legislature and approved by you, the voters, in November 2023. In addition to a one-time injection of \$2.5 billion from the state’s current surplus into the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB), this latest legislation finally establishes a sustained, dedicated source of funding to meaningfully address the long-term future of our water supplies and infrastructure through the Texas Water Fund.

House Joint Resolution 7 directs the state’s comptroller of public accounts to “deposit to the credit of the Texas Water Fund the net revenue derived from the imposition of the state sales and use tax on the sale, storage, use, or other consumption in this state of taxable items under Chapter 151, Tax Code ... provided that the total amount deposited ... in a state fiscal year may not exceed \$1 billion.” Taxable items under Texas Tax Code Section 151.010 include things like amusement services, cable television services, personal services, motor vehicle parking and storage services, telecommunications services, credit reporting services, debt collection services, insurance services, information services, real property services, data processing services, security services, Internet access service, among other services.

HJR 7 also stipulates that “the duty of the comptroller of public accounts to make a deposit under this section expires” 20 years hence, on August 31, 2035. However, “[t]he legislature by adoption of a concurrent resolution approved by a record vote of a majority of the members of each house of the legislature may extend, in 10-year increments, the duty of the comptroller of public accounts” to continue dedicating up to \$1 billion annually to the Texas Water Fund.

Passage of SB 7 into law is especially good news for rural communities because it directs the TWDB to use some of the funding for a “rural water as-

sistance fund” and amends the Texas Water Code Section 15.504(c) to ensure that a portion of any money transferred from the Texas Water Fund is used for “water and wastewater infrastructure projects, prioritized by risk or need” for “rural political subdivisions” and “municipalities with a population of less than 150,000.”

But money alone will not solve our long-standing water issues. SB 7 also includes detailed provisions for an advisory committee to ensure legislative oversight of the fund. It is my hope that this committee will use the Texas Water Fund as an opportunity to reform the culture at the Texas Water Development Board. Anyone who has tried to get funding from the TWDB is well aware that agency staffers frequently obsess over internal protocols and criteria informed by internal prerogatives and priorities based on internal processes and timelines that all too often run counter to solving actual problems in the real world. Not only do these internal dynamics demonstrably hamper communication among the various departments within the agency, they also lead to confusion and frustration among would-be applicants.

As the example of Presidio County clearly shows, outside technical assistance is not enough. The agency itself must be more proactive in helping applicants succeed through the timely guidance that it alone can provide. Perhaps the advisory committee of the Texas Water Fund can assist the TWDB in recognizing and fulfilling its role as a servant of the people of Texas by encouraging it to invest not just money, but also the time and attention necessary to truly understand the plight of the populations it serves. Unless there is a significant change in the way TWDB does business, the underserved, under (human-)resourced communities of Texas are certain to remain largely left behind.

Much of the media coverage of SB 7 and HJR 7 described the legislation as the “governor’s water plan.” That’s a nice way of putting it. But really it’s the culmination of years of work by a handful of sitting and former legislators led by Senator Charles Perry, chairman of the Senate Committee on Water, Agriculture, and Rural Affairs, in collaboration with the Texas Water Foundation, the Environmental Defense Fund, Texas 2036 and others. The successful passage of this latest legislation goes back to the teamwork of these folks who convinced lawmakers to form the Texas Water Caucus during the 88th Legislature. By converting its members into “water champions,” the Water Caucus succeeded in drawing the entire Legislature’s attention to the looming water crisis as a first step in the lengthy process of averting it. SB 7 and HJR 7 represent the next steps in that process, whose ultimate success will depend on all of us working together.

You, the voters, will also have a role to play in bringing this plan to fruition when the corresponding constitutional amendment appears on the ballot this fall. Your vote in favor will be indispensable because the language of Senate Bill 7 states that “[i]f that constitutional amendment is not approved by the voters, this Act has no effect.” If you care about water, please take a moment now to ensure that your voter registration is current and mark your calendar for November 4, 2025.

Trey Gerfers serves as general manager of the Presidio County Underground Water Conservation District. A San Antonio native, he has lived in Marfa since 2013.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

June 26, 1975

Rain - Hail Damage Causes Crop Loss

The rain and hail that hit the Presidio County area Monday night brought much needed moisture to the range lands but destroyed most of the cantaloupe crop in the Presidio area.

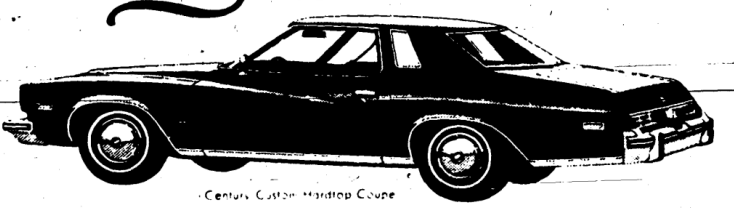
Estimates from Presidio indicate that over 500 acres of cantaloupe were destroyed by hail dashing the hopes of many farmers for a top crop in the delicious melons. No damage was reported to the Redford area crops.

Rain fell over a wide spread area with measurements ranging from one-half inch to three inches. Rain in Marfa began to fall about 7:15 p.m. and continued on and off past 9 p.m.

Hail damage in Marfa was at a minimum except for some broken window panes and some damage to cars and roofs.

A bolt of lightning Sunday hit the Brite Building in downtown Marfa knocking loose a chunk from the upper portion of the front wall. Some gauges in town registered a total of four inches from both rains, Sunday and Monday.

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5K Race & 1K Fun Run

Friday, July 4th
8:00 am



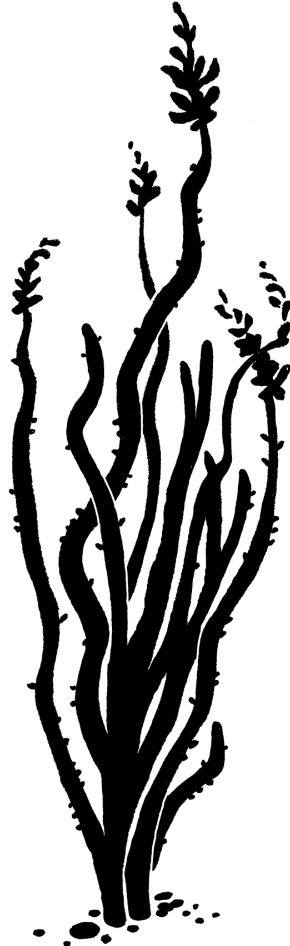
Jeff Davis County Park
Hwy 17 South
Fort Davis, TX

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