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Colleen O'Brien (Continued from page 1)



Colleen O'Brien

Canvases hung out to dry at a house in Panther Junction during O'Brien's 2024 residency in the park.

creative volcanic geology, is an especially rich text. “All of a sudden I had this large body of work that sort of amounts to a survey of the region, through the paintings,” she said.

O’Brien’s process is part old-school landscape painting and part backcountry adventure. She started out making large-scale oil paintings, but as her work fixated on landscapes, she began to feel trapped in a traditional studio environment.

Now, most of her paintings are created in one session in a singular location—usually a large rock. She spends a lot of time driving around and scouting locations, trawling for places that look hospitable enough to spend a few hours out in the elements. “The worst thing about painting a landscape and being inside is you just want to be outside,” she said. “My studio pretty much exists out of my car.”

The all-in-one-take approach is key for both theoretical and practical reasons—in one session where O’Brien had to bail on a painting as a flash flood loomed, she returned to find that a curious deer had used it for an outhouse.

Most of the time, O’Brien gathers elements from the scene around her work space, using different types of dirt, soil and rock for a range of pigments and textures. She had to rethink her process ahead of the residency in the national park, which abides by strict federal “leave no trace” regulations—she couldn’t take materials gathered within park boundaries outside.

The park helped her figure out a workaround, helping her connect with private landowners who would allow her to harvest materials that mirrored the conditions of promising sites in the park. As a result, her own personal map of the Big Bend grew exponentially as she got to meet new people and explore beyond

Judge appoints

(Continued from page 1)

so much as the courtesy of a call, the judge took this unnecessary action because that is the kind of small, self-serving guy he is.”

Portillo said Monday that he looked at the situation from a simple view of following the law while also protecting the county. The automatic resignation provision under the Constitution is clear. “It doesn't make provisions,” he said. “It doesn't talk about specific instances. It just says it's an automatic resignation. So, under the law, [the seat] had to be filled.”

Portillo said he was aware of the court case—Bianchi v. State of Texas—that allowed a county official to remain in office because the county judge and commissioners court did not replace him. The county’s defense in allowing his hold over to continue was based in part on an Attorney General’s Office opinion. But Portillo said each case “is going to have different sets of facts and circumstances” that could result in a different opinion or court ruling. The judge also cautioned that not filling the seat

the typical weekenders’ itinerary. “We did everything by the book,” she said. “It was really fun.”

O’Brien frequently posts image carousels and videos of herself making the work, which she regards as a kind of performance. It’s a way of documenting the landscape that mirrors the paintings themselves—who are, in a way, witnesses to their own creation. “My philosophy on abstract painting is that it’s a series of movements within a certain time frame,” she said. “My work is about hiking out there, driving around, wandering, finding the right rock, rubbing your hands on it, putting your hands in the dirt, listening to the water run by you. And then at the end, you’re left with a record of it, the physical painting.”

“I feel like art can give you a lot of access to senses and emotion and memory and smell,” she continued. “What I want for my paintings is for people to be transported to a place. I don’t necessarily want people to necessarily look for figures or anything that’s representative.”

While O’Brien considers herself a student—and steward—of the landscape, she does have an academic background in art. She studied at the Land Arts of the American West program at Texas Tech, which gave her room to breathe and the opportunity to study monumental works of the Southwest up close.

(Her teacher, Chris Taylor, is a frequent Marfa dinner table guest alongside wife Ingrid Schaffner, the former curator of the Chinati Foundation.) “People hate on Lubbock, but the sky is like 70% of your view and all that red dirt everywhere—it just gives you space to think,” she said. “You’re not just staring at concrete and buildings. I don’t want to see the built environment; I think it wears on your senses.”

could open the county up to a similar lawsuit over the validity of Beebe remaining and of any votes he cast.

In the Bianchi case, it was clear that the county judge and all commissioners were in agreement to keep the resigned county attorney—Richard Bianchi—in his position. The opposition to the hold over came from the local district attorney. In Beebe’s case, he had the support of Commissioners Deirdre Hisler and Franky Ortiz to remain on the court, according to their statements to Big Bend Sentinel. Commissioner Margarito Hernandez did not return a request for comment, and Portillo made his opinion clear on the need to replace Beebe.

Knight’s appointed term will end December 31, 2026. Knight, who served in the seat from 2018 to 2022 before being defeated by Beebe in the Democratic Primary, said emphatically that he is not interested in running for the seat in March. (Presidio County is a bit of an outlier in Texas

On her last day in the Panhandle, she gathered a box of red dirt from the canyons—a sentimental tether of sorts. The box rode around in her car for months before it finally found a home at a solo show of her work.

“It was a very emotional piece for me, but some of the feedback on it was funny,” she recalled.

Though her work took her away from the Panhandle, she’s found a way to keep herself centered in places where the sky looms large.

She’s made paintings at Ghost Ranch in Abiquiu, New Mexico, where God once told Georgia O’Keeffe—a painter who also famously enjoyed working from rocks—she could have a mountain if she painted it enough. She’s also made work in Bisbee, Arizona, in a region known for mountain lion and jaguar sightings.

In all her years of painting in the backcountry, the Bisbee big cats came the closest to rattling her. Conventional wisdom holds that mountain lions see you more often than you see them, and that the best way to repel them is to act big and tough. “You’re not supposed to crouch down, and that’s my entire practice,” O’Brien said.

For now, she’s happy to be back in Far West Texas, where she feels like she can inhabit the role of the artist 24/7. It’s both an escape and a big responsibility—being adequately prepared to work outside in the desert in a place with few services has its risks, but the mental peace she feels out here is its own reward. “I like the pace of life,” she said. “And I’m constantly inspired by every single inch of this place.”

politics and is solidly Democratic. Thus, a win in the Democratic Primary in March would make a candidate the shoo-in for the November election.)

“The good news is there is another election coming and Beebe is offering a change,” the Beebes stated. “But if the voters say no thanks, we’ll take four more years of this—he will concede as a gentleman should and we’ll happily move on. Until the people weigh in, Beebe’s going to keep right on doing what he’s been doing—showing up for Presidio County every single day and striving to do better.”

Correction: The original, online posting of this story stated that Knight was not available for comment because of an afternoon relaxation ritual. That text message comment was not from Knight and was from someone impersonating him. We will be frank. The Sentinel was pranked. Included in this update are actual comments from Knight.

Our Water Matters: Hot springs of the Trans-Pecos

by Trey Gerfers

Our region is home to many unusual geothermal phenomena, including a mysterious hot cave (106°F) about 12 miles south of Lajitas as well as abandoned mercury mines flooded with hot water (113°F) at a depth of about 900 feet around Terlingua. The area also has several miniature geysers that spurt hot water (140°F to 194°F) nearly two feet into the air from a series of small hot springs about 4 miles southwest of Can-

delaria. These curiosities, among many others, are described by Christopher D. Henry in “Geologic Setting and Geochemistry of Thermal Water and Geothermal Assessment, Trans-Pecos, Texas” published in 1979. It constitutes one of the most comprehensive surveys of hot-water features ever conducted in our area, whose most common sites involve hot springs that occur “where a somewhat fortuitous combination of circumstances allows the hot water to reach the surface,” writes Henry.

In an article titled “Geysers and hot springs” on the EBSCO Information Services website, William R. Hackett describes the water in hot springs “as rain and snowfall, which percolates several kilometers down into the Earth’s crust through permeable volcanic rocks and sediments.” The temperature of these rocks increases due to our planet’s geothermal gradient, which Hackett defines as “the rate at which temperature increases with depth in the Earth.” Henry reports that “[t]hermal gradients are at

least 30°C [per kilometer of depth] ... and possibly higher along the Rio Grande. The increase in thermal gradient and heat flow may be due to progressive thinning of the crust” beneath the Trans-Pecos region. This rise in the subsurface temperature heats the water, and because the “heated water is less dense,” it “is forced upward along fractures by descending cold water,” writes Henry. Depending on local conditions, “the complete cycle from snowflake to hot spring may take centuries or mil-

lennia,” according to Hackett.

Hot springs require very specific physical and thermal conditions. “If there is no focusing pathway to the surface, fluids may remain underground. If the heat source is not hot enough, or if there is too much cool groundwater, then warm springs may result,” according to Hackett. Hot springs are also very fragile. “Any disruption of the delicate plumbing systems by humankind or nature involving the extraction of fluids, injection of fluids, or perturbation of

the water table will almost always yield unpredictable and possibly detrimental consequences to nearby thermal features,” writes Hackett.

By the same token, hot springs themselves can have major effects on local environments because their high soil temperatures destroy plant roots and their noxious vapors can form “death traps” for birds and small animals, according to Hackett. But hot springs also “sustain unique ecosystems that include specialized microorganisms and plants ... and

Colleen O’Brien *(Continuar from page 1)*

el mes de agosto en Willow House, que ofrece becas y retiros para artistas. En agosto de 2024, O'Brien regresó, esta vez al Parque Nacional Big Bend, donde participó en el renovado programa de residencias artísticas del parque.

En estas dos residencias, O'Brien pintó obras de tierra con su estilo característico: obras a gran escala con materiales naturales creadas al aire libre que reflejan la forma del terreno y el flujo de sus drenajes. El Big Bend, conocido internacionalmente por su geología volcánica de gran creatividad, es un texto especialmente rico. "De repente, me encontré con una gran cantidad de obras que, a través de las pinturas, constituyen una especie de estudio de la región", comentó.

El proceso de O'Brien es en parte pintura de paisajes a la antigua usanza y en parte aventura en plena naturaleza. Comenzó pintando óleos a gran escala, pero a medida que su obra se centraba en los paisajes, empezó a sentirse atrapada en el ambiente tradicional de un estudio. Ahora, la mayoría de sus pinturas se crean en una sola sesión en un solo lugar, generalmente una gran roca. Pasa mucho tiempo conduciendo y explorando localizaciones, buscando lugares que parezcan lo suficientemente acogedores como para pasar unas horas a la intemperie. "Lo peor de pintar un paisaje y estar dentro es que solo quieres estar afuera", dijo. "Mi estudio prácticamente existe fuera de mi coche".

El enfoque de "todo en uno" es clave tanto por razones teóricas como prácticas: en una sesión en la que O'Brien tuvo que abandonar una pintura ante la amenaza de una inundación repentina, regresó y descubrió que un ciervo curioso la había usado como letrina.

La mayoría de las veces, O'Brien reúne elementos de la escena en su espacio de trabajo, utilizando diferentes tipos de tierra, tierra y roca para obtener una gama de pigmentos y texturas. Tuvo que replantear su proceso antes de la residencia en el parque nacional, que cumple con las estrictas normas federales de "no dejar rastro": no podía sacar al exterior los materiales recolectados dentro de los límites del parque.

El parque la ayudó a encontrar una solución

alternativa, ayudándola a conectar con propietarios privados que le permitieran recolectar materiales que reflejaran las condiciones de sitios prometedores del parque. Como resultado, su mapa personal del Big Bend creció exponencialmente a medida que conocía gente nueva y exploraba más allá del itinerario típico de los visitantes de fin de semana. "Hicimos todo al pie de la letra", dijo. "Fue muy divertido".

O'Brien publica con frecuencia carruseles de imágenes y videos de ella misma creando la obra, lo que considera una especie de performance. Es una forma de documentar el paisaje que refleja las propias pinturas, quienes son, en cierto modo, testigos de su propia creación. "Mi filosofía sobre la pintura abstracta es que se trata de una serie de movimientos dentro de un periodo de tiempo determinado", dijo. Mi obra se trata de hacer senderismo, conducir, deambular, encontrar la roca ideal, frotarse las manos, meterlas en la tierra, escuchar el agua correr. Y al final, queda un registro de ello, la pintura física.

"Siento que el arte puede brindar un gran acceso a los sentidos, las emociones, la memoria y el olfato", continuó. "Lo que busco con mis pinturas es que la gente se transporte a un lugar. No quiero necesariamente que la gente busque figuras ni nada representativo".

Si bien O'Brien se considera una estudiosa y protectora del paisaje, tiene una formación académica en arte. Estudió en el programa Land Arts of the American West en Texas Tech, lo que le dio espacio para respirar y la oportunidad de estudiar de cerca obras monumentales del suroeste. (Su profesor, Chris Taylor, es un invitado frecuente a la mesa en Marfa junto con su esposa Ingrid Schaffner, excuradora de la Fundación Chinati). "La gente odia Lubbock, pero el cielo ocupa el 70% de la vista y toda esa tierra roja por todas partes te da espacio para pensar", dijo. "No te quedas mirando solo el hormigón y los edificios. No quiero ver el entorno construido; creo que desgasta los sentidos".

En su último día en el Panhandle, recogió una caja de tierra roja de los cañones, una especie de atadura sentimental. La caja...



Colleen O'Brien

Un fotograma de un vídeo de autorretrato tomado mientras hacía una pintura.

Comisionado *(Continua de page 1)*

Knight y eligieron rotundamente a Beebe", escribieron David Beebe y su esposa Hilary en un comunicado el lunes. "El viernes, a pesar de las objeciones de los electores y otros comisionados, y sin siquiera la cortesía de una llamada, el juez tomó esta medida innecesaria porque es un tipo insignificante y egoísta". Portillo declaró el lunes que analizaba la situación desde una perspectiva simple: cumplir con la ley y, al mismo tiempo, proteger al condado.

La disposición constitucional sobre la renuncia automática es clara. "No establece disposiciones", afirmó. "No menciona casos específicos. Simplemente dice que es una renuncia automática. Por lo tanto, según la ley, [el puesto] debía cubrirse".

Portillo afirmó estar al tanto del caso judicial —Bianchi contra el Estado de Texas— que permitió que un funcionario del condado permaneciera en el cargo porque el juez del condado y el tribunal de comisionados no lo reemplazaron. La defensa del condado para permitir que continuara en el cargo se basó en parte en una opinión de la Fiscalía General. Sin embargo, Portillo señaló que cada caso "tendrá diferentes conjuntos de hechos y circunstancias" que podrían resultar en una opinión o fallo judicial diferente.

El juez también advirtió que no cubrir el puesto podría exponer al condado a una demanda similar sobre la validez de la permanencia de Beebe y de los votos que emitiera.

En el caso de Bianchi, quedó claro que el juez del condado y todos los comisionados acordaron mantener en su puesto al fiscal del condado, Richard Bianchi, quien había renunciado. La oposición a la permanencia provino del fiscal de distrito local. En el caso de Beebe, contó con el apoyo de los comisionados

Deirdre Hisler y Franky Ortiz para permanecer en la corte, según sus declaraciones al Big Bend Sentinel. El comisionado Margarito Hernández no respondió a una solicitud de comentarios, y Portillo dejó clara su opinión sobre la necesidad de reemplazar a Beebe.

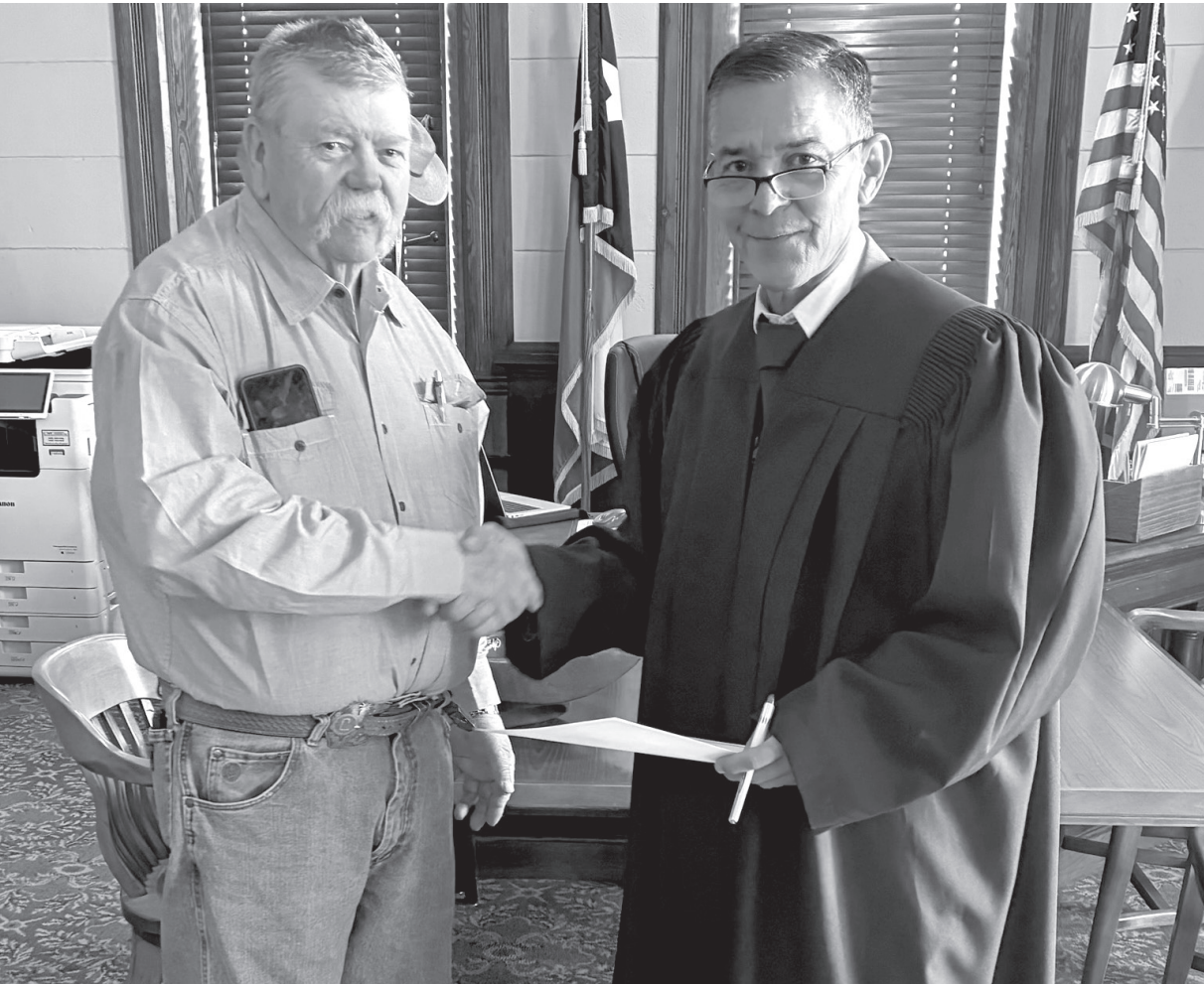
El mandato de Knight finalizará el 31 de diciembre de 2026. Knight, quien ocupó el cargo de 2018 a 2022 antes de ser derrotado por Beebe en las primarias demócratas, afirmó enfáticamente que no está interesado en postularse para el cargo en marzo.

(El condado de Presidio es un caso atípico en la política texana y es firmemente demócrata. Por lo tanto, una victoria en las primarias demócratas en marzo convertiría a un candidato en el favorito para las elecciones de noviembre).

“La buena noticia es que se avecinan otras elecciones y Beebe ofrece un cambio”, declararon los Beebe. “Pero si los votantes dicen que no, gracias, aguantaremos cuatro años más de esto; él cederá como un caballero y seguiremos adelante con gusto. Hasta que la gente opine, Beebe seguirá haciendo lo que ha estado haciendo: presentarse por el Condado de Presidio todos los días y esforzarse por hacerlo mejor”.

Corrección: La publicación original en línea de esta historia indicaba que Knight no estaba disponible para hacer comentarios debido a un ritual de relajación vespertino.

Ese comentario por mensaje de texto no era de Knight, sino de alguien que se hacía pasar por él. Seamos francos. El Sentinel fue una broma. En esta actualización se incluyen los comentarios reales de Knight.



Buddy Knight and Joe Portillo

Capital Highlights

La redistribución de distritos atrae a una oleada de candidatos republicanos

Por Gary Borders

La redistribución de los mapas congresionales del estado, aunque impugnada en los tribunales, ha atraído a 114 candidatos republicanos en los 38 distritos del estado a casi dos meses de la fecha límite de presentación, informó el Houston Chronicle.

La Legislatura de Texas redistribuyó los mapas a petición del presidente Donald Trump con la esperanza de obtener cinco escaños republicanos adicionales. Como resultado, hay escaños con posibilidades de ganar para los republicanos en Houston, San Antonio y Dallas, que han atraído a 19 candidatos republicanos hasta la fecha.

Dos congresistas republicanos buscan un cargo estatal en lugar de intentar conservar sus escaños actuales. Chip Roy, quien representa un distrito del centro de Texas, se postula para fiscal general de Texas, mientras que el republicano de Houston, Wesley Hunt, se unió recientemente a la contienda por el Senado de los Estados Unidos.

Además, Michael McCaul, republicano por Austin, y Morgan Luttrell, republicano por Houston, no buscan la reelección. Esos cuatro escaños vacantes han atraído a 25 candidatos republicanos.

Empresa designada para administrar programa de vales escolares

Una empresa tecnológica neoyorquina ha sido designada para administrar el nuevo programa estatal de elección de escuela, según informó el Texas Standard. El programa de mil millones de dólares, aprobado en la sesión legislativa regular, ayudará a los padres a usar el dinero de los contribuyentes para pagar la matrícula de escuelas privadas, los gastos de educación en casa y otros gastos educativos.

Odyssey, la empresa, gestiona la financiación de la educación en varios otros estados. Se encargará tanto de procesar las solicitudes como de clasificar a las familias para determinar quiénes tienen acceso a la financiación.

Cualquier persona puede solicitarla siempre que tenga un hijo que cumpla los requisitos para asistir a la escuela pública desde preescolar hasta el

bachillerato, así como niños de 4 años que cumplan los requisitos para preescolar.

Odyssey puede recibir hasta el 5% de la asignación total de mil millones de dólares para la elección de escuela, lo que significa que podría obtener hasta 50 millones de dólares por administrar el programa de vales.

Agencia crea conciencia sobre la amenaza del gusano barrenador

El Departamento de Servicios de Salud del Estado de Texas hace un llamado a aumentar la conciencia entre los profesionales de la salud y el público sobre el gusano barrenador del Nuevo Mundo. Esta mosca parásita puede amenazar la salud tanto de los animales como de los humanos.

El gusano barrenador fue erradicado en Estados Unidos en la década de 1960, pero siguió siendo endémico en la mayor parte de América Central y del Sur. Se detectaron casos en México en noviembre de 2024, lo que generó preocupación de que regresara a cruzar la frontera.

Desde entonces, se ha prohibido la entrada de ganado a Estados Unidos desde México, lo que significa que más de un millón de cabezas de ganado que normalmente se habrían dirigido a los corrales de engorde de Texas permanecieron al sur de la frontera. La cantidad de ganado que llega a los corrales de engorde de Texas ha disminuido un 18% con respecto al año anterior.

En septiembre, se reportó una vaca infectada a menos de 160 kilómetros de la frontera con Texas, según el San Antonio Express-News.

La escasez de suministro está elevando el precio de la carne de res a niveles récord. El comisionado de Agricultura de Texas, Sid Miller, ha pedido el uso de cebos con pesticidas para abordar el problema.

"No se trata solo de un problema ganadero, se trata de proteger los empleos de Texas, las comunidades rurales y nuestro sustento agrícola", declaró Miller.

Cornyn y Paxton, empatados, según una encuesta

Una encuesta publicada la semana pasada muestra que el senador estadounidense en funciones, John Cornyn, y el fiscal general de Texas, Ken Paxton,

están prácticamente empatados, con el nuevo representante estadounidense, Wesley Hunt, pisándole los talones, según el Express-News. Su candidatura sugiere que ningún candidato está en camino de obtener una mayoría absoluta, lo que hace probable una segunda vuelta, al menos por el momento.

La encuesta de la Universidad de Houston y la Universidad del Sur de Texas, realizada durante las dos últimas semanas de septiembre, reveló que el 34% de los encuestados favoreció a Paxton, frente al 33% que favoreció a Cornyn. Hunt obtuvo el 22% de los encuestados, mientras que el 11% de los probables votantes republicanos encuestados aún no se ha decidido.

Trump aún no se ha pronunciado sobre la contienda, y los tres candidatos están ansiosos por recibir su respaldo, si es que lo consiguen. La encuesta reveló que la mitad de los encuestados votaría por cualquier candidato que Trump apoyara.

Abbott ordena al DPS que aumente la aplicación de las leyes sobre el cáñamo

El gobernador Greg Abbott ha ordenado al Departamento de Seguridad Pública de Texas que endurezca la aplicación de las leyes contra las tiendas de vapeo y tabaco que no cumplan con las nuevas regulaciones estatales que prohíben la venta de productos derivados del cáñamo a menores de edad.

Abbott emitió una orden ejecutiva para impedir que las tiendas vendan productos derivados del cáñamo a menores de edad, tras el fracaso de los intentos de prohibir dichos productos por completo o de imponer nuevas leyes que regulen su venta en las dos últimas sesiones extraordinarias. “Texas protegerá a los niños de los productos peligrosos del cáñamo”, declaró Abbott.

El Departamento de Seguridad Pública (DPS por sus siglas en inglés) realizará operativos específicos para identificar tiendas de vapeo y tabaco que podrían estar vendiendo a menores. La iniciativa incluirá investigaciones encubiertas.

Gary Borders es un veterano y galardonado periodista texano. Publicó varios periódicos comunitarios en Texas durante 30 años, incluyendo publicaciones en Longview, Fort Stockton, Nacogdoches, Lufkin y Cedar Park. Correo electrónico: gborders@texaspress.com.

Hot springs *(Continued from page 2)*

even entire food chains of colorful algae, flies, and rare spiders ... wholly dependent on the supply of warm water.” The ecological importance of hot springs is further evidenced by their often “vivid surface coloration” for which “microorganisms are largely responsible,” writes Hackett, as well as the “birds and mammals that congregate near the year-round open water and green vegetation of hydrothermal features.”

Henry defines three distinct areas in the Trans-Pecos where hot springs occur: “the southern Hueco Bolson adjacent to the Quitman Mountains; the Presidio Bolson and its structural extension to the north, and the Big Bend region.” The most significant site in the southern Hueco Bolson is Indian Hot Springs, “a cluster of seven geothermal springs with high mineral constituents” located along the Rio Grande River about 25 miles south of Sierra Blanca, according to the Texas Historical Commission (THC). The name is apparently derived from the frequent use of the springs by Native peoples before European settlement of the area. Henry measured the temperatures of these springs in 1976 and found the high-

est recorded temperature of any thermal spring in Texas at 117°F.

The best-known geothermal feature in the Presidio Bolson is Chinati Hot Springs, which Henry refers to by the earlier name of Ruidosa Hot Springs. Located about 8 miles north of Ruidosa, the waters of these springs emanate “from a concrete enclosure on a terrace ... evidently from gravels along a small bluff overlooking the terrace” about 10 feet above the adjacent creek. Henry measured a temperature here of 113°F.

The Big Bend region boasts perhaps the most famous hot springs in the whole state known simply as Hot Springs or Boquillas Hot Springs (and formerly as Langford Hot Springs) in Big Bend National Park. Henry describes at least six hot springs here along the Rio Grande on both sides of the border, which mostly “occur in impenetrable cane thickets.” The Hot Springs location inside the national park, however, features a manmade stone tub above the Rio Grande, where the hot water can accumulate before overflowing into the river below. Henry measured a temperature here of 104°F.



Langford Hot Springs in Big Bend National Park

Perhaps the most fascinating geothermal features in our region involve two obscure artesian wells drilled by Gulf Oil Corporation back in 1965. Originally intended as part of an exploratory effort to find petroleum, these super-deep, highly prolific wells known as Presidio Trust #1 and Swafford #1 (each with a highest-reported temperature of 180°F) ended up tapping some of the hottest water ever found in the Trans-Pecos by chance. Indeed, as Henry points out: “Some thermal waters do not reach the surface but have been discovered accidentally; thus, there should be

many as yet undiscovered thermal convection systems, particularly in [the] Presidio and Hueco Bolsons.”

To learn more, visit www.beg.utexas.edu/publications/geologic-setting-and-geochemistry-thermal-water-and-geothermal-assessment-trans-pecos.

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 and can be reached at tgerfers@pcuwc-d.org.

Capital Highlights

Redistricting attracts a spate of GOP candidates

By Gary Borders

Redrawing the state’s congressional maps, though being challenged in court, has drawn 114 Republican candidates in the state’s 38 districts with nearly two months left until the filing deadline, the Houston Chronicle reported.

The Texas Legislature redrew the maps at the request of President Donald Trump in hopes of gaining five additional GOP seats. As a result, there are winnable seats for Republicans in Houston, San Antonio and Dallas that have drawn 19 GOP candidates to date.

Two Republican members of Congress are seeking statewide office instead of trying to hold on to their current seats. Chip Roy, who represents a Central Texas district, is running for Texas attorney general, while Houston Republican Wesley Hunt recently jumped into the U.S. Senate race.

In addition, Michael McCaul, R-Austin, and Morgan Luttrell, R-Houston, are not seeking reelection. Those four open seats have drawn 25 GOP candidates.

Company tapped to run school voucher program

A New York tech company has been picked to administer the state’s new school choice program, the Texas Standard reported. The billion-dollar program passed in the regular legislative session will help parents use taxpayer money to pay for private school tuition, homeschooling expenses, and other educational expenses.

Odyssey, the company, manages education funding in several other states. It will be responsible for both processing applications and ranking families to determine who gets access to funding.

Anyone can apply as long as they have a child eligible to go to public school in K-12 as well as 4-year-olds who are eligible for pre-kindergarten.

Odyssey can receive up to 5% of the total school choice appropriation of \$1 billion, meaning it could earn up to \$50 million for administering the voucher program.

Roberson’s execution date paused by Texas court

Just a week before his scheduled execution date, the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals stayed the execution of Robert Roberson in the death of his two-year-old daughter in 2002. Roberson was convicted of capital murder the following year for shaken baby syndrome, a diagnosis since discredited by most scientists. His case has drawn widespread attention and calls for his exoneration.

The Austin American-Statesman reported that the state’s highest criminal court decided to send the case back to trial in Anderson County, where he was convicted. The court cited the case of Andrew Wayne Roark, a North Texas man who was exonerated in a similar “shaken baby syndrome” case.

One of the judges wrote a concurring opinion: “As identified in Roark, our scientific understanding of what has become known as Shaken Baby Syndrome has significantly advanced. Because of this deeper understanding, certain assumptions and conclusions that were once thought to be true may not be.”

Roberson, now 58, claims his daughter fell out of the bed in the middle of the night in 2002. He soothed her to sleep, and upon checking on her later that night, found that she was not breathing. She was pronounced dead at an

emergency room the next day, and Roberson was eventually charged and convicted of capital murder.

Agency raising awareness of screwworm threat

The Texas Department of State Health Services is calling for increased awareness among health professionals and the public about the New World screwworm. This parasitic fly can threaten the health of both animals and humans.

The screwworm was previously eradicated in the United States in the 1960s but remained endemic in most of Central and South America. Cases were detected in Mexico in November 2024, raising concerns that it would make its way back across the border.

Cattle have been barred from coming into the United States from Mexico since then, meaning more than a million head of cattle that normally would have headed to Texas feed lots remained south of the border. The number of cattle arriving at Texas feed lots is down 18% from a year ago. An infected cow was reported less than 100 miles from the Texas border in September, according to the San Antonio Express-News.

The supply squeeze is raising the price of beef to record levels. Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller has called for the use of pesticide bait to deal with the problem.

“This isn’t just a livestock issue, it’s about protecting Texas jobs, rural communities, and our agricultural lifeblood,” Miller said.

Cornyn, Paxton neck-and-neck, poll finds

A poll published last week shows incumbent U.S. Sen. John Cornyn and Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton essentially tied, with new entrant U.S. Rep. Wesley Hunt not far behind, according to the Express-News. His entry suggests that no candidate is on track to win an outright majority, making a runoff likely—at least at this point.

The poll by the University of Houston and Texas Southern University, conducted the last two weeks of September, found 34% of respondents favored Paxton to 33% for Cornyn. Hunt picked up 22% of poll respondents with 11% of likely GOP voters polled still undecided.

Trump has yet to weigh in on the race, with all three candidates eager to receive his endorsement, if one is forthcoming. The poll found that half the respondents would vote for any candidate Trump endorsed.

Abbott directs DPS to increase hemp enforcement

Gov. Greg Abbott has directed the Texas Department of Public Safety to toughen enforcement against vape and smoke shops that don’t comply with new state regulations that prohibit selling hemp-derived products to minors.

Abbott issued an executive order to keep shops from selling hemp-derived products to minors after attempts to either ban such products outright or impose new laws regulating sales failed in the last two special sessions.

“Texas will protect children from dangerous hemp products,” Abbott said.

DPS will conduct targeted operations to identify vape and smoke shops that could be selling to minors. The effort will include conducting undercover investigations.

Gary Borders is a veteran award-winning Texas journalist. He published a number of community newspapers in Texas during a 30-year span, including in Longview, Fort Stockton, Nacogdoches, Lufkin and Cedar Park. Email: gborders@texaspress.com.

The Presidio County Commissioners Court is accepting applications for a Veterans County Service Officer (VCSO). This is a full-time position with benefits. The VCSO conducts benefits counseling; advises eligible military veterans, surviving spouses and dependents regarding federal and state benefits they may be entitled to; prepares, presents and pursues compensation and pension claims with supporting evidence designed to obtain the maximum allowable benefits for veterans, surviving spouses and dependents. This position will report directly to the Commissioners Court in accordance with the Texas Government Code, Subchapter B, Section 434.031. Certification or Accreditation as a VCSO from the Texas Veterans Commission will be required within 1 year of employment. THE VCSO MUST HAVE SERVED ON ACTIVE DUTY IN A BRANCH OF THE U.S. ARMED FORCES FOR AT LEAST FOUR MONTHS, OR HAVE A SERVICE CONNECTED DISABILITY AND BEEN HONORABLY DISCHARGED (additional or relevant Experience Requirements can be found in Texas Code 434.031) Applications can be submitted to Presidio County Commissioner – Precinct 1 Deirdre E. Hisler by email to deirdrehisler@co.presidio.tx.us, by hand delivery to the Commissioner Hisler office. 2 nd floor, County Courthouse, Marfa Texas or by mail to PO BOX 606, Marfa, Texas 79843. Applications are available at <https://www.co.presidio.tx.us/page/presidio.County.Forms.Policy>. Additional application information documents can be obtained by contacting Commissioner Hisler via email or by phone (432.729.8178)

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BIG BEND Sentinel

Editor	Rob D’Amico rob@bigbendsentinel.com
Reporter	Sam Karas
Copy Editor	Ariele Gentiles ariele@bigbendsentinel.com
Designer, Advertising	Andrew Siegfried designer@bigbendsentinel.com
Sports Reporter	Roxy Lara
Contributor, Manager	Mary Etherington mary@bigbendsentinel.com
Distribution	Gilberto Carrillo
Distribution	Rene Gonzales

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President and Publisher	Roger Black roger@bigbendsentinel.com
Director	Don Gardner
Director	Gonzalo Garcia Barcha
Office	209½ W. El Paso St., Marfa
Mailing address	Drawer P, Marfa, TX 79843
Telephone	(432) 729-4342
Contact	editor@bigbendsentinel.com
Advertising	ads@bigbendsentinel.com

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