



Mayor John Whitmire - See Page 4

HIGHLANDS

CROSBY

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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2026

HIGHLANDS, TEXAS 77562

Crosby-Huffman Chamber Celebrates Excellence at Awards Banquet

By David Taylor
Managing Editor

The Crosby-Huffman Chamber of Commerce hosted its annual Awards and Installation Banquet, shining a spotlight on local achievements, community spirit, and the installation of new board members for 2026. The event, attended by business leaders, volunteers, and local officials, was a celebration of progress and partnership across the Crosby and Huffman communities.

Chamber Board Chairman Velma Ellison opened the evening by announcing the successful completion of a major community initiative: the installation of 58 new streetlights along FM 2100, from Highway 90 to South Diamondhead. "Today we truly are shining bright along FM



New chamber board for 2026. (Photo by David Taylor)

2100," Ellison remarked, expressing gratitude for the project's completion in December 2025. She encouraged attendees to sponsor a light to help cover ongoing power costs, emphasizing the impor-

ance of community support in keeping the area safe and welcoming.

Reflecting on a successful 2025, Ellison reaffirmed the Chamber's commitment to supporting local businesses and fos-

tering growth. She highlighted the Chamber's unique role as an information hub and connector for Crosby and Huffman, especially given the area's reliance on county partners for municipal services.

"We work every day to bring together businesses, residents, and government partners, ensuring our shared voice is clearly heard," Ellison said.

The banquet featured the installation of the Chamber's 2026 board, with Judge Lucia Bates presiding over the ceremony. The new board includes Chairman Velma Ellison, 1st Vice Chair Toni Handley, 2nd Vice Chair Travis Mann, Treasurer Tiffany Muller, Parliamentarian Keenan Smith, Secretary Chelsey Long, and directors Tim Paterson, Isabelle Dion, Traci Galyean, Kay Sosa, Ed Hardy, Sean Matthews, Lance Cole, Billy Bostick, John Tallent, Tom Currie, LeeAnn Lockwood, Dr. Paula Patterson, and Dr. Angeles Perez.

Special recognition was given to staff members Deanna Becker (Member-

ship Director) and Debra Roberts (Communication Director) for their dedication and behind-the-scenes work. The Chamber also thanked its sponsors, including Platinum Sponsor Salon M, Gold Sponsors Visiting Angels, LyondellBasell, and Serna's Plumbing, and Silver Sponsors Community Resource Credit Union, United Community Credit Union, and Skeetercide.

The highlight of the evening was the presentation of the Chamber's annual awards, recognizing outstanding businesses, non-profits, volunteers, employees, and first responders:

Business of the Year – Crosby: Busta's Burgers

Continued. See CROSBY-HUFFMAN CHAMBER, page 2

IN THE STARS

Crosby Library Book Sale March 6, 7

Friends of the Crosby Library will hold their "Spring into Reading" Book Sale.

Friday, March 6 - 1pm - 6pm
Saturday, March 7 - 10am - 5am.

BOOK SALE SPECIALS:

A colorful reusable bag is available for \$10 per bag of all the books you can fit in it. Hard backed or paper back books
Children books are priced as marked and not included.

Children's books, mysteries, romance, cookbooks and craft books are just a sample of book choices, thanks to donations from patrons. All the proceeds from the Book Sale benefit the Crosby Library and support the Summer Reading programs.

Questions call the Library - 832-927-7790

CROSBY SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

Crosby Middle School Anti-Bullying Committee Leads with Heart, Inspires Culture of Kindness Across Campus

Dear East Harris County Communities and Families,

As Superintendent of Crosby ISD, I am continually inspired by the incredible things happening on our campuses. Over the past two years, the Anti-Bullying Committee at Crosby Middle School has truly shown our district what it means to Lead with Heart.

Under the guidance of Social Studies teacher Tyler Boyd, this committee was formed with a simple but powerful goal: to promote kindness and cooperation among students. Today, it has grown into a thriving, multi-grade organization of more than fifty students, supported by dedicated counselors, teachers, and parent volunteers.



Dr. Paula Patterson
Crosby Superintendent

The committee's impact can be seen and felt throughout the halls of Crosby Middle School. From monthly Kindness Awards and banner contests to the creation of two "Let Your Kindness Shine" murals, these students have worked intentionally to make kindness visible. Their monthly Kindness Awards are especially meaningful. Students and



Crosby Middle School Anti-Bullying Committee. These students were a part of the Unity Day Campaign that created a Unity Chain stretching several hundreds of links, each link representing a student that pledged to be united on Unity Day

staff are nominated through heartfelt letters of recommendation written by committee members, then voted on by the student body. Each month, those honored are celebrated with certificates and photos which adds a powerful reminder that character and compassion matter.

One event that especial-

ly stands out was Unity Day this past October. In collaboration with school counselors, the committee organized a campus-wide initiative that resulted in a chain of orange links stretching through the hallways, each link representing a student who pledged to stand united in kindness. Seeing that chain

displayed throughout the building was a powerful symbol of what happens when students choose inclusion over division and unity over isolation.

The committee has also partnered beautifully with Crosby ISD's HEY! Day initiative, where stu-

Continued. See CROSBY SUPERINTENDENT, page 2

Lady Liberty Legacy Tea Honors DAR members



The Old Three Hundred Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution met in Crosby at China Ko's Restaurant for tea at noon last Saturday.

By David Taylor
Managing Editor

The Old Three Hundred Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) hosted its 3rd Annual Member Tea, the Lady Liberty Legacy Tea,

on February 21, 2026, at China Ko in Crosby. The event brought together chapter members and guests to celebrate achievements, welcome new members, and commemorate the 140th anniversary of the Statue of

Liberty.

Attendees shared stories of their immigrant ancestors and marked their families' countries of origin, honoring the diverse

Continued. See DAR CHAPTER HOSTS LADY LIBERTY TEA, page 5

'Laughter, Luck and Lasting Memories' Bring Seniors Together at San Jacinto CC Casino Party

By David Taylor
Managing Editor

The San Jacinto Community Center in Highlands was transformed into a bustling casino for a day, as senior citizens gathered for a fun-filled Casino Night that delivered excitement, camaraderie, and plenty of smiles. The event, organized by director Tonya Kostka, featured classic casino games, delicious food, and a host of door prizes that kept spirits high throughout the festivities.

"What an amazing day at our Casino Party!" exclaimed Tonya Kostka. "Everyone had a blast playing the tables, enjoying delicious food, and winning



Janice Hooley, Brittany White, Bill Westerman, Cassie Rogers, and Tonya Kostka all try their luck at one of the craps tables during the festive Casino Party hosted by the San Jacinto Community Center.

some awesome door prizes. The room was full of laughter, friendly competition, and lots of smiles," she said proudly.

The event was made possible thanks to gener-

Continued. See COMMUNITY CENTER CASINO NIGHT, page 6

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Crosby-Huffman Chamber celebrates 2026 board, community achievements at annual banquet,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Business of the Year – Huffman: Serna's Plumbing
 Non-Profit of the Year – Crosby: Churches United In Caring
 Non-Profit of the Year – Huffman: May Center Volunteer in Action
 Volunteer of the Year – Crosby: Vasso Espinosa
 Volunteer of the Year – Huffman: Vernon Reed
 Employee of the Year – Crosby: LeeAnn Lockwood (Churches United in Caring)
 Employee of the Year – Huffman: Angeles Perez



Crosby Business of the Year Busta's Burgers



Huffman Business of the Year Serna's Plumbing

(Huffman ISD)
 First Responder of the Year – Cody Nance (Huffman EMS)
 Chamber Ambassador of the Year – Kay Sosa
 Chairman's Special Award – Eddie Foster
 The Chamber concluded the evening by inviting everyone to the upcoming 33rd Tees-N-Tail Golf Tournament, scheduled for April 17th at Stonebridge at Newport, promising more opportunities for connection and community building in the year ahead.



Crosby Churches United In Caring



May Center Volunteer in Action



Volunteer of the Year – Crosby: Vasso Espinosa



Volunteer of the Year – Huffman: Vernon Reed



Employee of the Year – Crosby: LeeAnn Lockwood (Churches United in Caring)



Employee of the Year – Huffman: Angeles Perez (Huffman ISD)



First Responder of the Year – Cody Nance (Huffman EMS)



Chamber Ambassador of the Year – Kay Sosa



Chairman's Special Award – Eddie Foster



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Crosby students lead with kindness,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

dents and staff wear green on Wednesdays to promote positivity and connection. Their "Let Your Kindness Shine" shirts, proudly worn every Wednesday, have become a visible reminder of their mission and an invitation for others to join.

Service is another cornerstone of their work. In partnership with the Houston Food Bank, committee members have volunteered at the campus food pantry, helping serve community members in need. Through these efforts, our students are learning that

kindness is not just something we say it is something we do. Giving back, serving others, and stepping up to help are powerful lessons that will stay with them far beyond middle school.

This committee has beautifully balanced celebration, outreach, and service. They have honored staff and students, strengthened school traditions, supported community initiatives, and kept kindness at the forefront of daily life on campus. Most importantly, they are modeling what it means to be a Cougar which is leading with

heart, standing up for one another, and creating a campus culture where every student feels seen, valued, and welcome.

To our students, staff, and volunteers who make this work possible: thank you for showing us that kindness is not just a word. It is a commitment.

At Crosby ISD, we are proud to be Committed to Students, and because of leaders like these, our future is bright.

With gratitude,
 Dr. Paula Patterson
 Superintendent, Crosby ISD

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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2026

MONT BELVIEU, TEXAS 77580

ON THE HILL

“Tees for Keys” Golf Tournament



The annual Tees for Keys charity golf tournament will take place at 8 a.m. Thursday, April 30, 2026, at The Battleground Golf Course. The event features breakfast, lunch, swag bags, on-course contests, range balls, and cart and green fees. An early bird special of \$500 available for a limited time. Several sponsorship opportunities are available: Golden Key (Title Sponsor): \$5,000 — Includes logo placement on scorecards, cart signs, website, flyers, and social media; three tee signs; premium banner and hole placement; awards announcement; swag bag merchandise option; renewal priority; and two golf teams. Foundation Sponsor: \$3,000 — Sold Out. Builder Sponsor: \$2,000 — Includes logo and link on website, social media recognition, one tee sign, swag bag merchandise option, exhibit space, awards announcement, and one golf team. Exhibit Sponsor: \$600 — Includes tee sign, on-course representative opportunity, and swag bag merchandise option. Swag Bag Sponsor: \$750. Tee Box Sign Sponsor: \$150 per sign. For registration and sponsorship information, interested participants are encouraged to contact event organizers.

United Way for Hygiene Drive



From February 1–March 31, United Way is collecting essential hygiene items to support students in Pre-K through 12th grade across our local school districts. Donations stock our Clothing for Kids Closets with everyday essentials so children can show up to school feeling clean, confident, and ready to learn.

- Most-needed items:**
- Shampoo
 - Conditioner
 - Body Wash
 - Bar Soap
 - Toothpaste
 - Lotion
 - Chapstick
 - Deodorant
 - Feminine Products
 - Q-Tips

Every item helps provide dignity and stability for students right here in our community. You can drop off items at partners across our area, shop our wish list and have items delivered to our office, or host a drive of your own!

Thank you for being part of a community that shows up for kids—because United is the Way we strengthen every part of our community.

\$68m Settlement Reached in Colony Ridge Housing Predatory Lending Case

By David Taylor
Managing Editor

Liberty County, - Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton and the U.S. Department of Justice announced a \$68 million settlement Friday with Colony Ridge Land LLC and its affiliated companies, resolving state and federal lawsuits alleging predatory land sales and lending practices targeting Hispanic borrowers in a large residential development northeast of Houston.

The settlement requires Colony Ridge to invest \$48 million in infrastructure improvements, including \$18 million for drainage projects to address flooding concerns, and \$20 million for enhanced law enforcement services, including the construction of a new law enforcement center. The agreement also mandates stricter underwriting standards, expanded consumer protections, improved disclosures, and revised advertising practices. A three-year freeze on new residential platting for direct-to-consumer sales is also included.



State and federal officials said the agreement is intended to improve housing conditions, increase transparency, and prevent borrowers from entering loan agreements they cannot afford.

“Intentionally targeting vulnerable borrowers with the promise of homeownership and then trapping them in unaffordable contracts violates federal civil rights laws,” said Assistant Attorney General Harmeet K. Dhillon, whose division led the federal case.

Paxton characterized the settlement as a major enforcement victory and tied the development to immigration

concerns, calling Colony Ridge a “de facto illegal immigrant community.” He also asserted that the development posed a threat to public safety.

However, publicly available crime data from the Liberty County Sheriff’s Office and regional law enforcement agencies do not show crime rates in the Colony Ridge area exceeding those of comparable communities in the Houston metropolitan region. Law enforcement officials have not identified the development as a crime hotspot relative to surrounding areas.

The civil lawsuits themselves focused on alleged dis-

criminatory lending practices and deceptive sales tactics rather than immigration enforcement. Court filings do not accuse Colony Ridge of violating immigration laws, nor do they allege that the company knowingly sold property to undocumented immigrants.

Under the settlement, Colony Ridge also agreed to adopt new identification and documentation requirements for buyers, expand foreclosure prevention policies, and implement additional protections aimed at safeguarding borrowers’ credit and financial stability.

The company denied wrongdoing while agreeing to the settlement, which resolves litigation brought by both the Texas Attorney General’s Office and the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division.

In a statement, Colony Ridge officials said they have already invested heavily in infrastructure, including paved roads, water and electricity access, schools, a community center, and

emergency services facilities. The developers also noted they built a sheriff’s substation currently used by local law enforcement.

Liberty County Judge Jay Knight welcomed the agreement, calling it a step toward improving long-term outcomes for the rapidly growing area.

“Our hope is that this settlement will help strengthen the community and ensure responsible development moving forward,” Knight said.

The Colony Ridge development spans thousands of acres and has been among the fastest-growing residential areas in Texas. Developers say the company maintains a substantial inventory of lots and does not expect the three-year platting moratorium to significantly slow growth.

The settlement marks one of the largest civil rights housing enforcement actions in Texas history, concluding years of litigation over lending practices, infrastructure obligations, and consumer protections.

Dayton High School Choir Earns UIL Honors and Advances to State Competition

Dayton, Texas— Dayton ISD is proud to recognize the outstanding achievements of the Dayton High School Concert Choir, which continues to demonstrate excellence through its recent University Interscholastic League (UIL) performances and upcoming competitions.

The Dayton High School Concert Choir will participate in the UIL Concert and Sight-Reading Evaluation on Wednesday, March 4, at First United Methodist Church in Beaumont. The choir’s concert performance is scheduled for 5:20 p.m. Community members and supporters are invited to attend and show their support.

In addition, Dayton High School choir students recently competed at the UIL Solo and Ensemble Contest on Saturday, February 7, at Hargrave High School in Huff-



Pictured front row (left to right): Keira Carroll, Anna Briggs, Isabelle Odogwu, Jeremiah Gant, Abigail Vega, Joseph Briggs. Back row (left to right): Olivia Williams, Richard Caster, Esther Garza.

man, where they earned an impressive 13 medals.

Isabelle Odogwu received a First Division medal on a

Class Two solo. The following students earned First Division medals on Class One solos, qualifying them for the

UIL State Solo and Ensemble Contest:

- Keira Carroll
- Anna Briggs

- Jeremiah Gant
- Abigail Vega
- Joseph Briggs
- Olivia Williams
- Richard Caster
- Esther Garza

Additionally, Anna Briggs, Joseph Briggs, Richard Caster, and Keira Carroll received First Division medals for their madrigal performance, also qualifying for state competition.

The UIL State Solo and Ensemble Contest will be held on May 25 at Barton Middle School in Hays CISD.

“These accomplishments reflect the dedication, talent, and hard work of our students and directors,” said district leadership. “We are incredibly proud of their commitment to excellence and look forward to cheering them on at upcoming competitions.”

THOUGHTS FROM HILLSIDE CHURCH

By Dr. Mark Trice



When Quitting Looks Tempting

a vital foundation. So do other choices like learning a new language, working on your physical fitness, and sticking to a decision to worry less. All of these require discipline and can seem slow to bring rewards.

The temptation is to quit too soon, abandon your goals, or lower your expectations to avoid disappointment. Don’t do it. Take this reminder from Hebrews 10:36. In the New King James Version (NKJV) it says, “For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God,

you may receive the promise.” You can also take Philippians 1:6 to heart. “...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

If you’re tired and discouraged, maybe it’s time for a reset. Try spending time with God specifically discussing the best way to reach your goals. If you’re still learning how to hear from God, perhaps it would pay to seek counsel from a mature Christian.

Perseverance, the ability

to endure even when the going gets rough, is an important character trait that makes the difference between success and failure. History is full of people who are well-known successes—people who only succeeded because they refused to listen to doubt and made a firm decision that quitting wasn’t an option.

Do you need help persevering? There are some tools you can use to help you maintain the vision you had last month.

Start by breaking your goals down into reasonable

milestones, and as you reach these milestones, celebrate each sign of progress. You might also want to adjust your pace if the goal you originally set was unrealistic.

Tracking your effort as well as your outcomes can also help. For instance, track how many minutes you spend reading the Word every day as well as celebrating when you finish another book of the Bible. Consistently reading fifteen minutes every day is a goal worth achieving.

Consistency itself, in anything you pursue, is worth celebrating!

Slow progress is still progress, and consistently staying the course often leads to more lasting change than rushing simply to reach the finish line. The work you’re putting in today is having results—even if you can’t see them yet. God can!

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★ OPINION PAGE ★

★ STATE OF THE CITY

By MAYOR JOHN WHITMIRE

The State of the City is Strong

HOUSTON - Mayor John Whitmire delivered his annual State of the City address before a sold-out audience of business and civic leaders, sharing a message focused on no new taxes, honest government that works, and a city that is strong.

“Houston has challenges just like every major city. But we face them head on. Houston is strong, and we’re getting stronger every day. Stronger because we work together, in collaboration,” said the mayor.

This year’s program began with a celebration of the city’s cultural diversity. Mariachi Imperial performed, featuring Houston Police Officer Alvaro Olivera. The mayor also selected a special performance of “You’ll Never Walk Alone” by Rev. Michael Gott and vocalist Kenneth Gayle from Unity of Houston.

Mayor Whitmire recognized Unite Here Local 23 as his invited guests. The labor organization went on strike against the Hilton Hotel last year for higher wages. In support of organized labor members and their families, the mayor postponed his original State of the City address last September.

“Thank you for what you do to help make this a great city, and to your co-workers providing the service today. These workers knew they would never walk alone. I was down at City Hall working, but I had their backs covered, and they knew it,” said Mayor Whitmire.

On the issues, Mayor Whitmire said during the State of the City that he is keeping his campaign commitment to fix Houston by:

- Removing conflicts of interest, eliminating waste, duplication, and corruption
• Balancing the budget without a tax increase
• Adding more Houston Police and Fire Department recruits
• Purchasing 54 new trucks and providing more resources for garbage pickup
• Investing in neighborhood and pocket parks, including a planned transformation of Tranquillity Park with Downtown Houston+
• Holding discussions about a possible METRO light rail connection to Bush Airport and future water taxi service on Buffalo Bayou.

On Infrastructure

- Replacing at least 200 miles of water pipes per year
• Paving 1,000 lane miles in 2026
• Investing \$500 million in drainage and road improvements
• Coordinating with other agencies to improve Houston’s infrastructure
• Preparing Houston to be a premier city for residents and visitors ahead of the World Cup

“We are increasing public safety and transportation and offering shuttles between downtown and the airports. We’re doing many things right in preparation for the World Cup. But, ladies and gentlemen, we have to treat Houstonians like they’re our World Cup visitors as well,” said Mayor Whitmire. “We’re making progress. That’s what I want to leave you with. I’m prepared to give six years, the remaining best years of my life to Houston, working 18-hour days with a team that is the best in America.”

The Greater Partnership and Houston First Corporation sponsored the State of the City.

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, 5906 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



Paxton, Crockett leading in primary poll

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 Feb. 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 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%. A majority of those polled said they didn’t know enough about any of the candidates to express a preference.

That poll was also conducted by the Hobby School of Public Affairs.

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 CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS By Gary Borders

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 SCREWORM INVASION

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins and Gov. Greg Abbott presided last week over the opening of 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 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

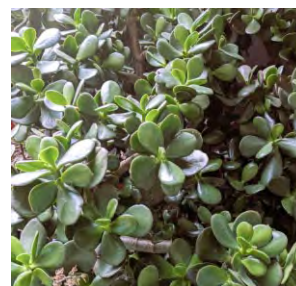
The 1877 “tall ship” Elissa, docked in Galveston Bay, will sail to New York City for the Fourth of July, the Texas Standard reported. The Galveston Historical Foundation purchased the ship in 1979, and it normally serves as a museum. Will Wright, creative director of the foundation, said the ship is 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.”

★ THE POSTSCRIPT

By Carrie Classon

My Plants love me



They say that some plants “thrive on neglect,” and I never really believed it until now.

I have tried for years—decades really—to get things to grow, indoors and out, and I have pretty much failed at everything. Gardens languish without producing whatever they were supposed to produce. Houseplants die as they enter the house. The only plants I have success with are floral bouquets. (I am very good with cut flowers, but I acknowledge this does not count as gardening.)

So imagine my surprise when I discovered that there is a plant that appears to love me and my style of plant husbandry—that is to say, no care whatsoever.

I work miracles with the jade plant.

Now, I hear someone snickering because growing a jade plant requires no skill at all and, of course, they would be right. But the same has been said about the Christmas cactus. My mother still has a Christmas cactus she smuggled home in her suitcase from a trip to Sweden in the 1970s—I have killed off every one I have ever had. I have killed philodendrons—plants known to flourish wrapped around the un-insulated windows of college apartments and neglected for semesters at a time. To assume that even the hardiest plant is safe from my ministrations would be to underestimate my total inability.

But my jade plants survive. In fact, my jade plants might be trying to take over my home.

Like a deeply dysfunctional relationship, my jade plants reward me for forgetting about them, neglecting them and treating them badly. A near total lack of care and the lowest possible emotional involvement are disproportionately rewarded with growth. The guiltier I feel, the larger they grow.

It was my husband, Peter, who suggested I put them outside in the summer. I started with one, and it did well, so I ended up with eight. I put them in little pots on the balcony. The wind was harsh. The sun was strong. Pigeons sat on them. I forgot to water them. And those jade plants flourished.

I cut them back. I brought them into the living room before there was a hard freeze. When we went to Mexico, I asked someone to water them while we were away.

“How often?” he asked.

Since I had completely neglected them all summer, I didn’t want to frighten them with too much attention. “Every three weeks should be fine.”

“How much water?”

“I don’t think it matters.”

When I got back from Mexico, I swear those plants had doubled in size. They were too big to be in the living room over Christmas, so I moved them to the bedroom and stuffed them into a dark corner. I completely forgot to water them over the holidays. They expanded until the plants in all eight pots had combined into one giant organism. I had trouble reaching the window shade.

“Well, this won’t do!” I thought.

I took a bread knife and cut off branches until they could stand on their own. Within a day (I am not exaggerating) those plants filled in where the missing branches had been.

I see no point in ever growing any other kind of plant.

I will have jade plants in the house and jade plants on the balcony. My specialty has been made clear. I grow jade plants. I don’t try to grow anything else. My jade plants love me.

But I leave for Mexico next week and, I admit, I’m a little afraid of what they will do while I’m away.

Till next time, Carrie

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

Seniors roll the dice on fun at Highlands Community Center Casino Night,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ous sponsors, including Seniors Helping Seniors High-Town Inc., Visiting Angels of Baytown, and Happy Pants Travel.

"We truly appreciate your support of our community and programming," Kostka added, expressing gratitude for the contributions that helped make the party a success.

While no real money changed hands, the seniors enjoyed plenty of fun and fellowship, creating fabulous memories.

"We try to stay busy around here," Kostka explained. "We lean on the Seniors Helping Seniors High-Town nonprofit. That nonprofit is the one that hosts a fundraiser every year, Purse Bingo, and those funds are able to support the budget that I request from them each year. They were solely designed and created to support the programs here at the community center."

Local businesses also stepped up to support the center's programming every year.

"Chick-fil-A Crosby has been amazing for us—they've done things for National Night Out and the summer kids program. There are some entities around town that have really stepped up and are there when we ask for their help for sure," Kostka noted.

For those interested in supporting the center, tax deductible donations can be made directly to the community center or to Seniors Helping Seniors.

"The easiest way is if

they want to write a check, they can mail it here to the community center or drop it off in care of Seniors Helping Seniors, and we make sure that they get it. Of course, we provide a receipt," Kostka confirmed.

The Casino Night was just one of many activities offered by the center.

"Our busiest days are Monday, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays. Thursdays are typically carved out for bus trips, and Fridays are a slower end of the week. We always try to throw in two or three special parties each month on top of what we already do just to keep them coming and keep them moving," Kostka said.

Upcoming events include an Astros watch party and the Senior Olympics, a week-long event featuring Olympic-style games for seniors.

Most events at the center are free, with occasional fees for craft classes to cover supplies.

"To play bingo is free. To come to the lunches is free. We always keep a donation box out if they ever feel it in their heart to leave a little something, and we make sure that goes back to the Seniors Helping Seniors group," Kostka emphasized.

The Casino Night was a shining example of the vibrant community spirit at the San Jacinto Community Center, where seniors are welcomed, engaged, and celebrated.

For more information on programming and how to make a donation, visit their website online.



Margie Roderick, Cherrie Richardson, Sheila Merrill, Pam White, and Ed Wingate working their magic at the Black Jack table.



Pat Strange, Sherry Price, MaryAnn Cowley, and Laneen T aylor enjoy the fun at the Casino Party sponsored by the San Jacinto Community Center.



Tom Peeler shows off his lucky shirt at the Casino Party sponsored by the San Jacinto Community Center.



Sharon and Curt Flippo take a break from the black jack table to give a wave to the photographer at the Casino Party sponsored by the San Jacinto Community Center.



Senior members Gwen Burt, Jerry Thamm, MaryAnn Cowley, and Tom Peeler get their photo made with sponsor Kay Sosa (center) during the Casino Party at the San Jacinto Community Center.

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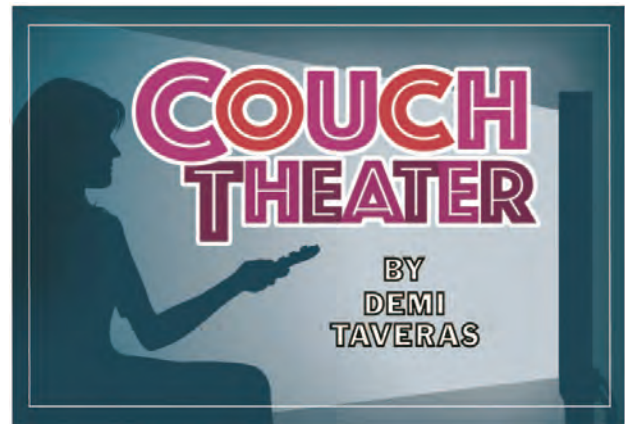
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Priyanka Chopra Jonas star in 'The Bluff.'

"The Bluff."

"Song Sung Blue" (PG-13) — This biographical musical-drama is based on the documentary film of the same name and stars Hugh Jackman ("Deadpool & Wolverine") and Kate Hudson ("Shell"). Jackman and Hudson respectively play Mike and Claire Sardina, who are performers in a Neil Diamond tribute band called Lightning & Thunder. You wouldn't imagine that there's much story to tell about a tribute band, but this one is different. The Sardinas had a tumultuous journey in life, not just with their band; heart attacks, psychotic episodes, and addiction are just some of what the couple and musical duo experienced. (Not to mention, a bad gig or two!) Hudson has re-

ceived glowing reviews for her performance in the film, and she also received Oscar and Golden Globe noms for Best Actress. It is out now to stream. (Peacock)

"Kiss of the Spider Woman" (R) — Hollywood producers must have thought that fans were desperate enough to fill seats for a new J.Lo movie, and boy, were they wrong! This musical drama film cost \$30 million to make, while only earning a mere \$2 million in theaters. It's a shame that it has an interesting premise! It is based on the 1992 stage musical of the same name, and besides Jennifer Lopez, it also stars Diego Luna ("Andor") and Tonatiuh ("Promised Land"). Set against a background of an Argentinian prison

at the end of the Dirty War, the film tells the story of a gay window dresser named Luis (Tonatiuh), who shares the same cell as a political prisoner named Valentin (Luna). When daily life in prison becomes difficult, Valentin encourages Luis to tell him the plot of his favorite movie — "The Kiss of the Spider Woman," starring Ingrid Luna (Lopez). Viewers get to see the movie themselves, right alongside Valentin, as Luis recounts the musical. Premieres Feb. 27. (Hulu)

"The Bluff" (R) — If you see Priyanka Chopra Jonas' name in the billing of a movie, expect an action-packed, direct-to-streaming film with splashes of comedic lines that we've definitely heard before. (Until she decides to surprise us, of course!) In this film, she portrays a former Caribbean pirate during the 19th century. When buccaneers invade her island and look to apprehend her, she must revert to her former ways in order to save her family — and herself — from certain death. Karl Urban ("The Boys") plays the vicious Captain Connor, who doesn't mind losing all of his men if it means getting revenge, along with Temuera Morrison ("Moana") as his second-in-command. All jokes aside, Chopra Jonas' action choreography in this film is nuts! Check it out on Feb. 25. (Amazon Prime Video)

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HOLLYWOOD

by Tony Rizzo

HOLLYWOOD — The race for the Oscars is on! Tinseltown's buzzing that the Best Actor Oscar is between Timothee Chalmet (30) for "Marty Supreme" and Ethan Hawke (55) for "Blue Moon." Chalmet is the fair-haired boy after only 25 films, while Hawke has an impressive 89 films under his belt.

Chalmet has "Dune: Part Three" coming on Dec. 18. Hawke's "Black Phone 2" rang into theaters on Sept. 20, 2025, and he also stars in the historical drama "The Weight," opposite Russell Crowe, which was screened at the Sundance Festival back in January. Hawke plays a prisoner who is involved in a gold-smuggling scheme.

Jacob Elordi, who nailed down a Best Supporting Actor Oscar nomination for "Frankenstein," wrapped director Ridley Scott's postapocalyptic sci-fi epic "The Dog Stars" in June 2025. It was filmed in Bordano, Cansiglio, Avezzano and Rome, Italy. It's about the aftermath of a catastrophic flu virus. (COVID, is that you?) The film will be unleashed in August.

Not everybody's worried about the price of bananas and health insurance. Bob Iger, the outgoing CEO of Disney, received a parting package of \$45.8 million. The incoming CEO Josh D'Amaro will make \$2.5 million with a target incentive bonus of 250%, as well as long-term stock incentives of \$26.25 million for each fiscal year that he's CEO.

His second-in-command Dana Walden, the new president and chief creative officer, will have a base salary of \$3.75 million and an annual target bonus equal to 200% of this, as well as a long-term stock award of \$15.75 million for each fiscal year. Where did we go wrong?

The oldest living female Oscar winners are: Eva Marie Saint at 101 ("On the Waterfront"); Rita Moreno at 94 ("West Side Story"); Sophia Loren at 91 ("Two Women"); Judi Dench at 91



Timothee Chalmet for "Marty Supreme."

("Shakespeare in Love"); Julie Andrews at 90 ("Mary Poppins"); Vanessa Redgrave at 89 ("Julia"); and Jane Fonda at 88 ("Klute" and "Coming Home"). Special mention for Carol Burnett, at 92, who never won an Oscar but won an impressive seven Emmys!

The oldest living male Oscar winners are: George Chakiris at 93 ("West Side Story"); Joel Grey at 93 ("Cabaret"); Michael Caine at 92 ("Hannah and Her Sisters" and "The Cider House Rules"); Dustin Hoffman at 88 ("Kramer vs. Kramer" and "Rain Man"); three-time Oscar winner Jack Nicholson at 88 ("One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," "Terms of Endearment," and "As Good as It Gets"); Morgan Freeman at 88 ("Million Dollar Baby"); Anthony Hopkins at 83 ("The Silence of the Lambs" and "The Father"); Christopher Walken at 82 ("The Deer Hunter"); Joe Pesci at 83 ("Goodfellas"); and Robert De Niro at 82 ("The Godfather Part II" and "Raging Bull").

These living legends prove that Oscar gold never grows old!

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ENTERTAINMENT

Amber Waves



Weekly SUDOKU

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

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ◆◆◆

◆ Moderate ◆◆ Challenging
◆◆◆ HOO BOY!

HOCUS-FOCUS BY HENRY BOLTINOFF

Find at least six differences in details between panels.

Differences: 1. Camera is lower. 2. Music note is higher. 3. Rail is added to fence. 4. Cap is different. 5. Hill is added. 6. Tree trunk is thicker.

February 23, 2026 Posting Date

King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Goller Ernie
- 4 Gullet
- 8 Engine noise
- 12 Horror star Chaney
- 13 Costa —
- 14 Inter —
- 15 Past
- 16 Novelist Jennifer
- 17 Pealed
- 18 Fresh starts
- 21 Boom times
- 22 Small batteries
- 23 Humorist Dave
- 26 Flow out
- 27 Depot vehicle
- 30 "Iliad" setting
- 31 Shade
- 32 Spring honorees
- 33 — Salvador
- 34 Supporting
- 35 Rolled-up sandwiches
- 36 Evergreen tree
- 37 Hindu honorific
- 38 Age-old knowledge
- 45 Soccer legend
- 46 Spring flower
- 47 Plastic — Band
- 48 Verbal
- 49 Quitter's word

DOWN

- 1 Flair
- 2 Theater section
- 3 Winter fall
- 4 Eerie
- 5 Bobby who lost to Billie Jean King
- 6 Smoothie berry
- 7 Hopeful
- 8 Seine city
- 9 — Bator
- 10 Saturn feature
- 11 Cleaning cloths
- 19 Conceal, in a way
- 20 Arrest
- 23 "Dynamite" band
- 24 Notre Dame coach
- 25 Harry Potter pal
- 26 Where Ger. is
- 27 Large snake
- 28 Ref
- 29 Radiator sound
- 31 "That's wonderful!"
- 32 Hosp. scans
- 34 Charge
- 35 Places for bracelets
- 36 Relinquish
- 37 Pigs
- 38 Per person
- 39 Roman emperor
- 40 Family
- 41 Tea carrier
- 42 Rx amount
- 43 Cameo stone
- 44 Humorist Sahl

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Trivia test by Fifi Rodriguez

- LANGUAGE: What does the Latin phrase "carpe noctem" mean in English?
- U.S. PRESIDENTS: Which president was a lifeguard in his earlier life and saved 77 people from drowning over a seven-year period?
- MOVIES: Who is the primary nemesis of Professor X in "X-Men"?
- GEOGRAPHY: English is the official language in which Central American country?
- LITERATURE: Which English novel features characters such as Pip, Miss Havisham and Estella?
- MUSIC: How many strings does a standard guitar have?
- TELEVISION: Which TV sitcom stars a character named Eleanor Shellstrop?
- HISTORY: Which European ruler is known as the Sun King?
- U.S. STATES: Which state is home to Mount St. Helens?
- ANATOMY: Which human organ produces insulin?

Answers

1. Seize the night. 2. Ronald Reagan. 3. Magne-to. 4. Belzco. 5. 'Great Expectations'. 6. Six. 7. 'The Good Place'. 8. Louis XIV of France. 9. Washington. 10. The pancreas.

King Crossword

Solution time: 21 mins.

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