

BIG BEND *Sentinel*

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Our 100th Year

Marfa, Texas • TWO DOLLARS

County sheriff signs ICE contract

Agreement won't impact day-to-day policework, says Brewster Sheriff

Brewster County Sheriff's Office (BCSO) joined Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) warrant service officer program at the end of January.

"The warrant service officer program allows ICE to train, certify and authorize state and local law enforcement officers to serve and execute administrative warrants on [undocumented people] in their agency's jail," the official ICE.gov webpage explains.

The agreement is part of ICE's 287(g) program, which partners with local law enforcement agencies to carry out immigration enforcement. The program was launched in January 2025, when President Trump issued a laundry list of border security-related executive orders, and was designed in a political climate where "sanctuary cities"—cities typically run by Democrats that welcome migrants and asylum seekers—became a huge talking point on both sides of the aisle.

In Texas, individual law enforcement agencies don't have much of a choice. June of last year, the Texas Legislature passed SB 8, which opens the door legally for the state attorney general to sue sheriffs' offices that don't comply by December 1, 2026. (The Texas Immigration Law Council called SB 8 "one of the state's most significant immigration enforcement laws"—an impressive achievement in a state with a national reputation for its shock-and-awe approach to border security.)

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BREWSTER COUNTY SHERIFF

Local law enforcement often supports Border Patrol.

INSIDE

"Let's get ready for a fight—a hard fight. Let's start by making some noise about this, shall we?"

—Tyler Priest

Walk on the wild side: We must defend the Ranch! Page 7

Sentinel News Project



SAM KARAS PHOTOS

Alexander Neal of the Texas Rivers Protection Association paddles the river through Big Bend Ranch State Park to document a stretch of the Rio Grande that could be cut off by a border wall.

7 vie for 3 council seats

Marfa

While last year's Marfa City Council elections were canceled after no challengers filed against incumbents Mayor Manny Baeza, Mayor Pro Tem Raul Lara and Councilmember Travis Acreman, this year is a different story with four challengers facing three incumbents. The deadline for filing for the May 2 election was Friday, February 13.

Marfa's elections are run by plurality, meaning the all seats are at large and the top three vote getters are elected to three seats. All seats carry two-year terms.

Incumbents up for the May election are Mark Cash, Mark Morrison and Eddie Pallarez. Challengers are Christopher Johnson, Emily Kolb, Katy Kowal and Sal Tornabene. Johnson is a microbiologist; Kolb runs Mutual Friends Marfa, a coffee shop; Kowal is a baker with Dirty Water Bagels; and Tornabene runs Raba Marfa, a vintage store.

Big Bend Sentinel will be covering the race more closely—particularly on the issue of rezoning land for a new AEP power substation, which will come to council for a vote this year.



The DHS wall proposal stops near this point at the end of Closed Canyon in Big Bend Ranch.

GOVERNMENT BYPASSES ENVIRONMENTAL RULES TO RUSH BIG BEND WALL

Planned projects could also include the National Park

By SAM KARAS

Kristi Noem, Homeland Security secretary, has greenlit construction of a physical border wall in the Big Bend region, fast-tracking the project.

This action, published in the Federal Register, overrides critical protections, including the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, in order to accelerate development.

Secretary Noem explains in the posting that there is "an acute and immediate need to construct additional physical barriers and roads" along the U.S.-Mexico border.

She describes the Big Bend as an "area of high illegal entry," citing 89,000 illegal entry arrests within a four-year period in an area that stretches from Sierra Blanca to Sanderson. "Since the President took office, DHS has delivered the most secure border in history," she boasted. "More can and must be done, however."

The waiver also gives coordinates for the "project area," which stretches from an arroyo downstream of Fort Quitman outside of Sierra Blanca to about a half mile upstream from Closed Canyon in Big Bend Ranch State Park. That area spans approximately 175 miles of the Rio Grande, including around 5 miles of riverfront in the State Park and some of the region's most popular views, trails and river runs.

While the area did share in the large influx in migrant traffic that peaked in 2021, the Big Bend is the largest Border Patrol sector by area and historically the quietest. CBP has released data for the sector as recently as December 2025, when 178 people were caught crossing the border illegally in the Big Bend—in the Rio Grande Valley, also due for wall construc-

tion, that figure was 1,371—a far cry from the numbers Noem cites.

Marfa Public Radio broke the story last Thursday after a provisional draft of the waiver was released online, noting that officials have so far been vague about where a physical steel-bollard wall will be placed and where "Smart Wall" technology including sensors and lights will instead keep watch.

"Depending on terrain and operational requirements, each area may receive any combination of barrier installation, technology deployment, and road improvements," spokesperson Landon Hutchens wrote in a statement.

Gov. Greg Abbott, who appoints members to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission in his role as governor, also told Marfa Public Radio that he "fully supports using every tool and strategy to aid in the Trump administration's deterrence of illegal immigrants."

Messaging coming from D.C. and Austin isn't doing much to convince the vast majority of Big Bend locals that the project is necessary or desirable.

"We do not need a wall!"

Denisse Carrera, who has lived in Presidio for most of her life and has family on both sides of the border, was passionate about the history in and around her hometown, which has been continuously settled and farmed for thousands of years and could be threatened by a major construction project.

It's also the only place in the world where she feels truly comfortable as a young woman going for a run late at night or in the early morning. "We do not need a wall!" she wrote in a post on Instagram. "I feel safe, and I know a lot of others do as well."

In response, a coalition of locals under the handle "No Big Bend Wall" have taken to social media to share pictures, videos and other mementos of their favorite wild places. "Our core message is clear: no walls through our parks," wilderness guide Tyler Priest of Fort Davis posted to the page. (For more from Priest, see his column on page 7).

DHS's wall projects in the Big Bend were a notable side character this week in a different corner of the social media world—namely, conservative media circles on X. Last week, Secretary Noem's chief of staff and longtime alleged affair partner Corey Lewandowski threatened criminal charges against journalist Anna Giaritelli for reporting on complaints within DHS that over 100 miles of wall in the Laredo, Del Rio and Big Bend sectors had been delayed by Noem's alleged inability to sign contracts promptly. (A source told the *Wall Street Journal* that a contract for border wall steel sat on Noem's desk for so long that the price of the order ballooned by \$100 million due to inflation.)

All the gossip in D.C. doesn't seem to be slowing down the wall—in mid-December, Customs and Border Protection was averaging two miles of wall construction per week, but hopes to pick up the pace to 10 miles a week, per the Washington Examiner.

Here in the Big Bend, calls to local landowners seem to have intensified, with folks across Presidio County receiving calls from contractors and engineers about easements and long term housing for large groups of workers.

Continued on page 4

Paisano sells to Terlingua hotel developer

By ROB D'AMICO

Marfa

The historic Hotel Paisano—once temporary home for the cast of the movie *Giant*—has sold to new owners, Lauren Werner King and husband Harrison King.

Werner King founded and runs Willow House, a celebrated casita hotel near Terlingua. She confirmed the purchase on Tuesday. The purchase is still under contract, and she hopes to close in July.

Lanna and Joe Duncan have owned the Paisano, which sits adjacent to the Presidio County Courthouse on Highland Avenue, since they purchased it in 2001 for \$185,000 after it had been foreclosed on for back taxes owed.

The building is a two-story Spanish-colonial style building with a central courtyard. The Paisano is one of four West Texas hotels designed by the legendary architect Henry Trost of El Paso. The others are the Gage in Marathon, the Holland in Alpine and El Capitan in Van Horn, called the Paisano's sister hotel, since they share a similar plan.

"We are so grateful to Joe and Lanna for trusting us with this historic property," Werner King said. "We are so excited! It is a dream project."

"We will keep the hotel operating as is in the short term,"

Werner King said. "Over the summer we will reimagine the dining program entirely with hopes to open the new restaurant and bar by mid September. After the holidays, we will begin to renovate the rooms in phases—only

shutting down the hotel for two months from mid January to mid March. We will be redesigning and managing the hotel ourselves and want to honor the original integrity of the architecture."

Continued on page 4



Hotel Paisano has long been a centerpiece of Marfa life since its opening in 1930.

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Scammer tries to sell man's property twice

Fake listings target a lot for a planned return to sunshine

About 18 months ago, when Lee Cohen got an automatic notification from a real estate website that his Marfa property was for sale, he thought it was odd. "I'm signed up to get alerts about the property, mostly because I was just kind of curious about what's being sold around it and the value of it," he said.

Cohen, who is living in Berlin, said he "hopped out of bed" and called the listing agent—Marfa Realty—and told them, "It's definitely not for sale. I don't know what's going on. And they immediately called me back, and they immediately pulled it down and were super apologetic and super helpful."

The listing for Cohen's Antelope Hills lot was, of course, a scam intended for someone to try to impersonate him and get some kind of traction for a remote sale and transfer of money. The scam is nothing new and has been reportedly attempted all across the United States in the past few years. But Marfa Realty's Kathleen Walstrom said it's the first time she's seen it attempted in the area. "It's new for Marfa, and I don't know the sophistication of scammers, so I don't know if anything can go through without getting caught, but even IDs can be faked," she said.

Walstrom believes it would be extremely difficult to get a sale process through a title company with someone impersonating the owner, but she said it has obviously happened elsewhere, and it's a good heads up to area property owners to be on the lookout for potential scams. National news reporting shows that fake IDs and corrupted notaries can make it work.

Cohen said he thinks it's possible that this person was going after earnest money, which a buyer puts down when starting a sale contract to reserve the property from being sold to someone else. That amount varies, usually 1% to 3% of the sale price. Although that money is held by an escrow agent, a shady or fake agent could be involved in the theft.

Cohen said the scammer tried the same tactic again a few weeks ago with an Alpine real estate agent. Marfa Realty spotted the listing, alerted the agent, and they took it down. He said the person mined public information about him and the property to try to show the agents he was Lee Cohen. The FBI was alerted to the attempts, he said.

The scammer in Cohen's case left a phone number. "I called him and told him, 'You got to stop trying to sell my property,'" Cohen said. "And he said, 'Who is this?' And I said, 'You know who it is! You're trying to impersonate me, and I called the FBI,' and he hung up ... unless he didn't know who it was, because he's doing it on multiple properties and multiple people."

Walstrom said one red flag is sellers not willing to meet in person, or if they are far away, not willing to jump on a video call. Cohen suggested that property owners sign up on Redfin or other real estate websites that provide notifications on changes in property status, and, if a scam is attempted, alert the area title companies and realtors.

Cohen, who used to live in Marfa and work with Ballroom Marfa on music events, said he dreams of returning here someday. "I have no cause to sell it. In a perfect world, I'm 65 years old, I come back to Marfa and put a house on it and get some sunshine after living in darkness for the last 25 years. I lived in Portland and Scotland, and now I live in Berlin, and I'm like, I just want to see the sun."

CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS

Paxton, Crockett leading in polls

Republican Attorney General Ken Paxton and Democratic U.S. Rep. Jasmine Crockett are leading their respective primary campaigns for U.S. Senate, according to a poll released last week by the University of Houston's Hobby School of Public Affairs, the Austin American-Statesman reported. Early voting began February 17 and runs through Feb. 27.

Among Republicans, Paxton led incumbent U.S. Sen. John Cornyn 38% to 31%, U.S. Rep. Wesley Hunt polled at 17%, making it likely that the race will go to a runoff in May if these margins hold. Among Democrats, Crockett led with 47% while state Rep. James Talarico was favored by 39% of respondents.

The margin of error for both parties was plus or minus 4 percentage points. The election is on March 3.

Roy leading in polls in attorney general's race

In the race to succeed Paxton as attorney general, U.S. Rep. Chip Roy, with 33% in the latest poll, leads a crowded GOP field by 10 percentage points, with state Sen. Mayes Middleton in second at 23%. The Texas Tribune reported state Sen. Joan Huffman polled at 13%, and Aaron Reitz, a former federal assistant attorney general, trailed at 6%.

However, 25% of those polled remain undecided in that race.

On the Democratic side, state Sen. Nathan Johnson led with 25% of the 550 people polled, followed by former Galveston mayor Joe Jaworski at 22%. Attorney and former FBI agent Tony Box held 13%.

Fed predicts job growth in Texas in 2026

A new employment forecast by the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas predicts the state will add jobs in 2026, after a flat 2025, The Dallas Morning News reported. The bank's forecast predicts Texas employment will grow by 1.1%, or about 155,000 jobs. That is about half of job growth the state has experienced in recent years.

"We've run our models. We're going with the 1.1% growth, so that is a significant increase from zero, certainly," said Pia Orrenius, a senior economist at the Dallas Fed.

The slower-than-normal employment growth is partly attributable to the Trump administration's restrictive immigration policies and enforcement operations, according to some economists. In a report published by the Fed in October, the authors said the immigration policies were negatively affecting one in five Texas businesses.

"The stepped-up visibility and intensity of enforcement have produced a chilling effect," the authors wrote. "As fear spreads in immigrant communities, foreign-born individuals are more likely to miss work or school and less likely to venture out to shops and restaurants."

State, feds prepare to fight screwworm invasion

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins and Gov. Greg Abbott presided last week over the opening of a new facility in Edinburg to produce sterile flies in order to combat a potential invasion of New World screwworms from Mexico that could threaten the nation's leader in cattle production, The Texas Tribune reported.

Cases of the screwworm, which lays eggs in open wounds on cattle, have been detected in Mexico as close as 70 miles from the border.

"I don't want to underplay it because it is a big threat to our country, but I believe we're as prepared as we could possibly be, if that happens, to deal with it, to move toward eradication," Rollins said. Sterile flies were released last week in Northern Mexico and in Texas within 50 miles of the border as a precautionary measure.

Abbott has issued a disaster declaration to enable a newly formed response team to have adequate resources. The USDA plans to open its own production facility in Edinburg by the end of 2027. For now, the facility is using larvae produced in Panama and flown to Texas.

Abbott breaks with Trump over nationalizing elections

The governor has broken with Trump over the president's call to nationalize elections in some parts of the country, kut.org reported. He was asked about Trump's suggestion at a recent campaign event.

"Listen, my understanding of the United States Constitution, and that is elections for state positions are to be conducted by states, and I don't think we should deviate from that," Abbott said.

Legal experts and some Trump allies highlight that the Constitution grants states the primary authority over elections, making any effort to nationalize the process both legally complicated and logistically challenging.

High stakes for Abbott in comptroller's race

As the Houston Chronicle reported, while Abbott is widely expected to win his primary reelection bid, the governor has a lot on the line in the Texas comptroller's race. Acting comptroller Kelly Hancock, appointed when Glenn Hegar left to become chancellor of the Texas A&M University System, faces a serious challenge from one of the governor's biggest political foes, former state Sen. Don Huffines—who ran and lost to Abbott in 2022. Also on the GOP primary ballot is Railroad Commissioner Christi Craddick.

The winner of that race will oversee the state's new voucher program.

"Succession in Texas politics is on the ballot," said Brandon Rottinghaus, a political scientist at the University of Houston. "There's a lot of jockeying for position for the future of the Republican Party in Texas."

Huffines spent heavily in 2022 in his unsuccessful bid to oust Abbott, calling him a "weak leader" and a "coward." Hancock has vowed to work closely with Abbott.

Galveston's Elissa sailing to New York for 250th celebration

The 1877 "tall ship" Elissa, docked in Galveston Bay, will sail to New York City for the Fourth of July, the Texas Standard reported. The Galveston Historical Foundation purchased the ship in 1979, and it normally serves as a museum. Will Wright, creative director of the foundation, said the ship is one of only two of its kind in the world that can still actively sail.

"Elissa is still traditionally sailed," Wright said. "We benefit from a lot of the technological advances, but at the end of the day, the ship is a sailing ship."

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.

PRESIDIO INTERNATIONAL



SAM KARAS

Gran parte de los accesos más populares al río podrían quedar bloqueados.

SACRIFICAN LEYES AMBIENTALES PARA BLINDAR LA FRONTERA

Los proyectos planificados también podrían incluir el Parque

Por SAM KARAS

A finales de la semana pasada, la secretaria del Departamento de Seguridad Nacional (DHS por sus siglas en inglés), Kristi Noem, autorizó la construcción del muro fronterizo en Big Bend. Para agilizar el proceso, la publicación en el Registro Federal también suspende 28 leyes destinadas a proteger los recursos ambientales y culturales, incluyendo la Ley de Ríos Salvajes y Escénicos y la Ley de Protección y Repatriación de Tumbas de Nativos Americanos.

La secretaria Noem explica en la publicación que existe una “necesidad urgente y urgente de construir barreras físicas y carreteras adicionales” a lo largo de la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México. Describe Big Bend como una “zona de alta entrada ilegal”, citando 89,000 arrestos por entrada ilegal en un período de cuatro años en un área que se extiende desde Sierra Blanca hasta Sanderson. “Desde que el presidente asumió el cargo, el DHS ha logrado la frontera más segura de la historia”, se jactó. “Sin embargo, se puede y se debe hacer más”.

La exención también proporcionalascoordenadasdel“área del proyecto”, que se extiende desde un arroyo aguas abajo de Fort Quitman, a las afueras de Sierra Blanca, hasta aproximadamente mediamillaaguasarriba deClosed Canyon, en el Parque Estatal Big Bend Ranch. Esta área abarca aproximadamente 280 kilómetros del Río Grande, incluyendo alrededor de 8 kilómetros de ribera en el Parque Estatal y algunos de los paisajes, senderos y cauces fluviales más populares de la región.

Si bien el área se vio afectada

por la gran afluencia de migrantes que alcanzó su punto máximo en 2021, Big Bend es el sector más grande de la Patrulla Fronteriza por área e históricamente el más tranquilo. La CBP publicó datos del sector tan recientes como diciembre de 2025, cuando 178 personas fueron detenidas cruzando la frontera ilegalmente en Big Bend (en el Valle del Río Grande, donde también se construirá el muro, la cifra fue de 1371), cifras muy diferentes a las que cita Noem.

La *Radio Pública de Marfa* dio a conocer la noticia el jueves pasado, tras la publicación en línea de un borrador provisional de la exención. Señaló que, hasta el momento, los funcionarios han sido imprecisos sobre dónde se instalará un muro de bolardos de acero y dónde se instalará la tecnología “Smart Wall”, que incluye sensores y luces, para su vigilancia. “Depende de la frontera más segura de la historia”, se jactó. “Sin embargo, se puede y se debe hacer más”.

El gobernador Greg Abbott, quien designa a los miembros de la Comisión de Parques y Vida Silvestre de Texas en su calidad de gobernador, también declaró a la *Radio Pública de Marfa* que “apoya plenamente el uso de todas las herramientas y estrategias para ayudar a la administración Trump a disuadir a los inmigrantes indocumentados”.

Los mensajes procedentes de Washington D.C. y Austin no están convenciendo a la gran mayoría de los residentes de Big Bend de la necesidad o conveniencia del proyecto. Denisse Carrera, quien ha vivido en Presidio la mayor parte de su vida y tiene familia a ambos lados de la frontera, sentía pasión por la historia de su pueblo natal y sus alrededores, que ha estado habitado y cultivado continuamente durante miles de años y podría verse amenazado por un gran

proyecto de construcción. También es el único lugar del mundo donde se siente realmente cómoda, como joven, saliendo a correr tarde en la noche o temprano en la mañana. “¿No necesitamos un muro?”, escribió en una publicación de Instagram. “Me siento segura, y sé que muchos otros también”.

En respuesta, una coalición de lugareños bajo el nombre de usuario “No Big Bend Wall” ha recurrido a las redes sociales para compartir fotos, videos y otros recuerdos de sus parajes naturales favoritos.

A mediados de diciembre, la Oficina de Aduanas y Protección Fronteriza promediaba 3 kilómetros de construcción de muro por semana, pero espera acelerar el ritmo a 16 kilómetros semanales, según el *Washington Examiner*.

Aquí en Big Bend, las llamadas a los terratenientes locales parecen haberse intensificado, con residentes de todo el condado de Presidio recibiendo llamadas de contratistas e ingenieros sobre servidumbres y alojamiento a largo plazo para grandes grupos de trabajadores. Porque la gran mayoría de la frontera es.

Al cierre de la edición del Big Bend Sentinel, los planes para un nuevo proyecto de muro, denominado “Big Bend 4”, se añadieron a un mapa interactivo en línea mantenido por el DHS. Se prevé que dicho proyecto se extienda a lo largo de 178 kilómetros y abarque gran parte de la ribera del Parque Nacional Big Bend, excluyendo los cañones de Santa Elena, Mariscal y Boquillas. El muro podría cortar el acceso al río a los campamentos de Cottonwood y Río Grande Village, así como al popular Distrito Histórico de Hot Springs. (No se pudo contactar inmediatamente a portavoces del DHS ni del Servicio de Parques Nacionales para que hicieran comentarios, pero el *Sentinel* proporcionará información actualizada a medida que se disponga de ella).

Sheriff de Brewster oficializa acuerdo con ICE

Por SAM KARAS

A finales de enero, la Oficina del Sheriff del Condado de Brewster (BCSO por sus siglas en inglés) se unió al programa de oficiales de servicio de orden judicial del Servicio de Inmigración y Control de Aduanas (ICE por sus siglas en inglés). “El programa de oficiales de servicio de orden judicial permite a ICE capacitar, certificar y autorizar a agentes del orden público estatales y locales para entregar y ejecutar órdenes administrativas contra [personas indocumentadas] en la cárcel de su oficina”, explica la página web oficial de ICE.gov.

El acuerdo forma parte del programa 287(g) de ICE, que colabora con las agencias policiales locales para llevar a cabo la aplicación de las leyes de inmigración. El programa se lanzó en enero de 2025, cuando el presidente Trump emitió una larga lista de órdenes ejecutivas

relacionadas con la seguridad fronteriza, y se diseñó en un clima político donde las “ciudades santuario” (ciudades generalmente gobernadas por demócratas que acogen a migrantes y solicitantes de asilo) se convirtieron en un tema de conversación recurrente en ambos partidos.

En Texas, las agencias policiales individuales no tienen muchas opciones. En junio del año pasado, la Legislatura de Texas aprobó la ley SB 8, que abre la puerta legal para que el fiscal general del estado demande a las oficinas del sheriff que no cumplan antes del 1 de diciembre de 2026. (El Consejo de Derecho de Inmigración de Texas calificó la SB 8 como “una de las leyes de aplicación de la ley migratoria más importantes del estado”, un logro impresionante en un estado con reputación nacional por su enfoque impactante en la seguridad fronteriza).

El sheriff Dodson afirmó que el programa no cambiaría la forma

en que él o sus oficiales abordan su trabajo policial y es simplemente una expresión formal, en papel y tinta, de cómo la BCSO ha trabajado con agencias como la Patrulla Fronteriza durante décadas. “Básicamente, lo que hacemos es que, si atrapamos a alguien en situación ilegal, notificamos a ICE”, explicó. “Simplemente lo hacemos porque el gobernador quiere que lo hagamos; no los llamamos con tanta frecuencia”.

Dodson afirma que el acuerdo podría tener un impacto positivo en un problema persistente en la cárcel: el condado se lucra con los reclusos federales, pero no ve ningún beneficio económico en alojar a los reclusos estatales. Como resultado de la ofensiva migratoria del presidente Trump, las cifras en Big Bend son tan bajas que las ganancias de la cárcel se han reducido a un mínimo. “Económicamente, lo que yo llamo nuestro ‘dinero extra’ se ha agotado”, explicó Dodson.

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Alpine private schools have questions on vouchers

By GINA VERA

With parent applications for the Texas Education Freedom Accounts (TEFA) program open, Alpine’s two private schools are on the list of vendors but are still unsure of what will be required of them and what the impact, if any, will be.

The window for parents to apply for financial aid to pay for their children’s private education through what is commonly called the state’s school voucher program opened on February 4 and will run through March 17 for the 2026-2027 school year.

Alpine Christian School, a private school offering kindergarten through 12th grade, and Alpine Montessori School, a private school offering the Montessori curriculum format for grades kindergarten through 6th, are the only schools listed as vendors in the TEFA program for the tri-county area.

But while things are moving forward with parents potentially filling out applications and schools on the vendor list, officials at both schools are uncertain of everything from how money will be distributed to how special education services and food will be paid for, what testing will be required and whether parents will want to apply with testing as a requirement.

Krista Gilbert, the office administrator at Alpine Montessori School, said the process of becoming a TEFA vendor “felt extremely self-guided.” By that, she meant that it felt like they were on their own. “So we obviously work with tons of state entities, both from a financial assistance standpoint and just a regular licensing standpoint,” she said. “And in most of those, we have like a point of contact or a representative that we’re able to, you know, communicate with about anything little or anything big.” Gilbert added that there was no point of contact for this process. “And I would say that’s the one component that really feels like it’s missing,” she said.

Graydon Hicks, a member of the administrative team at Alpine Christian School, has multiple

specific questions regarding the paths funds will take, the services that will need to be provided, and the testing that will be required.

And, while he has reached out to state officials and representatives of Odyssey, the company selected by the state to administer the voucher program, he hasn’t gotten any answers.

“They’re just not offering a lot of information,” Hicks said, “I mean, there are so many more questions than there are answers.”

A key question is what testing will look like for TEFA participants and how reporting will occur.

According to information provided by Odyssey, “TEFA program participants in grades 3-12 enrolled in an approved private school are required to take an approved nationally norm-referenced or state-approved assessment each year. ... Parents are required to provide results to Odyssey to verify compliance with program requirements.”

Hicks said the information is unclear about how students in upper grade levels will be tested and how many tests they will take. Students in upper-grade levels in public schools take course tests, not grade-level tests. And the Texas Education Agency recently changed public school testing requirements, moving from yearly tests to beginning-of-year, mid-year, and end-of-year tests given each year.

“They reference back to the education code, which references back to the same tests that public school kids take,” Hicks said. “Then they come back to the statute on the vouchers, and so it didn’t say exactly on the voucher system ... There’s no one-for-one. You don’t go straight from one to the other.”

Hicks also questions the feasibility of having parents report their students’ test scores, wondering what would happen if parents forget to report or do not complete the report correctly.

“So do they lose eligibility?” Hicks questioned. “Do they have to repay money? Does the school get penalized?”

Several of Hick’s questions center on money, including how schools and staff will get paid and

what will happen when funds for students with disabilities run out.

Some schools outsource disability services and food, Hicks said. Alpine Christian is part of an area partnership called a “588 Coop” for disability services. “If the school’s tuition is \$10,600, but the child is special ed, and they gotta provide services, who gets paid for those services?” Hicks said.

And while the TEFA program provides \$30,000 for disability services for special needs students, it is often not enough to cover all that is called for in a student’s individual education plan, Hicks said.

“It’s not clear to me that the private school can bill for those extra services that may be required under that child’s individual education plan,” Hicks said.

Hicks also doubts that the questions will matter once parents realize that the cost of the financial aid is testing for their children.

He doesn’t believe many parents will participate because the primary reason they send their children to a private school is so they won’t have to take tests, Hicks said.

Texas’ Senate Bill 2, passed in 2025, established a \$1 billion budget to fund financial aid for parents who want to send their children to private schools through the Texas Education Freedom Account program.

According to the official website of the TEFA program, the Texas Education Agency has set the amount available for the average attending student at about \$10,475 and for a student with disabilities at about \$30,000 for the 2026-2027 school year. Parents of homeschooled children could be eligible for \$2,000 through the program.

Sentinel staff reached out to the Texas Comptroller’s office for information on the number of parents that have applied for the TEFA program listing Alpine Christian School and Alpine Montessori as the vendor, but had not heard back at deadline. However, information released by the comptroller’s office on February 16 said that more than 100,000 people had completed applications for schools across the state.

ICE contract required

Continued from page 1

Sheriff Dodson said that the program would not change the way he or his officers approach their policework and is simply a formal ink-and-paper expression of how the BCSO has worked with agencies like the Border Patrol for decades. “Basically what we’re doing is, if we catch somebody that’s illegal, we notify ICE,” he explained. “We’re just doing it because the governor wants us to do it—we don’t call them that often.”

Dodson says that the agreement could have a positive impact on a persistent problem at the jail: the county makes money off of federal inmates, but sees no financial benefit from housing state inmates. As a result of President Trump’s immigration enforcement crackdown, numbers in the Big Bend are so low that profit from the jail has slowed to a trickle. “Financially, what I call our ‘extra money’ is gone,” Dodson explained.

In January, Dodson and Sheriff Danny Dominguez of Presidio County met with Gov. Greg Abbott to discuss these issues and their personal experiences working in law enforcement on the border. Abbott advised them that there might be grant opportunities at the state level. SB 8 also provides grant-funding opportunities proportional to the size of each county. (Dominguez has not yet signed a similar agreement for Presidio County.)

Wall moves forward

Continued from page 1

As Big Bend Sentinel went to press, plans for a new wall project—named “Big Bend 4”—were added to an interactive online map maintained by DHS. That project is slated to stretch over 111 miles and encompass much of the riverfront in Big Bend National Park, with the exclusion of Santa Elena, Mariscal and Boquillas canyons. The wall could potentially cut off Cottonwood and Rio Grande Village campgrounds from river access, as well as the popular Hot Springs Historic District. Spokespeople for DHS and the National Park Service were not immediately available for comment.

Marfa’s historic hotel to change hands

Continued from page 1

The hotel has been a centerpiece of Marfa life with variations on its function since its opening in 1930. Families gathered in its popular restaurant for decades to share stories in a town where everyone knew each other and the cooks and other employees.

It is a popular destination hotel that includes old-fashioned hotel amenities, like a gift shop arcade

with an art gallery, and Jett’s Grill, a traditional restaurant with a large bar, tables spilling out into the courtyard. The hotel is decorated with pictures of Elizabeth Taylor and Rock Hudson from the movie Giant. Rooms carry the signature names of cast members, like the “James Dean Room.”

El Paisano Hotel is a Historic Texas Landmark and is listed on the National Register of Historic

Places. The Duncans, who also own El Capitan hotel in Van Horn and The Lodge at Cloudcroft in New Mexico, could not be immediately reached for comment.

Werner King built the Willow House in 2018-2019 on the outskirts of Terlingua, about six miles from the entrance to Big Bend National Park. The Judd-style casitas offer views of the Chisos Mountains and the surrounding desert.

Werner King and Harrison King live in Marfa with their 11-month-old son, Dolan. Harrison King is the son of James and Tammy King of Fort Davis. He works alongside his father at King Land and Water, a conservation-based ranch real estate company located in Fort Davis.

“We want this to be an asset to the community and a warm space for locals and travelers to gather,” Werner King said.

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Valentine population spikes—for one day

While Shinyribs (bottom) and three other bands lit up the stages at the Mercantile in Valentine on Saturday, the local Valentine Bar (top) offered a respite to sit down for a talk with hundreds of visitors to the tiny town for the annual Valentine’s in Valentine.

Photographs by JENNIFER PITTINGER



Marfa Live Arts awards student playwrights

In January, Marfa High School students participated in the 15th annual Marfa Live Arts (MLA) Playwriting Program. The program was taught by Cal Poly University playwright professor Ramón Esquivel, who shared his thoughts on teaching Marfa’s youth.

“It was exciting to talk playwriting with high school students who all had experience writing plays before,” he said. “Some students even wrote sequels to plays that they had written in previous MLA residencies. So many students wrote dialogue for characters that spoke and listened like real people, and that reflects good communication skills. I was touched by how interested students were in each other’s ideas and work. Some even based characters on their friends in the classroom. It reflects how making theatre is about creating shared experiences.”

On the students’ writing styles, Esquivel noted, “A common thread running through most plays was the need for individuals to stand up to a danger or threat to protect themselves or others, like family or friends. The most common style was realism: sometimes, it was just friends hanging out, but then something dramatic happens. A few scripts tapped into horror and supernatural elements. I was heartened by the range of styles because I encouraged students to write plays that they were interested in.”

He continued, “It is extraordinary that Marfa Live Arts has de-



TINA RIVERA

Marfa Live Arts award-winning Marfa High School students: Liliana Zubia, Seth Nuñez, Diego Sanchez Bravo, Jose Munoz, Itzel Urrutia and Christopher Huerta.

veloped a program to work with all high school and middle school students in Marfa, and that the teachers and administrators are committed to this program and have been for over 15 years.”

Award-winning 2026 student playwrights were: freshmen first place-*What Moves in the Dark* by Seth Nuñez, honorable mention to *The Backflip* by Liliana Zubia; sophomores first place-*Tornado Warning in Mississippi* by Ora Webb, honorable mention to *The Appalachian Woods* by Diego Sanchez; juniors first place-*Chasing Scrubs* by Itzel Urrutia, honorable mention to *The Legendary Boxer* by Jose Muñoz-Bueno; seniors first place-*The Quiet After* by Christopher Huerta, honorable mention to *Only the Moon* by Piper Donaldson.

The first-place winners will have their works staged and brought to life by local adult actors at the Crowley Theater on Wednesday, March 4, at 7 p.m. The community is invited to this annual feel-good event.

The Playwriting Program is supported by Texas Commission on the Arts and Marfa Education Foundation. In its 15th year, the annual Marfa Live Arts program has resulted in over 1,150 one-act plays written by Marfa students. For more information see www.marfalivearts.org.



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AROUND THE BIG BEND

Thursday February 19

Boxing at Maintenant
7:30am-9:00am
Maintenant, 1825 Rabbits Rd.
Marfa, TX



Hike with Homeless Dogs
10:00am-11:00am
Davis Mountains State Park
Fort Davis, TX

Silent Book Club
6:00pm-8:00pm
Alcove Social, 211 E Holland Ave
Alpine, TX

Friday February 20



Birding For Beginners
9:00am-10:30am
Davis Mountains State Park
Park Rd 3
Fort Davis, TX

Desert Adaptations
Night Hike
Big Bend Ranch State Park
21800 FM170
Terlingua, TX

Saturday February 21

Pards – Lone Star Cowboy
Poetry Gathering
1:00pm-1:45pm
SRSU Marshall Auditorium
Alpine, TX

Art in the Park
2:00pm-3:00pm
Davis Mountains State Park
Park Rd 3
Fort Davis, TX

Live Music:
Connor Palomino
7:00pm-10:00pm
Alcove Social, 211 E Holland Ave
Alpine, TX

Sunday February 22

Boxing at Maintenant
9:00am-11:00am
Maintenant, 1825 Rabbits Rd.
Marfa, TX



5:00pm-8:00pm
Alcove Social, 211 E Holland Ave
Alpine, TX

Tuesday February 24

Brewster Commissioners
Court Regular Meeting
9:30am
Alpine, TX

Jeff Davis Commissioners
Court Meeting
10:00am-11:00am
Fort Davis, TX



Trivia Tuesday!
7:00pm-9:00pm
Alcove Social, 211 E Holland Ave
Alpine, TX

Wednesday Feb. 25

Telescopes 101 Workshop
6:45pm
McDonald Observatory
3640 Dark Sky Dr
Fort Davis, TX

CROSSWORD

I Need Space!
By John Holmes

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60						61					62			
63						64					65			

Edited by David Steinberg

- ACROSS**

1 Cpl.'s superior

4 Poisonous atmosphere

10 British trolley car

14 Is for many?

15 Being borrowed

16 Jewish wedding dance

17 How a paddle is used at an auction house

19 Chimpanzee and gorilla, for two

20 Landmass that includes Latvia and Laos

21 Most tidy

23 Militaristic city-state of antiquity

24 Stately trees

25 Where you may find music stands

31 Holiday candelabras

35 High-fat diet

36 Acrobat company

37 Alphabetical nickname

39 Nilla cookie

40 Attains

41 Writer such as Joan Diodon or Susan Sontag

43 How priests dress

47 Apple assistant
- 25 Shohei of baseball

53 Excuse for not turning in homework

56 Prophets

57 sci (study of govt.)

58 Where you may hear cover songs

60 Oscar-winning Ben Affleck film

61 Real surname of Dr. Seuss

62 End of Stanford's URL

63 James or Jimmy

64 Obfuscate, as a message

65 Pumpnickel ingredient
- 11 Plastic Clue weapon

12 Greek god of war

13 Sail support

18 Exam for a law graduate

22 Theater chain

26 Agcy. that oversees FEMA

27 Lauder of cosmetics

28 Mortgage deal, for short

29 14-Across, in French

30 Kind

31 Three nativity visitors

32 Biblical garden

33 Punishment for a '90s kid

34 Fixation

38 Org. with aircraft carriers

39 Like some kids' markers or paint
- 42 Legendary

44 Basic dog command

45 Prioritization process

46 Glove alternative

49 Fort Worth sch.

50 Change slightly

51 Not self-reliant

52 Problem

53 Top-selling tablet

54 Folktales and such

55 Russian name meaning "holy"

56 Words after an estimate

59 Spasm

PREVIOUS PUZZLE ANSWER

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SUDUKO

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★☆

SOLUTION:

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

Hard work, faith and the land moved Ragland

JEAN ANN Wagoner Ragland, 87, of Alpine, Texas, passed away on February 6, 2026, at Odessa Regional Medical Center.

Jean was born on June 25, 1938, in Arlington, Texas, to Robert and Emma Wagoner. She fell in love and married Bobby Ragland in 1957, and together they made their home in Mansfield, Texas, before retiring to Alpine in 1980.

Both her father and her husband were cattle ranchers, a way of life that deeply shaped Jean's appreciation for hard work, faith, and the land.

Jean loved her mountain views and cherished the quiet beauty of Alpine, which she proudly called home for 46 years. She was a devoted member of the Alpine Church of Christ, where she found community and friendship. Her church family held a special place in her heart.

She is survived by her daughter,



ter, Cheryl Ann Ragland, and granddaughter, Sarah Celeste; her son, Kevin Mark Ragland, and grandchildren Courtney Sage and Conner Riley; her nephews Lynn, John, and Matt Day; as well as numerous friends and her beloved church family.

Jean was preceded in death by her parents, Robert and Emma Wagoner; her husband, Bobby Ragland; her sister, Emma Nell; and her mother-in-law, Dorothy Ragland.

Jean will be remembered for her strong spirit, deep faith, and devotion to her family, her

church, and the West Texas landscape she so dearly loved.

The family extends heartfelt gratitude to the doctors, nurses, and staff of Big Bend Regional Medical Center and Odessa Regional Medical Center for their kindness, compassion, and care.

Funeral services were held Thursday, February 12, 2026, at the Alpine Church of Christ, with visitation at 9 a.m. and ceremony at 11 a.m. Burial followed at Elm Grove Cemetery, with a lunch reception afterward at the church annex.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the Alpine Church of Christ.

Services are entrusted to Alpine Memorial Funeral Home and gifts and condolences may be left by visiting www.alpinememorialfuneralhome.com.

To publish an obituary in Sentinel, send by email to: editor@bigbendsentinel.com. Please accompany your message with a photograph. There is no charge. Copy received by the end of the day Friday will appear in the following week's paper.

CLASSIFIEDS AND PUBLIC NOTICES

PUBLIC AWARENESS

PUBLIC AWARENESS INFORMATION ON NATURAL GAS
The City of Marfa operates a natural gas distribution system. The gas pipes are located underground in the City's streets and alleys.

- Natural Gas Safety Tips**
- Service Natural Gas appliances periodically
 - Don't use a gas range to heat a room
 - Keep litter and flammables away from gas hot water heaters
 - Prevent carbon monoxide poisoning by proper appliance installation, maintenance and use
 - Teach your family to recognize the smell of natural gas

- You can recognize a gas leak by:**
- Dead or dying vegetation
 - Unusual changes to soil
 - Dry, blowing dirt
 - Bubbling water
 - Corrosion or physical damage
 - Insect swarms or dead flies
 - Smell of odorized gas
 - Hissing sound

- Natural Gas Hazards**
- Natural Gas is flammable and can ignite when it comes into contact with an ignition source
 - In confined spaces, exposure can cause dizziness, asphyxiation and may be toxic, if inhaled at high concentrations
 - Natural gas may contain H2S
 - May cause asphyxiation, burns, bodily injury, fatality, and property damage

- Natural Gas Facts**
- Natural Gas is a clean, economical, and efficient fuel
 - Natural gas is very safe when used and handled properly
 - Natural gas is non-toxic and non-poisonous
 - Natural gas has excellent safety record
- If you suspect a gas leak:**
- Leave the area immediately
 - Do not operate electrical appliances
 - Do not operate electrical switches
 - Call the gas department for help on a phone away from a leak
 - Eliminate ignition sources and secure leak area
 - Do not operate motor vehicles near leak area and provide traffic control as needed

REPORT GAS LEAKS BY CALLING (432)729-1998, (432) 295-3050 OR 911

REMEMBER: STOP BEFORE YOU DIG!!
Law requires you to call **811** 48 hours before any excavation project begins so gas and other lines can be located in advance.

1. Call 811 before excavation begins
2. Wait required time (48 hours)
3. Respects the marks and city's underground gas lines marked in yellow
4. Dig with care

The leading causes of pipeline incidents is third party digging without proper notification to 811.

The City of Marfa Gas Department is committed to the safety of our community as well as the safety of the environment.

- Priorities in the event of emergencies**
- Protection of life
 - Protection of property
- This would include the following programs: Damage Prevention and Emergency Response

For additional information call or write to:
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113 S Highland Ave
Po Box 787
Marfa, Texas 79843
432-729-1998

INFORMACIÓN DE CONCIENCIACIÓN PÚBLICA SOBRE EL GAS NATURAL
La ciudad de Marfa opera un sistema de distribución de gas natural Las tuberías de gas se encuentran bajo tierra en las calles y callejones de la ciudad.

- Consejos de seguridad para el gas natural**
- Dar servicio a los aparatos de gas natural periódicamente
 - No use una estufa de gas para calentar una habitación
 - Mantenga los litros y los productos inflamables alejados de los calentadores de agua a gas
 - Evite el envenenamiento por monóxido de carbono mediante la instalación, el mantenimiento y el uso adecuados de los electrodomésticos.
 - Enseñe a su familia a reconocer el olor del gas natural

- Puede reconocer una fuga de gas por:**
- Vegetación muerta o moribunda
 - Cambios inusuales en el suelo
 - Suciedad seca y soplada
 - Agua burbujeante
 - Corrosión o daños físicos
 - Enjambres de insectos o moscas muertas
 - Olor a gas odorizado
 - Sonido de silbido

- Peligros del gas natural**
- El gas natural es inflamable y puede encenderse cuando entra en contacto con una fuente de ignición
 - En espacios confinados, la exposición puede causar mareos, asfixia y puede ser tóxica si se inhala en altas concentraciones
 - El gas natural puede contener H2S
 - Puede causar asfixia, quemaduras, lesiones corporales, muerte y daños a la propiedad

- Datos sobre el gas natural**
- El gas natural es un combustible limpio, económico y eficiente
 - El gas Natural es muy seguro cuando se usa y se maneja correctamente
 - El gas natural no es tóxico ni venenoso
 - El gas natural tiene un excelente historial de seguridad

- Si sospecha de una fuga de gas:**
- Abandone el área inmediatamente
 - No opere aparatos eléctricos
 - No opere interruptores eléctricos
 - Llame al departamento de gas para pedir ayuda a un teléfono de distancia de una fuga
 - Elimine las fuentes de ignición y asegure el área de fuga
 - No opere vehículos motorizados cerca del área de fugas y proporcione control de tráfico según sea necesario

REPORTE FUGAS DE GAS LLAMANDO AL (432)729-1998, (432) 295-3050 O 911

- RECUERDA: ¡DETENTE ANTES DE CAVAR!**
La ley requiere que Harné al **811** 48 horas antes de cualquier. Se inicia el proyecto de excavación para que el gas y otros.
- Las líneas se pueden localizar con anticipación.
1. Llame al 811 antes de que comience la excavación
 2. Tiempo de espera requerido (48 horas)
 3. Respeta las marcas y las líneas de gas subterráneas de la ciudad marcadas en amarillo
 4. Cava con cuidado

Las principales causas de incidentes en las tuberías son de terceros excavando sin la debida notificación al 811.

El Departamento de Gas de la Ciudad de Marfa está comprometido a la seguridad de nuestra comunidad, así como a la seguridad del medio ambiente.

Prioridades en caso de emergencia

- Protección de la vida
- Protección de la propiedad

Esto incluiría los siguientes programas: Prevención de daños y respuesta a emergencias

Para información adicional llame o escriba a:
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Apartado de correos 787
Marfa, Texas 79843
432-729-1998

PROCUREMENT OF ENGINEERING RFQ #26-01 & ADMINISTRATION/ PROFESSIONAL SERVICES RFP #26-01 FOR APPLICATION PREPARATION AND GRANT CONTRACT IMPLEMENTATION SERVICES PUBLIC NOTICE
The County of Presidio seeks to develop an application to the Texas Department of Agriculture for the 2026-2027 Community Development Fund for eligible activities associated to the Texas Community Development Block Grant Program. Accordingly, Presidio County is separately soliciting (A) RFP #26-01 proposals from Administrative Consultants for Application Preparation and Project Administration and (B) RFQ #26-01-qualifications from Texas-Registered Engineers to provide engineering services associated to Application Preparation and Project Implementation. Firms and/or individuals should have past experience with federally funded programs. Please submit a proposal of services and/or a statement of qualifications to countyauditor@co.presidio.tx.us or submit 5 copies to:

Presidio County Auditor
Alicia V Sanchez
PO BOX 423
Marfa, TX 79843

Proposals shall be received by the County no later than 4:00 pm on 03/13/2026. The same firm will not be awarded contracts to provide both services. The County reserves the right to negotiate with any and all individuals or firms that submit proposals, as per the Texas Professional Services Procurement Act and the Uniform Grant and Contract Management Standards. Section 3 Residents and Business Concerns, Minority Business Enterprises, Small Business Enterprises, Veteran Business Enterprises and Women Business Enterprises are encouraged to submit proposals.

The County of Presidio is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer

HELP WANTED

FULL-TIME HOUSEKEEPER
15 jobs w/ Big Bend Outdoor Center LLC dba Far Flung Outdoors in Terlingua, TX, Brewster County. Clean lodging rooms, remove dirty linens & towels, remove trash from rooms. Make bed w/ clean linens/blankets, dust, wipe down furniture, & remove debris. Vacuum, sweep, & mop floor. Clean bathrooms: toilet, sink, shower, vanity, & floors. Restock storage room & carts w/ towels, amenities, trash bags, & cleaning supplies provided. Clean common areas & kitchens & perform deep clean of rooms & common areas. Must lift/carry 35 lbs., When nec. Pre-employ background checks req'd of all workers in position, both foreign & domestic. Sat. & Sun. work required, when necessary. No experience nec. Email resume to jess@bigbendfarflung.com or mail to 23310 FM170 Terlingua, TX 79852.

OPINION

A walk on the wild side: We must defend the Ranch

THE RANCH is weighing heavy on my mind. I'm not talking about a private ranch, though it once was one of the largest private cattle ranches in the entire country. I'm talking about a ranch we collectively share as Texans. Yes, believe it or not, you have a ranch in the borderlands of Far West Texas. Congratulations. For just \$5, all 300,000-plus acres can be yours for the day.

The Ranch is big, it's beautiful, it's rugged, and it's pristine. And in 1991, it became a state park—one so big that you could almost fit the rest of Texas' state parks system inside it. I speak, of course, of Big Bend Ranch State Park. And over the last decade, it's become my favorite place to get lost and my home in the wild.

On the Ranch I've paddled through the brown volcanic corridors of the Rio's Colorado Canyon. I've climbed the high peaks of Oso to the west and Fresno to the east, which overlooks a 10-mile-wide collapsed volcanic dome, a range of perfect concentric circles known as El Solitario. I've backpacked a 100-plus mile loop through the park, drinking water from pristine oases the park is known for. I've scrambled up into rock shelters and seen a pictograph of a 20-foot-long black serpent stretching across the wall. I've come across metates and morteros and perfect arrow points and touched rock that's half a billion years old.

And as the first commercial backpacking guide in the park's history, I've now guided several trips in the park, including the first half of the Big Bend 100, which traverses the state park some 50 miles from northwest to southeast. And I've introduced several new backpackers to the beauty of desert backpacking in Fresno Canyon, whose side canyons hold some of the tallest waterfalls in Texas. I've given my blood, sweat and tears to this park. I derive great joy and a seasonal livelihood from the Ranch.

But the Ranch is heavy on my mind. The Ranch is under serious threat—the greatest threat it has faced in its 35 years as a state park. Thanks to local investigative journalists like Sam Karas and Rob D'Amico here at the aptly named Big Bend Sentinel, as well as Mary Cantrell and Travis Bubenik at Marfa Public Radio, it's just come to light that there is an intentionally quiet and opaque plan by the Department of Homeland Security to destroy the very crown jewel of the Texas State Parks system. And so I'm sounding the alarm and rallying defenders.

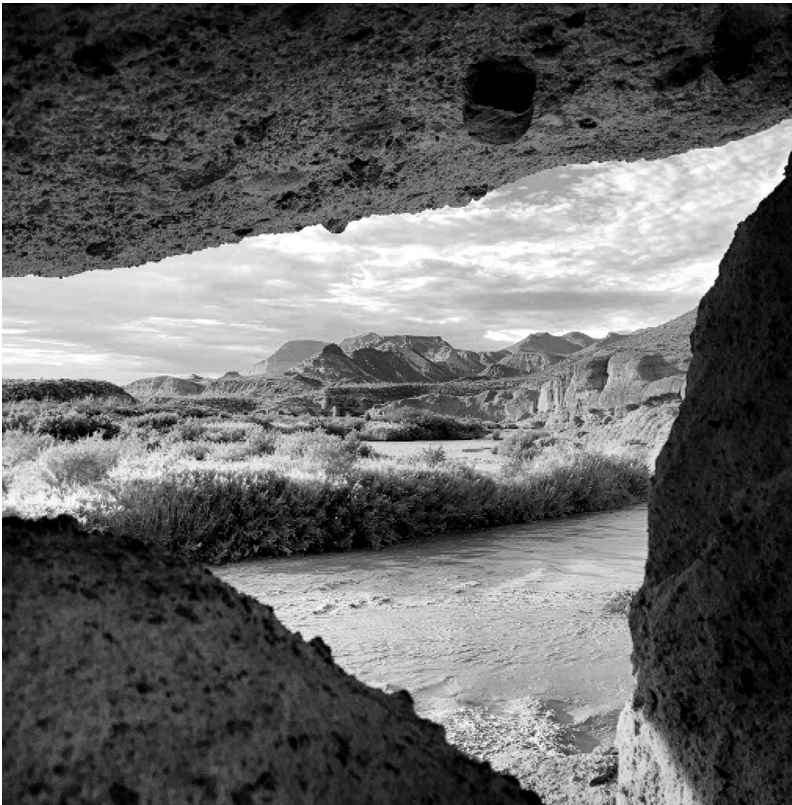
There are plans now underway for the construction of a border wall to rip through the western half of Big Bend Ranch State Park's Rio Grande river corridor. This could be a 20-mile long, at times 100-foot wide, 30-foot tall scar across the wildest, most beautiful state park in Texas. We are at risk having one of the prettiest places in Texas sacrificed for an industrial wall that in these parts is more of a xenophobic symbol than a necessary barrier.

A wall through the region, and particularly through the state park, would be an irreparable catastrophe on many levels. We are standing on the brink of an environmental disaster, an archaeological disaster, a wildlife disaster, a cultural disaster, a recreational disaster, a tourism disaster, a dark skies disaster, a quality of life disaster, an aesthetic disaster and a regional economic disaster all rolled into one ugly steel curtain set to be unfurled across the Big Bend.

I'm not having it. And I trust that if you give a damn for one of the last and best wild places in Texas, you won't have it, either.

A wall stands against everything that our parks stand for. Parks are about protecting intact landscapes. Parks are about allowing wildlife to move freely. Parks are about protecting natural scenic beauty and allowing nature to prevail. Parks are about allowing rivers and creeks to flow freely. Parks are about bringing people together around shared values of conservation—of collectively stewarding our public land—what little we have in Texas. Parks are about having fun, connecting with the natural world, lowering our stress levels, being wowed by scenic beauty, and breaking down barriers that tend to keep us separated.

A wall is everything that a park is not. And a park is everything that a wall is not. And never the twain shall meet. Not on my watch.



A window through the Hoodoos in Big Bend Ranch State Park.

IF YOU'VE NEVER BEEN to the state park yourself, you might still be skeptical that anything there is really worth preserving. There's already a national park, right? Well, I'm happy to show you the state park, but how long do you have? If you can set aside your responsibilities and take off a week, and if you can hike 20 miles a day with a fully loaded backpack, I'll take you on my 135-mile backpacking loop through the park. And by then, trust me—you'll get it.

But you probably don't have the time or the desire to do something like that. So let's carve out a day and drive down Big Bend Ranch's River Road, arguably the most scenic drive in Texas. We'll make several beautiful stops and do at least two short hikes—particularly one of them while we still can.

But if you don't have a day to spend in Big Bend Ranch, let me make an even more succinct case. Within the park's current boundaries, so much would be destroyed and stolen from us by a monstrous border wall, but let me highlight just one little spot we currently stand to be cut off from completely. We'd lose the Hoodoos Trail. And that in itself should be tragic enough to stop a godforsaken wall.

The Hoodoos Trail, on the western portion of FM 170, follows closely behind Closed Canyon as the second most popular hike in the state park. A hoodoo is a tall, irregularly shaped rock formed by erosion. These strange, mushroom-shaped marvels stand above the banks of the Rio Grande like giant abstract pieces of art, telling ancient stories of volcanoes, rains, floods, wind and time. Set against the Big Bend skies with the Rio winding below, it's a thing of Instagram dreams.

The Hoodoos parking lot is easily one of the best views along the western portion of River Road. Looking west you see the big skies of the Big Bend before the winding Rio enters the tight confines of

Colorado Canyon. The view takes in the wild geology and the imposing and multi-layered Bofecillos Mountains to the north. And to the east, River Road rises and falls along a chipsealed roller coaster track before also disappearing into Colorado Canyon.

The Hoodoos Trail is notably one of only two dog-friendly trails in the entire state park. I love meeting other people's dogs at Hoodoos. It's also a place where you (and your furry friends) can access the flowing waters of the Rio Grande. There's a grassy, sandy beach along a bend in the river, and it's the perfect place to hike down to with a blanket and a book and a picnic. A large boulder sits across on the Mexican banks, and below that is what I regard as the best swimming hole in the park.

Hoodoos is one of the most relaxing spots in the park because of the nearby rapids. The sound of the rushing, cascading waters bounces off the 30-foot tall natural wall on the Mexico side, drowning out the noise of motorists cruising down River Road. It's the perfect white noise for an afternoon nap on the banks of the Rio.

For those who've never had the chance to visit Hoodoos, if you've ever watched Richard Linklater's movie Boyhood to the very end, you've seen the Hoodoos. The filming of the movie spanned 12 years as it follows a 6-year-old boy named Mason who, in the span of 3 hours, grows up into a thoughtful and articulate 18-year-old college freshman. Nostalgic scenes include iconic Texas spots like Minute Maid Park and Pedernales Falls State Park—oh, and the Hoodoos Trail. The movie ends as Mason goes off to college at Sul Ross State University in nearby Alpine. A trip down to the Big Bend with new friends follows, and a sunset scene at Hoodoos Trail makes for the perfect ending to a Texan boy's coming-of-age story.

This irreplaceable spot could soon be lost forever. Given the reckless pace of current border wall construction upriver from El Paso that's waiving every environmental and legal protection in place, Hoodoos could soon be blasted, bulldozed, trenched, paved and fenced into oblivion. But to do so first, they'll need to drag me off the pavement of River Road. Well, me, and it's beginning to sound like many, many others.

So let's get ready for a fight—a hard fight. Let's start by making some noise about this, shall we? If you're in Presidio County, let's get on the phone and call representatives like state Sen. Cesar Blanco, who's already on the people's side. And let's call Rep. Eddie Morales Jr., who represents our region's interests, too. And let's be sure to light up U.S. Rep. Tony Gonzales' phone lines, though he may be harder to move. And hey, it never hurts to go through the motions and call U.S. Senators Ted Cruz and John Cornyn. It's the least we can do. Advocate strongly against a physical wall, and instead for a smart wall using technologies that won't destroy our park—as is being proposed for Big Bend National Park, and presumably the eastern half of Big Bend Ranch.

And after we've made all the calls we can, and we've bent every influential ear that has ties to Austin and D.C., I'll see you on the pavement along River Road over by the Hoodoos. Hell, I've never been much of an activist, but you know what they say about desperate times. I have to do something to stop this madness.

Because the Ranch is weighing heavy on my mind.

—TYLER PRIEST

Priest, a former state park ranger, is an outdoor guide who resides in Fort Davis. He can be reached at tylerdrewpriest@gmail.com.



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‘Material redirection’ defines Davis’ work

THE CHINATI FOUNDATION is hosting an Open Studio with Artist in Residence Deondre Davis on Friday, February 20, from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Locker Plant, 135 E. Oak Street in Marfa.

Davis is a Los Angeles-based artist whose work explores material redirection, object-making, and painting through a conceptual lens. Light refreshments provided.

Davis (b. 1991, Chicago) examines identity, consumption and refuse. Recent and forthcoming solo exhibitions include Castle, Los Angeles (2025), and Gordon Robichaux, New York (2024, 2026).

Davis will show new work made in Marfa, including a selection of paintings and assembled sculptural objects. The work will then travel to a forthcoming show at Gordon Robichaux, New York, and a booth at Frieze New York 2026.

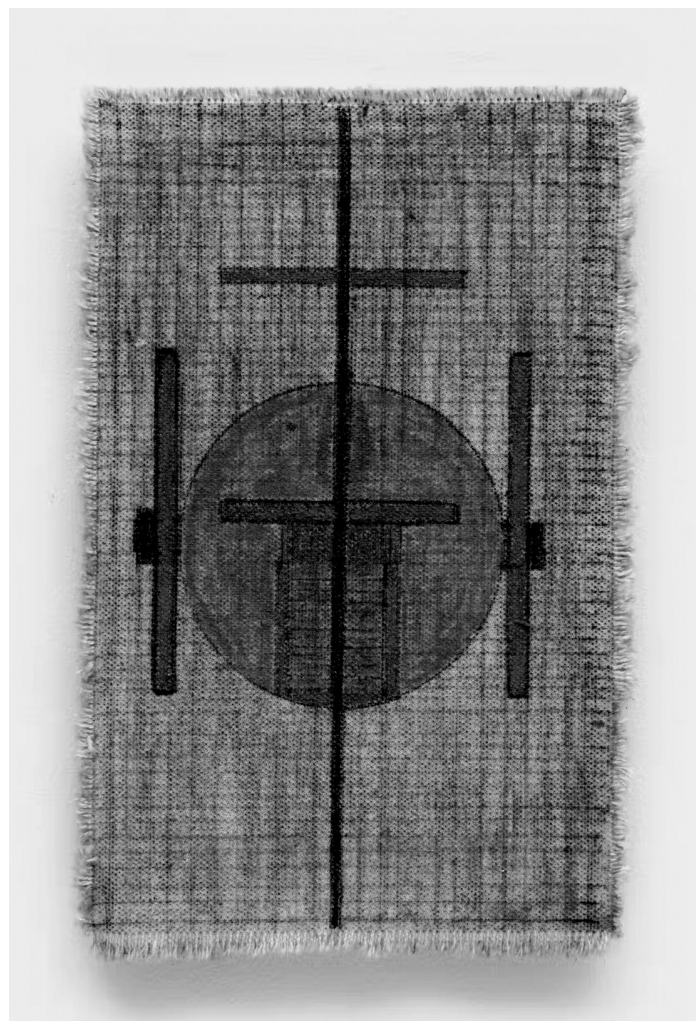
The Artist in Residence (AiR) Program was initiated by Donald Judd in 1989 and remains fundamental to the artist-centered mission that Judd established at Chinati. Since its inception, more than 200 artists from over 25 countries have participated in the residency program, which does not require that artists produce new work but offers time and space for the development of ideas. Many artists conclude their time in Marfa with public open studios, talks, or performances.

Still slated for residence this year are: David Batchelor, Will Boone, SoIL Thornton, Gillian Walsh, and Sarah Zapata. The 2026 cohort includes artists from the United States and Scotland working across a variety of media including performance, sculpture, textiles, printmaking, and painting. Each artist will spend up to two months living and working among the art, architecture, and land at Chinati.

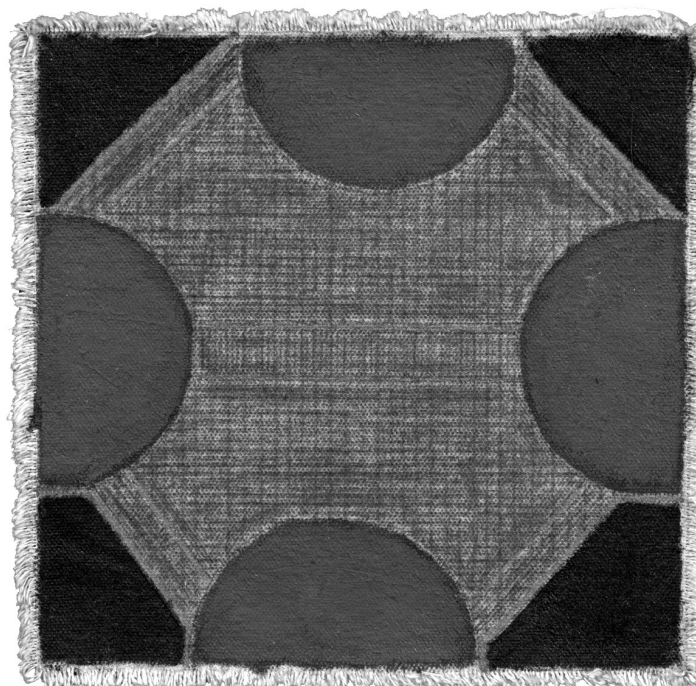
“Mor Von Ray,”
Found objects,
copper wire, epoxy,
artificial eyelashes,
screw, 12 x 2.5 x
0.75 inches, 2024



“Nevyrazimov,”
Found object,
epoxy, artificial
eyelashes, screws,
4 x 6.25 x 1.75
inches, 2024



“The Star Pit,”
Pencil, colored
pencil, and
gouache on
canvas, 5 x 8
inches, 2024



“Untitled,” Oil,
pencil, acrylic
and gouache on
canvas, 7.8 x 7.8
inches, 2024