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HIGHLANDS, TEXAS 77562

THEA and CHEJ Join Forces: A New Era for Environmental Health Advocacy

By David Taylor
Managing Editor

In a landmark move for the environmental health movement, the Texas Health and Environment Alliance (THEA) and the Center for Health, Environment & Justice (CHEJ) have announced a merger that will see CHEJ become a national program under THEA beginning in 2026. This strategic alliance is set to amplify the voices of communities fighting for clean air, water, and justice across the United States.

A Legacy of Grass-roots Leadership
CHEJ, founded nearly

45 years ago by Lois Gibbs—often called “the mother of Superfund”—has been a pillar in the fight against toxic waste and environmental injustice. Gibbs’ leadership at Love Canal in New York led to the creation of the national Superfund program and inspired thousands of local leaders to take action in their own communities.

Reflecting on the merger, THEA’s founder and CEO Jackie Medcalf shared, “For nearly 45 years, the Center for Health, Environment & Justice (CHEJ), founded by Lois Gibbs, has stood shoulder-to-shoulder with communities fighting for their families, their neighborhoods, and their right to a healthy place to live. CHEJ helped shape the national Superfund program, trained thousands of local leaders, and ensured



Jackie Medcalf

that ordinary people had the tools to take on extraordinary environmental challenges.”

A New Chapter for THEA and CHEJ

Beginning in 2026, CHEJ’s decades

of experience—its publications, technical resources, organizing tools, and commitment to grassroots leadership—will be integrated into THEA’s operations.

“Our role will be to ensure that CHEJ’s decades of experience remain available to the communities who need them most. We are committed to ensuring that communities across the country can continue to rely on the resources and training CHEJ pioneered,” Medcalf emphasized.

THEA, based in Houston, has built a reputation for its relentless advocacy in the Houston-Galveston region, particularly around Superfund and toxic site cleanups. Medcalf reassured supporters, “THEA’s deep commitments here in Texas will not change. This region is our home, and we will continue to work

side-by-side with the people who are threatened by contaminated chemical waste in the Houston-Galveston area. The same team, the same focus, and the same dedication to protecting public health will continue. In fact, it will grow with the addition of CHEJ’s national resources, tools, and training into the next generation.”

Ramifications of the Merger

The merger is expected to have significant ramifications for environmental health advocacy nationwide:

Continued. See **MERGER EXPANDS ENVIRONMENTAL**, Page 2

IN THE STARS

Crosby Lions Club Semi-Monthly Mtg.

Crosby Lions Club meets every second and fourth Monday at 6:30 pm at the Parish Hall of Crosby Brethren Church, 5202 First Street, Crosby. New members are welcome.

Highlands Rotary Club 51st Annual Chili Feast

When: Saturday, February 7, 2026
11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Where: St. Jude’s Catholic Church, 808 South Main, Highlands. Live Auction Begins at 1 p.m.
Win a new 2026 Chevrolet Trailblazer or Trax from Turner Chevrolet.
YOUR CHOICE!
Raffle Tickets \$100
Donation (includes 2 Chili dinners)
Meal Tickets at the Door \$10

Highlands Seniors Ring in New Year with Music, Luncheon and Celebration at San Jacinto Community Center



Brittany White, David and Tonya Kostka led the celebration for area seniors, sponsored by Seniors Helping Seniors High-Town Inc. The group toasted the new year with sparkling cider and a colorful balloon drop.



The San Jacinto Community Center staff celebrated New Year’s Eve with a special luncheon for seniors. They were entertained with the acoustic tunes of Al White and his band.



Rotarians receive Paul Harris Awards at Holiday Dinner



Rotarians presented with the Highest Service Award for Rotary.

Highlands Rotary President Patricia Scott presented 4 Paul Harris Fellows at our Christmas party. Diana Moreau Weaver PH+7, Connie Russell PH+2, Robert Woodall PH+6 and Cora Lynn Blacketter PH+1. Thank you all for your commitment to peace, service and community both locally and internationally. Congratulations!

CROSBY SUPERINTENDENT’S MESSAGE

Crosby ISD Planning Team Recommends Bond Package to Address Rapid Growth

Dear East Harris County Community Members and Families,

Over the past four months, Crosby ISD has engaged in meaningful and collaborative work with members of our community to plan thoughtfully for the future of our district. This work has been guided by our Long Range Planning Team, a diverse group of parents, educators, business owners, and community members who generously volunteered their time to help shape the direction of Crosby ISD.

Our Long Range Planning Team first met on August 28, 2025, at Crosby High School, where more than sixty communi-



Dr. Paula Patterson
Crosby Superintendent

ty members came together to begin this important work. During that initial meeting, we shared current district demographic data, heard a presentation on projected growth from Dr. Stacey Tepera of PASA, and asked participants to reflect on the skills and characteristics a

Crosby ISD graduate should possess to be successful in the future.

As we reviewed growth projections, it became clear that Crosby ISD is facing an even greater rate of growth than originally anticipated. Over the next ten years, some campuses are expected to grow substantially as our community continues to expand. According to Dr. Tepera, Crosby ISD is looking at adding an additional almost 1,600 students, moving us over the 8,600 student mark.

The second meeting, held on September 18,

Continued. See **CROSBY SUPERINTENDENT**, page 7

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Dr. O'Brien, former Superintendent at Goose Creek CISD, with thoughts after his retirement

Dear Family and Friends,

I am now, as of 12-31-2025 officially retired! However, I want to address an ongoing misinformation campaign regarding me personally and professionally. Most people know that the superintendent of schools acting as the CEO of a multimillion-dollar organization often the largest employer of a region, negotiates their contract upon arrival and in most cases upon departure. To be clear, both the board of trustees and I have acted in good faith and with the best interest of the school district as the primary consideration throughout these negotiations. Here are the facts to the negotiated departure as partially reported by our local newspaper on August 1, 2025, upon receiving a requested copy of said contract.

1. Not to interfere with or detract from the spring commencement celebration of students, on or about June 4, 2025, the Superintendent provided notice to the board of trustees of intentions to retire.

2. Upon willful consideration, the proposed last day of employment decided upon was December 31, 2025, designed and agreed upon by both parties to ensure fidelity and to provide adequate time for a thorough search and selection process.

3. No consideration was requested or considered by the superintendent or school board regarding any remaining portion of the existing multiple year contract, therefore no "buy out" exists.

4. The \$250k Payment mentioned in the news article was for days worked of the existing employment term of six months between July 1, 2025 and December 31, 2025, plus a negotiated reduced portion (25% of the superintendent's eligible 200+ sick bank days), or equivalent to 50 days salary.

5. The Texas legislature (HB610) recently reduced the amount of exit payments for superintendents not to exceed 6 months, or for comparative purposes, 120 days salary. (previously no cap)

6. Superintendent Emeritus is a title assigned to a sitting superintendent, should the board elect to employ the new superintendent prior to this previously agreed upon retirement date. Emeritus is also a title offered to certain members of higher education upon retirement. Neither of which necessarily constitute financial payment, but rather status of duty.

7. Emeritus status was created, because of law that prohibits employment of more than one superintendent of schools, as there may be only one designated decision maker, while the emeritus position may serve as consultant for transition purposes. For example, it may have been initiated if a start date for the new superintendent had been set for October, November or December 1st, rather than January 1st.

8. In an act of fiduciary responsibility, the Goose Creek school board opted not to hire the new superintendent prior to expiration of the existing superintendent contract on January 1, 2026, therefore the Emeritus title was never activated in this case, but was made eligible only if an earlier start date was needed or negotiated for acquisition of the new superintendents acceptable start date.

9. Goose Creek did not extend the employment agreement of service, but only corrected contract verbiage regarding that all payroll payments must be made "on or before" December 31, 2025, when it is not proper to make payment prior to contract fulfillment, including any payment associated with the calculation of unused sick days. This was the correction of a clerical error and all employment benefits and payroll earned, ended on December 31, 2025.

10. There is no golden parachute as referenced by some. All the rhetoric suggesting anything of this nature is baseless and posted by people, who in my opinion, are seeking attention, not justice or transparency. They may be protected by their first amendment rights in these online public forums, but facts are facts and the truth will always prevail. Whether patently lying or trying to create a false narrative, the person(s) speaking out about this matter, posing as knowledgeable are simply uneducated on the matter or are intentionally not being truthful, in either case they are wrong.

11. While every effort was considered in planning and preparing for a successful transition of leadership, no one could have anticipated such a tragic loss of a student. While heartbroken, I am, however, confident that the board of trustees has invested the time, energy and true diligence to move this district forward through the selection of Dr. Joe Rodriguez, as he is a godly man of character and committed to listening to our students and faculty during this period of grief, while becoming a part of our community and will serve to help us heal through this tragedy.

Unfortunately, over the course of our career as educators, most all of us have experienced death of beloved students. Whether through visiting hospital beds of students who we've lost to cancer or other illness, attending funerals of students lost to suicide or other tragedies, or even staring at an empty student desk when we don't even know what happened to a student who is no longer in our class or on our roster, we have all dealt with the wounds of children lost too soon, before they had a chance to live a full life. It is devastating every single time and makes us question whether we are making a difference as educators in this world. I would make a case that we are making a difference. In fact, as flawed as our educational system may be, we may be the only altruistic resource left when the dust settles on other hidden agendas. Please seek opportunity to thank a teacher if you are so inclined, especially the heroes who dealt with this tragedy on that fateful day. They truly rose to the occasion and rendered every possible effort to save a life that day. No student or adult should have to experience something like that, but everyone knows that it is a risk in a chosen profession of service. These who continue to choose to serve as educators amid one of the most challenging times in history need our prayers for recovery and hope regarding this event and our future.

In reflecting on my service and now departure from a leadership role that I have loved and committed my life's work to, the timing of this transition compounded with this crisis has left me wondering many things. I announced my retirement six months ago and had prepared the executive team and our organization to be prepared for anything upon my departure. No one could have anticipated what that "anything" may entail. In retrospect, I'm sure I could have done more. I'm sure I could have said more. All of it would have been after the fact, and nothing I could've said would have changed the outcome of this horrific tragedy. We implemented the actionable steps of the crisis plan and stepped aside to enable health professionals to try and save the injured student and then law enforcement to do their jobs of taking control of the scene, detaining the suspect and then investigating the incident to ensure justice for Andrew and the Meismer family. We communicated by protocol, first with parents of the campus and then the district whole. We met to determine next steps, in which protocols to provide grief counseling support for staff and students became the prevailing concern requiring immediate attention versus closing school and not being able to provide those services.

Beyond the notices sent out, any public announcement could not have provided further details, as the investigation was ongoing and as such, no relevant information could have been provided until such time as law enforcement released it. None the less, we could have hosted a student assembly, or community forum sometime within that 24-hour period before the break while I was still charged with the duty. Although I believe it may not have provided the needed relief that only investigative answers will eventually provide, we could have hosted the meetings anyway. A meeting was conducted with a small group of the students immediately impacted by the incident with campus and district administrators. Counseling was provided and utilized by students and staff on both days. One thing a large group or public meeting could not have provided would be information about either student, as that information is protected by FERPA laws, and as such may have created even more chaos, doubt and suspicion in a public setting. However, I do believe that details about the event will be fully realized in the court room where law enforcement and legal teams will provide such testimony and evidence of the incident as well as discipline records that may tell a more comprehensive story as to why we as educators attempt to save every child that comes into our charge to educate. We do not discard any student as a matter of both education law and moral obligation to this community and society. An uneducated child becomes an uneducated adult, and it shows and impacts us all. I personally believe that education is the great equalizer and it is a calling versus a job and is the very reason why the teachers on the scene did everything in their power that day.

I am left wondering what could have been done differently, I am proud of the students who have protested. They are right, Andrew mattered and safety within our school's does matter. Talking about all the safety measures we've put into place over the past decade won't bring him back. However, listening to how and when students feel most at risk or threatened may help shape our daily protocols, such as passing periods and restroom usage and lunch periods as well as visitors on campus. The fact remains that these two boys were allegedly friends and neither of whom would have expected the other to breach that friendship in such a horrific way. I have walked the hallways of our schools for the past thirteen years and with every walk I have been impressed with the quality of our students and staff. Some may consider my opinion biased, but generally speaking, I do not believe that our students come to school each day in fear. When I visit students on our campuses, walking the halls and visiting classrooms, I see joy, I see happiness when I look into their eyes. Of course, there are some children still maturing and learning social skills while finding their own path of academic

growth throughout their personal journey called education. We regularly provide tours of all our campuses, and most often our student ambassadors are the ones who do so, as they are most familiar with the campus and can speak to the daily operations of our academic achievements and career readiness opportunities. Our board of trustees have clearly established opportunity to celebrate our students at each school board meeting, and while the public comment portion may legally limit an immediate response to any parent concerns, the charge for administration to investigate any and all concerns is delivered each time a concern is raised. In short, our teachers care, our administrators care, our elected officials care. There is no defense for such a horrific event, but it should be noted that taking every measure possible to provide a safe school environment is not a guarantee that can or will eliminate evil from this world. The one thing we know is that the more engaged we are, the higher the odds of ensuring safety for all will be.

As stated, I am delivering this clarification for my friends, as I know how listening to the negative diatribe of online posters can be confusing, especially when some purport to "know everything", many who may harbor ill will toward the district for reasons unknown to me. We likely have all experienced that a little information can be dangerous, especially when used intentionally to cause harm. I am still here, living in this community, although no longer employed. I still care about the students and community I've lived in and served relentlessly for the past decade or more. So, we will let haters hate and while I will never understand such hatred, we just know that toxic people must live with the person in the mirror. Please continue to pray for Andrew's siblings, parents, immediate and extended family, as well as his many friends, classmates and faculty who have been impacted by this unimaginable loss of life.

I want to take this opportunity to thank those of you who have been praying for our school district. Thank you for praying for each student, teacher, support staff member. Please pray for the Meismer family and our new superintendent of schools, Dr. Rodriguez as he takes the helm of leadership alongside our elected board of trustees. I know they are in it for the right reasons and will pursue improved outcomes in all they do. I will ask that you also pray for my family as we seek new ways to serve the community through our church or service organizations or by any means we may be led to serve. If I can answer any further questions, reach out to me. God Bless you all.

Much love to each and every one of you,
Randy.....yes, simply citizen Randy!

Merger expands environmental justice efforts nationwide,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

National Reach, Local Impact:

THEA will now have the capacity to support communities across the country, leveraging CHEJ's national stature and resources while maintaining its deep roots in Texas.

Continuity and Expansion: CHEJ's legacy of training, technical assistance, and grassroots organizing will continue, ensuring that communities facing environmental threats are not left behind.

Amplified Advocacy: With combined resources, the new alliance will be better positioned to push for faster cleanups, hold polluters accountable, and advocate for stronger regulatory action.

Medcalf highlighted the importance of listening to community voices during this transition. "The first thing and most important thing I intend to do is listen. The environmental movement has struggled in recent years. There is a growing sense that changing times call for new voices and new approaches. As we bring THEA and CHEJ together, I need to hear directly from you—the peo-

ple who believe Americans have a right to live in neighborhoods free of toxic waste and to drink water that is safe from carcinogens."

Carrying Forward a Movement

Lois Gibbs' legacy is central to this new chapter. As she has often said, "Average people and the average community can change the world. You can do it just based on common sense, determination, persistence and patience."

The merger is both an honor and a responsibility for THEA. "Together, we will ensure that the hard-won lessons of the past 44 years continue to guide and strengthen the movement for environmental health and justice," Medcalf concluded.

What's Next?

In the coming months, THEA will share more details about new program offerings, resources for communities, and opportunities for public involvement. Both organizations invite supporters and community members to stay engaged and help shape the future of environmental health advocacy.

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THURSDAY, JANUARY 15, 2026

MONT BELVIEU, TEXAS 77580

ON THE HILL

Judge Denies Bail for Sterling HS Student Charged with ClassMate's Death

BAYTOWN, Texas - A judge on Wednesday denied bail for an 18-year-old student charged with murder in the death of a classmate who was allegedly stabbed inside a Goose Creek Consolidated Independent School District high school classroom last month.

What we know:

Aundre Matthews, 18, is accused in the Dec. 17 stabbing of Andrew Meisner, 16, at Sterling High School. Meisner later died from his injuries.

Wednesday's hearing marked Matthews' second appearance in court since the stabbing.

A Goose Creek CISD investigator testified during a Harris County hearing as prosecutors moved to deny bond for the Sterling High School stabbing suspect. Investigator Cory Scott described extensive blood inside a science classroom and said the altercation stemmed from a dispute over a vape pen. Testimony detailed surveillance findings, witness accounts, and staff intervention during the fight, which left one student fatally wounded. Defense attorneys challenged the evidence and sought bond, while prosecutors argued the severity of the alleged attack and campus disruption justified denying bail.

Decision made

Dig deeper: In her ruling, Judge Detoto said photographs from the scene were "disturbing," particularly because the incident occurred around other children, and referenced a history of allegations involving weapon possession. Bail was denied.

Pct 3 Sergeant Charged in Baytown Hospital Nurse Assaults

Precinct 3 Sergeant Charged in Baytown Hospital Nurse Assaults

A Harris County Precinct 3 deputy constable sergeant allegedly attacked three nurses at Houston Methodist Baytown Hospital on New Year's Day, including a pregnant nurse, according to authorities.

Police say the suspect, Sgt. Robert Earl Nobles Jr., was at the hospital for medical treatment when the assaults occurred.

Surveillance video reportedly corroborates nurse accounts of the violent encounter, in which Nobles punched and struck staff with equipment.

Nobles was relieved of duty and placed on administrative leave by the Precinct 3 Constable's Office as a criminal investigation continues.

He now faces three felony counts of assault on medical personnel, according to court records.

No new court dates or bond information has been reported yet. Police say he remains under medical care and has not yet been booked due to treatment.

GC CISD Celebrates Ribbon Cutting of Community Support Center at Peter E. Hyland Empower Academy

Story by: Nancy Bonds, GCCISD Director of Communications

Goose Creek ISD (GC-CISD) marked a major milestone in community engagement and student support with a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new Community Support Center at the Peter E. Hyland Empower Academy on December 16, 2025.

District leaders, Board members, community partners, and campus staff gathered to celebrate the opening of the center, a dedicated space that connects students, families, and community members with essential resources that promote stability, learning, and long-term success.

The Community Support Center brings together a food bank, adult learning programs, and Texas Workforce Commission services, creating a centralized hub focused on removing barriers and expanding opportunities for the



Peter E. Hyland Empower Academy staff, district leaders, and community partners gather to mark this milestone for our community and GCCISD. (Photos by: Carrie Pryor-Newman)

Goose Creek community.

"This moment reflects our shared commitment to creating opportunities that empower students and strengthen families," said Superintendent Dr. Randal O'Brien. "What began as a vision has become a reality that enhances how we support our students personally and beyond the classroom."

The Peter E. Hyland Em-

power Academy, built on the foundation of the former Peter E. Hyland Center, serves students through a non-traditional learning model that emphasizes small class sizes, expanded counseling services, and strong community partnerships. The addition of the Community Support Center extends that mission by addressing both immediate needs and long-term goals for

families.

Board President Jim Campisi emphasized the collaborative effort behind the project. "This center represents a significant step forward for Goose Creek CISD," Campisi said. "We are grateful to our educators, staff, facilities team, architects, contractors, and community partners who worked together to bring this space to life."

Principal Alicia Brooks highlighted the impact the center will have on students and families. "This is more than a building," Brooks said. "It is a resource, a support system, and a bridge to opportunity. Through access to food support, adult education, and workforce resources, we are empowering families to pursue their goals and build a stronger future."

The ceremony recognized key partners and contributors, including the GCCISD Facilities Planning and Construction Department, Lockwood, Andrews, & Newnam, Stantec, Dura Pier Facilities Sources, and the administrative team at Peter E. Hyland Empower Academy.

This Community Support Center represents GCCISD's continued commitment to holistic support, meaningful partnerships, and creating pathways for success for our families and community.

33 Texas New Laws Take Effect, Reshaping Property Taxes, Immigration, and AI

By David Taylor
Managing Editor

As the sun rose on January 1, 2026, Texans woke up to a slate of 33 new laws reshaping everything from immigration enforcement to artificial intelligence and property taxes. Passed during the 89th Legislative Session, these measures are poised to impact residents and businesses statewide.

Some laws have minor changes while others clean up existing laws. Lawmakers seemed to target taxes, AI, and immigration.

Immigration Enforcement Tightens

One of the most significant changes is Senate Bill 8, which requires sheriffs in counties operating jails to formally cooperate with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement under the federal 287(g) program. Supporters say the law will improve public safety, while critics warn of increased racial profiling and overpolicing.

Counties participating in the program can apply for state grants ranging from \$80,000 to \$140,000 to help cover costs. However, groups like the ACLU argue the program won't fully cover the associated expenses.

AI Regulation Arrives

Texas is also stepping into the future with House Bill 149, the Texas Responsible Artificial Intelligence Governance Act. The law establishes a state framework for AI, bans certain uses—including AI-driven pornography bots and impersonation of minors—and creates the Texas Artificial Intelligence Council to study the impact of regulation.

The law also prohibits AI systems that could encourage self-harm, criminal activity, discrimination, or unauthorized biometric surveillance, giving the Texas Attorney General enforcement authority.

Property Tax Relief and Housing Changes

Homeowners and businesses will see notable tax changes. House Bill 9 raises the business

inventory tax exemption from \$2,500 to \$125,000, a move hailed as a win for Texas businesses but expected to reduce local tax revenues by about \$442 million in fiscal year 2027.

Homestead exemptions are also increasing, with up to \$200,000 for those who are disabled or 65 and over. Livestock feed and border-security infrastructure built on private property are now tax exempt. Additionally, new laws limit how cities can raise taxes after natural disasters, requiring the governor's approval—a direct response to Houston's tax hike after Hurricane Beryl.

Senate Bill 38 targets squatters, streamlining eviction procedures and allowing justice courts to schedule hearings within 10 to 21 days. The law restricts courts to ruling strictly on unlawful occupation, tightening notice requirements and enabling summary judgments in clear cases. "These are commonsense reforms to keep bad things [from] happening to people's homes, and more importantly, to keep people out of property they don't own and they don't have any legitimate right to through a lease," according to bill sponsor Sen. Paul Bettencourt, R-Houston in an interview.

However, housing advocates warn the changes could reduce protections for tenants and increase the risk of wrongful evictions.

Digital and Insurance Reforms

Other notable laws include requirements for app stores to verify age and obtain parental consent for minors (though enforcement is currently paused by a federal judge), new insurance transparency rules, and

simplified unemployment claims.

As Texas steps into 2026, residents and businesses alike will be navigating a new legal landscape—one shaped by lawmakers' push for safety, innovation, and economic relief. Below is the full list of the 33 pieces of legislation now in effect as of January 1, 2026:

HB 22 — Exempts intangible personal property from property (ad valorem) taxes.

HB 30 — Limits how taxing entities calculate tax rates and raise taxes following a declared disaster.

HB 149 — Regulates the use of artificial intelligence in Texas and allows civil penalties for violations.

HB 851 — Changes how residence homesteads receiving tax benefits are counted and reported.

HB 1244 — Allows land to keep its open-space tax appraisal after ownership transfers if use stays the same.

HB 1392 — Extends tax payment deadlines if a tax office is

closed on the delinquency date.

HB 2067 — Addresses when insurance policies may be declined, canceled, or not renewed.

HB 2525 — Exempts certain senior housing owned by charitable organizations from property taxes.

HB 2723 — Requires an application for property tax exemptions on land used for human burial.

HB 2742 — Allows property owners to split property tax payments into installments.

HB 3159 — Creates a severance tax exemption for oil and gas from certain restimulated wells.

HB 3370 — Allows late timber land tax appraisal applications after a landowner's death.

HB 3424 — Changes how dealer-owned heavy equipment inventory is taxed.

HB 3699 — Modifies how initial unemployment compensation claims are handled.

HB 4395 — Allows electronic filing and delivery of public securities and related records.

HB 4738 — Eliminates the requirement to send a portion of certain loan fees to the state comptroller.

HB 4739 — Ends the requirement to remit part of retail charge delinquency fees to the comptroller.

HB 5654 — Creates Montgomery County Municipal Utility District No. 263 with taxing and bonding authority.

SB 8 — Requires certain

sheriffs to partner with ICE for immigration enforcement and creates state grants.

SB 1023 — Changes how certain property tax rates are calculated.

SB 1058 — Excludes certain securities transaction payments from taxable revenue.

SB 1106 — Requires public improvement district plans and assessments to be posted online.

SB 1453 — Revises how taxing units calculate debt and property tax rates.

SB 1455 — Changes how workers' compensation regulation is funded, including new surcharges.

SB 1502 — Allows school boards to adopt tax rates above voter-approved limits under certain conditions.

SB 1522 — Updates regulations for continuing care retirement facilities.

SB 1951 — Imposes penalties for failing to timely file required property tax reports.

SB 1968 — Updates licensing and regulation of certain real estate professionals.

SB 2206 — Creates tax credits and sales tax changes for research and development expenses.

SB 2420 — Regulates mobile app marketplaces, including age verification and parental consent.

SB 2520 — Adjusts school property tax limits for elderly and disabled homeowners.

BID NOTICE

BID NOTICE

BID NOTICE

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL NOTICE – RFP #26-002

The Barbers Hill Independent School District is accepting proposals for a multiple award bid for:

Plumbing Services

Proposals will be accepted on or before: 2:00 p.m., Friday February 6, 2026

The RFP can be obtained by visiting <https://www.bhisd.net/departments/financetax-office/purchasing> or contact Amy Presley at 281-576-2221 ext. 1268 to obtain a copy of the RFP.

The school district reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals, waive any formalities and/or technicalities in the proposal and award the contract to the best proposal that serves the interests of the district. The district may negotiate with vendors that submit viable proposals.

OPINION PAGE

OPINION

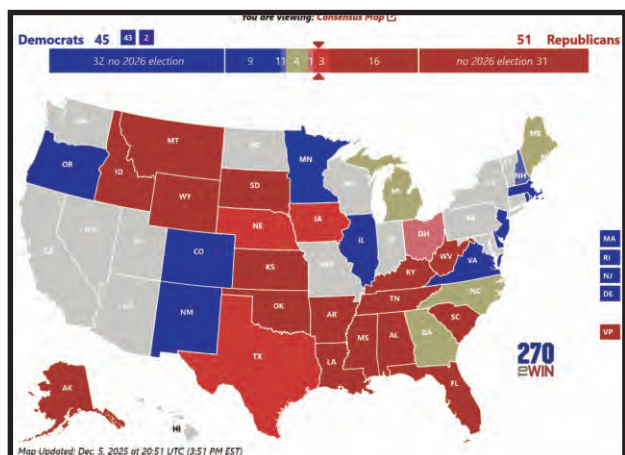
By BILL KING



Republicans Unlikely to Lose Senate but It Will Be Very Different

Republicans go into the 2026 election with a three-vote majority. For Democrats to win control of the Senate, they would have to pick up four seats because in the event of a tie, Vice President Vance would cast the deciding vote on the majority party.

In 2026, 33 Senate seats will be up for election. Thirteen of those are held by Democrats and twenty by Republicans. However, only about 6-8 races will be competitive. 270-To-Win maintains an interactive map that shows the most likely outcome based on current polling. It shows the Republicans likely holding 51 seats after the election, with Democrats holding 45 and 4 seats too close to call. The too-close-to-call states are Michigan, Georgia, North Carolina, and Maine. Personally, I would add Ohio to the too-close-to-call list and put Maine on the lean-Republican list.



Real Clear Polling averages show that Democrats currently lead the polling in North Carolina, Georgia, and Ohio. The Republicans lead in Michigan and Maine. The leads in all of these states are low-single digits, so anything could happen. But with Trump's polling numbers deeply underwater, it certainly appears that the Democrats could pick up a seat or two.

The most likely outcome, based on current polling, is that Democrats end up with 48 or 49 seats. If they get to 49, things get really interesting because at that point the Republican majority would rest on Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski and Maine Senator Susan Collins. Both are moderates and have demonstrated they are not afraid to buck their party, frequently voting together.

That would make Murkowski and Collins the most influential members of the Senate. They could essentially become a moderate caucus that would control what bills the Senate passes. Because of the Senate's 60-vote filibuster rule, their influence would be somewhat muted but still very significant. Also, there is no love lost between them and Trump. Both voted to convict him in the second impeachment trial.

If the Democrats win back the House, which appears very likely at this point, and gain two seats in the Senate, Trump is going to have a rough last two years in office. None of his agenda will be passed. For that matter, very little of anything will get passed, as this configuration of the two houses would represent the ultimate gridlock. And, of course, there will be non-stop investigations of Trump, particularly around his and his family's business dealings.

So, if you were hoping to have any reprieve from hyper-partisan warfare after the 2026 election, you are likely to be sorely disappointed. Many believe gridlock is not necessarily a bad thing. Certainly, many in the business community welcome less government interference and whiplash legislative changes. I am generally sympathetic to that view.

However, the country is facing some very serious problems that desperately need to be addressed. Our national debt is rapidly approaching \$40 trillion. Social Security and Medicare are careening toward a demographic cliff. Our immigration system is completely and totally dysfunctional. Healthcare is an incomprehensible mess. To address any of these issues, we need collaborative, pragmatic problem-solving – not interminable partisan warfare. Sadly, we appear to be headed toward the latter and not the former.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Opinions expressed here are not necessarily that of this newspaper or its staff. YOUR OPINION is welcome. Send a letter for possible publication to Grafikpress Newspapers, 5832 Star Lane, Houston TX 77057 or an email to GRAFIKSTAR@aol.com. Please limit your words to about 200. Letters will be subject to editing. Thank you.



STATE CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS

By Gary Borders



New Laws Taking Effect in New Year

A spate of new laws took effect on Jan. 1, The Dallas Morning News reported. Here's a brief summary of the most notable new laws now in force:

• County sheriff's offices are now required to cooperate with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement after the passage of Senate Bill 8. Local jail staff are now authorized to verify the immigration status of inmates and to honor certain federal immigration warrants. A grant program was created by the state to help sheriffs cover training and implementation costs related to the new law.

• Eviction proceedings involving unauthorized occupants must be held in court from 10 to 21 days of filing. Also, the new law limits legal delays occupants may take to avoid eviction.

• With the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence systems into many aspects of daily lives, House Bill 149 established a statewide framework for regulating AI and providing transparency. Companies using AI must notify people when they are interacting with an AI system. The law also created a state advisory group to oversee the implementation of oversight and compliance. Penalties can be assessed for violations of the new requirements.

The business inventory tax exemption has been raised to \$125,000, cutting property taxes for small businesses that maintain stock. The previous exemption was \$2,500.

TEXAS SMALL BUSINESSES OPTIMISTIC ABOUT 2026

Most Texas small-business owners are optimistic about 2026 and expect their businesses to grow, according to a survey conducted by Comerica Bank of roughly 1,000 small-business owners, the Houston Chronicle reported. Nearly 80% expect sales growth this year, and about 70% plan to make capital investments, the survey indicated.

"While the headlines about the economy can be disconcerting, small business owners are telling us that they see much brighter prospects for the part of the economy that touches their business directly," said Comerica Bank chief economist Bill Adams. "That's an encouraging sign that the underlying trend for small business is still solid."

Despite the uncertainty surrounding the impact of tariffs and a slowing of growth in the national economy, Adams said the recent interest rate cut by the Federal Reserve and lower effective tax rates for businesses un-



STATE CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS By Gary Borders

der the major financial bill passed last summer are encouraging to small-business owners.

The state's gross domestic product grew at an annual rate of 6.8% in the second quarter of 2025, compared to 3.8% nationally.

TEXAS STUDENT LOAN BORROWERS IN DEFAULT COULD SEE WAGES WITHHELD

Beginning this month, the Trump administration has threatened to withhold wages from borrowers who have not made a student loan payment in the past nine months or longer, the San Antonio Express-News reported. An estimated \$131.9 billion in outstanding student loans are owed by Texans, according to the Education Data Initiative.

The federal Department of Education confirmed recently that it could begin seizing up to 15% of a person's disposable income from his or her employer until the defaulted loan is paid in full or removed from default. Nearly 5.5 million borrowers are currently in default. The pandemic-era pause on repayments was ended by the Trump administration last year.

Critics of the move worry about the effect of garnishing income in the current financial climate, the Express-News reported.

"At a time when families across the country are struggling with stagnant wages and an affordability crisis, this Administration's decision to garnish wages from defaulted student loan borrowers is cruel, unnecessary, and irresponsible," Persis Yu, director of Protect Borrowers, an advocacy group, wrote in a statement.

TEXAS TO GET \$281 MILLION IN FEDERAL FUNDS FOR RURAL HEALTH CARE

Texas will receive the largest portion of the first rollout of the \$50 billion allocated under the

Rural Transformation Program, The Texas Tribune reported. The state will receive \$281 million under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, which also slashed Medicaid funding by an estimated \$1 trillion.

While Texas is receiving the most funds, when its population rank is calculated that amount comes to about \$60 per rural resident — the lowest rate in the nation. The funds come as the state's rural hospitals and clinics face budget shortfalls and rising costs. Fourteen rural hospitals in Texas closed in the last decade, according to a report from the Center for Healthcare Quality. Over half of the 82 remaining facilities are at risk of closing.

The funding will be used to strengthen rural health care clinics by educating and attracting health care professionals to work in rural areas, as well as modernizing resources and technology.

PAXTON LOSES BID TO ENFORCE RULES ON LARGE-COUNTY PROSECUTORS

A Texas appeals court has again blocked Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton from enforcing new rules that would require prosecutors in the state's largest counties to send his office detailed reports, according to the Denton Record-Chronicle.

The Texas Fifteenth Court of Appeals unanimously upheld a lower court order blocking the rules after several district attorneys filed suit. The court ruled that, under the Texas Government Code, Paxton lacks the legal authority to require the proposed reports.

"Based on the plain language of [the code], the Legislature did not expressly grant rulemaking authority to the Attorney General, nor can rulemaking power be implied where no such authority is expressly granted," Justice Scott K. Field wrote in the three-judge panel's opinion.

The rules were adopted last year and mandated that prosecutors in counties with populations of more than 400,000 turn over detailed information from case files from victims and witnesses, including internal emails. The appeals court ruling stays in place while the case continues in a lower court.

AT LEAST 10 TEXAS INCUMBENTS IN CONGRESS NOT RETURNING

At least one-fourth of Texas' congressional delegation will not be coming back in 2027, the Texas Standard reported. The massive departure likely will weaken the state's clout on Capitol Hill. Nine members of Congress from Texas — six Republicans, three Democrats — have already announced they will leave at the end of the year. Three incumbents in South Texas are facing competitive general election races.

In addition, a special election on Jan. 30 in a redrawn Houston district will elect a member of Congress who will then face U.S. Rep. Al Green, D-Houston, in the March primary. When the dust settles, between 10 and 17 of the 38-member delegation could end up leaving when this term ends.

"We're slim right now, [from] what we used to be," said U.S. Rep. Roger Williams, R-Willow Park, who, with 13 years, is one of the longest-tenured Texans in the House. "But that's because we've had a lot of retirements. That happens. Now you've got to rebuild."

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 POSTSCRIPT

By Carrie Classon

Having Coffee



"I miss our conversations!" Marilyn wrote to me.

I don't know Marilyn well, but I like her very much. "You want to get a coffee sometime after Christmas?" I asked.

Life starts to pick up and get moving again in early January. After hibernating in a cookie-induced coma for two full weeks, we've had a brief reprieve from normal. Now, with enough cookies consumed to keep us safe from a sudden cold snap and make the zipping of our trousers just a little more challenging—now we are ready to face the world again.

And I am ready to make time for people. That is my goal. I've never had coffee with Marilyn, but I used to chat with her on my walks several times a week. But since she moved, I never see her. So I suggested coffee, and she thought that sounded like fun, and I wondered why I don't do more of that. I decided I would. And the new year is a good time to start.

I googled: "How long does it take to make a habit?" and the answer was "66 days."

At first, I was surprised it was that long. Then, as I thought about it, I was surprised it was that short. This says to me that it probably is a pretty accurate answer, because I always imagine that I'll form a new habit in two days, but if I'm still doing it two months later, then I figure it's a habit.

And making more time for people is a good habit for me to cultivate.

I have tried to foist my friendship on unwilling participants in the past. I've insisted that we have a lot in common, and I've kept in touch with no prompting and tried to be encouraging when no encouragement was requested. These have been long-distance relationships, conducted online, usually with other new writers. I would imagine the long-distance relationships enjoyed by writers in the past, swapping letters and having long and meaningful conversations over the years as they wrote and grew and changed.

None of this has come true for me.

Instead, I keep writing and writing with fewer and fewer replies, and I get the distinct impression that the person I'm writing to is filled with growing dread every time something lands in their inbox. They are not interested in sharing their journey. Maybe their journey isn't going the way they'd like. Maybe they've opted for a different journey altogether. Whatever the reason, they find my continued attention annoying. I finally realize that I am being a pest, and my feelings are hurt. I feel unwanted and embarrassed and a little lonely.

I think having coffee makes more sense.

It is better to see people face-to-face. It is better to ask them how they are doing and then quietly drink coffee and wait for their reply. For all the convenience of online communication, nothing can compete with a cup of coffee and a real talk. Because if someone is willing to take the time for a cup of coffee, I think it's a good sign they would like to be my friend.

And so this will be my new habit. Even if it takes time away from whatever I'm working on. Even if I have to drive someplace I have never been for coffee.

Instead of chasing friendship, I will meet people wherever they are. I will make the investment necessary to cultivate friendships with people who would like to be friends.

In 66 days, I'll let you know how it is going.

Till next time, Carrie

Advertisement for Star Courier newspaper, including contact information for the publisher, subscription rates, and address.

New Cost Study bolsters efforts to Reuse Astrodome

Harris County Releases Cost Estimates for Astrodome Options

(Harris County – December 19, 2025) — Harris County has received cost estimates outlining two potential paths for the Astrodome, renovation and demolition. Commissioners Court and County leaders have long emphasized the importance of having this data to make informed, responsible decisions about the Astrodome's future.

The renovation option would restore the Astrodome to basic operational functionality. This approach does not include full historic preservation or upgrades to meet modern venue standards, but would address necessary improvements such as plumbing and HVAC systems to allow safe occupancy. Under this scenario, the Astrodome would still not be suitable to host large-scale collegiate or professional sporting events. The estimated cost is \$752,576,133.

The demolition option, which is estimated to cost \$54,966,318, would demolish the structure, clear debris, and leave the below-grade area in its current condition until a future use for the site is identified.

"These cost estimates illustrate that it will not be financially feasible for Harris County to renovate the Astrodome without significant private investment," said Interim County Administrator Jesse Dickerman.

While no timeline for a decision on the future of the Astrodome has been set, these estimates represent an important step in the County's due diligence to consider all available options. The Astrodome sits at the heart of NRG Park, a 350-acre complex that includes NRG Center, NRG Arena, and NRG Stadium, and any decisions about its future must be made in partnership with our major tenants, the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo and the Houston Texans, and the community. The Astrodome remains a defining part of Harris County's history and identity, and these efforts aim to ensure its legacy is considered thoughtfully in shaping the County's path forward.

Questions or comments regarding the Astrodome may be directed to CountyAdministration@harriscountytexas.gov.

About the Office of County Administration: Established by the Commissioners Court in June 2021, the Office of County Administration (OCA) is tasked with supervising day-to-day operations and implementing the Commissioners Court's priorities and policies as well as guiding the long-term strategic efforts for Harris County. For more information, visit <https://oca.harriscountytexas.gov>.



hotel rooms and suites (similar to MGM's ~308 rooms).

A 3,000 seat entertainment theater, major spa, extensive food and beverage program, retail, and large structured parking.

Layering all that on top of the Astrodome's aging structure would be substantially more expensive than the "basic occupancy" renovation the county priced at about \$752 million, because you would be adding a large hotel tower, full interior buildout, gaming infrastructure, lifesafety and code upgrades, luxury finishes, and extensive backofhouse support.

Reasonable rough range

Putting those pieces together:

Baseline to make the Astrodome safely usable again: about \$750+ million.

Add a hotel tower, casino floor, theater, spa, structured parking upgrades, and highend finishes comparable to MGM National Harbor (which alone ran \$1.3-\$1.4 billion as a new build): that easily pushes the combined project into the midbillion to low twobillion range in 2025 construction prices, especially given the complexity of working inside an old dome.

So in practical planning terms, treating the Astrodome as the shell for a full MGM style resort, a working planning number is around \$1.5-\$2+ billion.

--Contributed by Astrodome Conservancy

A New Proposal to develop the Dome as an MGM Style Resort

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE WITH THE ASTRODOME!

Let's stop playing with the idea and give the people of Houston what we already know what needs to happen with the Astrodome.

Turning the Astrodome into something on the scale and quality of MGM National Harbor in Maryland would likely run in the ballpark of roughly \$1.5-\$2+ billion in today's dollars, assuming a full casino resort style buildout rather than just basic re-

pairs.

Key cost benchmarks

Harris County's latest study estimates about \$752-753 million just to bring the Astrodome back to basic, safe operational condition, with no full modern venue buildout or luxury amenities.

A more ambitious public-private redevelopment concept for the Astrodome that adds hotel rooms, arena seating, retail, and restaurants has been pegged around \$840 million-\$1 billion.

MGM National Harbor (the MGM in Maryland)

cost about \$1.3-\$1.4 billion to build from the ground up for a 1.7million-squarefoot resort with a 23-24 story, 308 room hotel, 125k-160k sq ft casino, theater, spa, highend retail and restaurants, and a 4,800-5,000 car garage.

What "like MGM Maryland" implies

To truly match an MGM style resort inside or around the Astrodome, you are talking about:

A full casino floor on the order of 125k-160k sq ft, plus poker room and VIP/highlimit areas.

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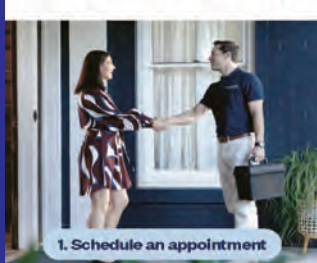
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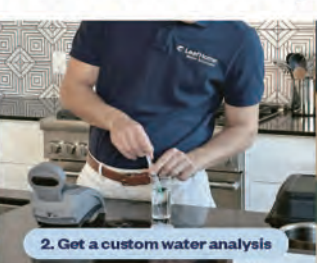
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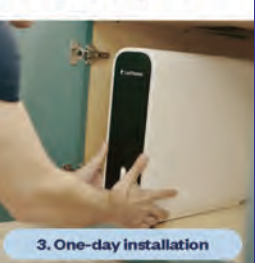
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OBITUARY

HENRY CAMPBELL

Henry Campbell, 80, of Crosby Texas has passed away. He was a resident of Crosby for more than 54 years.

He had an immense love of cattle & was in the cattle business for many years. He was also a Tennessee Walker horse fan & previously owned several of them.

He is survived by his wife of 61 years Margaret. Three daughters: Kim Woods & husband



Matt, Jenny Ham-bright & husband Rik, Melissa Cream & husband Kevin. 5 grandchildren: Ashley Woods & partner Steve McCoughan, Matthew Woods & wife Chelsea, Luke Loftin,

Tegan Loftin & Jaylen Cream. 2 great grandchildren Weston Woods & Kinsley Woods. 3 brothers: Ricky Campbell, Roy Campbell, Ralph Campbell & 2 sisters: Barbara Stephens & Jeanine Campbell & numerous Nephews & nieces.

A Celebration of Life is planned for Saturday January 17, 2026 at 2:00 pm At Northeast Free-way Baptist Church, 1635 Runneburg Road, Crosby Texas.

LEGAL NOTICE

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Notice is hereby given that Original Letters Testamentary for Docket No. 538450; Estate of TIMOTHY BENOIT Deceased; In Probate Court No. 1 of Harris County, Texas, were issued on DECEMBER 2, 2025 to:

JOHNATHAN ALLEN WATSON

The residence address of the administrator is in Harris County, Texas. The mailing address is:

c/o Weston Cotten
1500 E. Wallisville Road
Highlands, TX 77562

All persons having claims against this Estate which is currently being administered are required to present them within the time and in the manner prescribed by law.
Dated this JANUARY 6, 2026

by WESTON COTTEN
Attorney for the Estate

LEGAL NOTICE

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Notice is hereby given that Original Letters Testamentary for Docket No. 535994; Estate of SAMUEL JOSEPH STORY Deceased; In Probate Court No. 1 of Harris County, Texas, were issued on NOVEMBER 26, 2025 to:

MARJORIE ANN STORY

The residence address of the administrator is in Harris County, Texas. The mailing address is:

c/o Weston Cotten
1500 E. Wallisville Road
Highlands, TX 77562

All persons having claims against this Estate which is currently being administered are required to present them within the time and in the manner prescribed by law.
Dated this JANUARY 6, 2026

by WESTON COTTEN
Attorney for the Estate

LEGAL NOTICE

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Notice is hereby given that Original Letters Testamentary for Docket No. 534835; Estate of NANCY MARIE GILES Deceased; In Probate Court No. 2 of Harris County, Texas, were issued on NOVEMBER 7, 2025 to:

DALE WAYNE GILES

The residence address of the administrator is in Harris County, Texas. The mailing address is:

c/o Weston Cotten
1500 E. Wallisville Road
Highlands, TX 77562

All persons having claims against this Estate which is currently being administered are required to present them within the time and in the manner prescribed by law.
Dated this JANUARY 6, 2026

by WESTON COTTEN
Attorney for the Estate

LEGAL NOTICE

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Notice is hereby given that Original Letters Testamentary for Docket No. 538322; Estate of BESSIE M. PAGE Deceased; In Probate Court No. 4 of Harris County, Texas, were issued on NOVEMBER 10, 2025 to:

IVY JEANETTE ROBINSON

The residence address of the administrator is in Harris County, Texas. The mailing address is:

c/o Weston Cotten
1500 E. Wallisville Road
Highlands, TX 77562

All persons having claims against this Estate which is currently being administered are required to present them within the time and in the manner prescribed by law.
Dated this JANUARY 6, 2026

by WESTON COTTEN
Attorney for the Estate

LEGAL NOTICE

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Notice is hereby given that Original Letters Testamentary for Docket No. 538196; Estate of ANNA PEARL VEST BARNETT Deceased; In Probate Court No. 3 of Harris County, Texas, were issued on NOVEMBER 26, 2025 to:

HERMAN TAYLOR BARNETT

The residence address of the administrator is in Harris County, Texas. The mailing address is:

c/o Weston Cotten
1500 E. Wallisville Road
Highlands, TX 77562

All persons having claims against this Estate which is currently being administered are required to present them within the time and in the manner prescribed by law.
Dated this JANUARY 07, 2026

by WESTON COTTEN
Attorney for the Estate

LEGAL NOTICE

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Notice is hereby given that Original Letters Testamentary for Docket No. 536997; Estate of GARY HIGHTOWER Deceased; In Probate Court No. 2 of Harris County, Texas, were issued on JANUARY 02, 2026 to:

CINDY SUZANNE HIGHTOWER

The residence address of the administrator is in Harris County, Texas. The mailing address is:

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All persons having claims against this Estate which is currently being administered are required to present them within the time and in the manner prescribed by law.
Dated this JANUARY 07, 2026

by WESTON COTTEN
Attorney for the Estate

LEGAL NOTICE

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Notice is hereby given that Original Letters Testamentary for Docket No. 535953; Estate of GLADYS F. LANSFORD Deceased; In Probate Court No. 2 of Harris County, Texas, were issued on NOVEMBER 7, 2025 to:

RANDALL TODD LANSFORD

The residence address of the administrator is in Harris County, Texas. The mailing address is:

c/o Weston Cotten
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All persons having claims against this Estate which is currently being administered are required to present them within the time and in the manner prescribed by law.
Dated this JANUARY 6, 2026

by WESTON COTTEN
Attorney for the Estate

LEGAL NOTICE

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Notice is hereby given that Original Letters Testamentary for Docket No. 538212; Estate of JEFFREY DEAN WEGER Deceased; In Probate Court No. 5 of Harris County, Texas, were issued on NOVEMBER 07, 2025 to:

SUSAN GALE WEGER

The residence address of the administrator is in Harris County, Texas. The mailing address is:

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1500 E. Wallisville Road
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All persons having claims against this Estate which is currently being administered are required to present them within the time and in the manner prescribed by law.
Dated this JANUARY 07, 2026

by WESTON COTTEN
Attorney for the Estate

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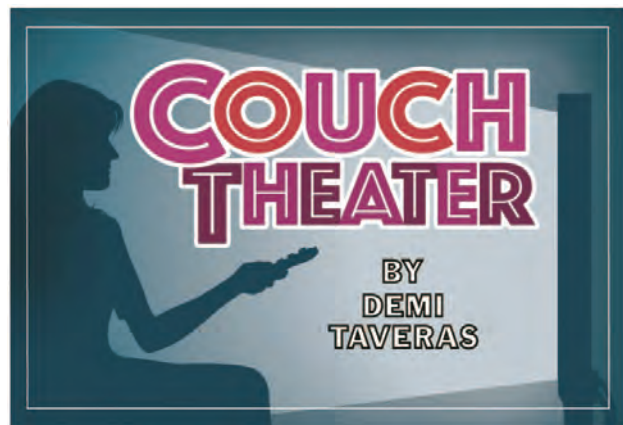
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"Ash"

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Crosby ISD weighs bond for growth,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

2025, focused on a comprehensive SWOT analysis examining the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing our district...

and security improvements, and facility updates. The fourth meeting, held on November 13, 2025, brought together district-identified needs and community concerns...

with an average annual household impact of an estimated \$17.35 per year. The third option would have increased taxes two cents and included a District Aquatic Center and expanded technology support...

ENTERTAINMENT

Amber Waves



Weekly SUDOKU grid and instructions

HOCUS-FOCUS comic strip by Henry Boltinoff

January 5, 2026 Posting Date King Crossword

Crossword puzzle grid and word list (ACROSS, DOWN)

Trivia Test Answers: 1. St. Lucia's Day; 2. Edward Norton; 3. Gillette; 4. The first women's rights convention...

Trivia test by Fifi Rodriguez with 10 questions and answers

