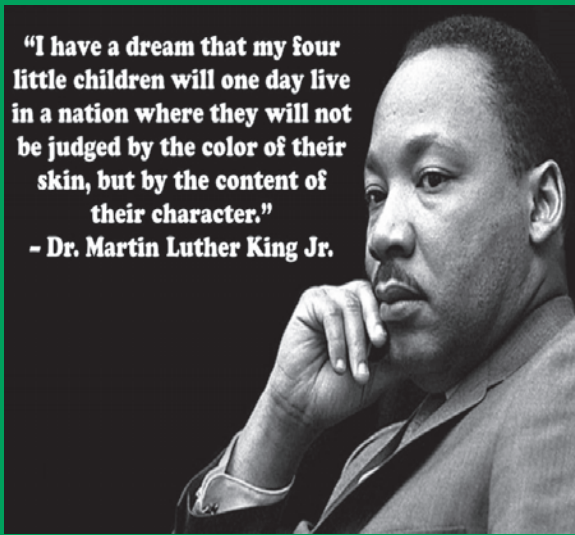


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"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



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VOLUME 11, NO. 2(#452)

THURSDAY, JANUARY 19, 2023

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CHANNEL CURRENTS

NCA Chamber 46th GALA Thursday Jan. 26

North Channel Chamber invites you to their 46th Annual Awards and Installation Gala. Thursday, Jan. 26 at 6:30pm, Sylvan Beach Pavilion. Guest Speaker Gus Dwairy, Entrepreneur and Rancher. \$90 per person. RSVP 713-450-3600.

Body in River Identified

Authorities from the Harris County Institute of Forensic Science (Coroner's office) have said they identified the unclothed body floating in the San Jacinto River as Te-vion Bass, a 23 year-old young man from Channelview.

He was on the Autism spectrum, as well as living with bipolar disorder and paranoid schizophrenia.

He had been off his medication since mid November, was wandering aimlessly while his family searched for him.

His body was found in the river near 2410 Shorewick Drive in Highlands.

RodeoHouston 2023 performers announced; Tickets on Sale now

2023 RODEO HOUSTON ENTERTAINER LINEUP

Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo officials released the entertainment lineup for the 2023 Rodeo season, scheduled for Feb. 28 – March 19. The lineup features a mix of genres, including Country, EDM, Hip-Hop, Norteño, Pop, Rock, and Christian. Many of the artists will make their RODEO-HOUSTON® debut in 2023.

"We are thrilled to welcome back so many talented artists including some fan favorites such as Houston rap legend, Bun B who will be taking the stage alongside some additional iconic southern performers," said Chris Boleman, Rodeo President and CEO.

Continued. See RodeoHouston, Page 7

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY

STAR ENTERTAINER LINEUP
Feb. 28 - March 19, 2023 ★ rodeohouston.com

Celebrating M.L.King Jr. Day

By Allan Jamail

HOUSTON, Texas – Monday, January 16, 2023 - MLK Jr. Day was celebrated in Houston and cities all over the nation. Thousands gathered to watch 2 parades in downtown Houston on Monday to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. MLK Day is a federal holiday to be celebrated on the third Monday each January.

Mayor Sylvester Turner served as Grand Marshal in one of the parades. It was the final MLK Jr. Day parade of Turner's administration. Co-Grand Marshal also included Rev. Dr. Derek King, the nephew of the great civil rights leader.

Dr. King an African American was greatly responsible for bringing social justice to many Americans regardless of



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

race or ethnicity. He was assassinated April 4, 1968 when I was 24 years old. As a young man I was beginning to take an interest in politics and so I had been keeping up with the politics of the times and so I took a special interest in Dr. King's speeches. In that time of the early sixties it was unusual for a Black person to be as outspoken as he was. He be-

came popular as he publicly called on the government to treat everyone equal as the constitution spelled out for citizens to be treated equal. Blacks in most states were not given most of the same privileges as Whites, including the same voting rights.

Dr. King organized non-violence movements and demonstrations all across the nation to bring an end to racial injustice. Although he stressed the need for non-violence to bring about these changes it was a violent act of being shot to death that took his life.

In the 1960's there were several assassinations of political figures. Nov 22, 1963, the assassination of President John F.

CONTINUED. HOUSTON REMEMBERS DR. KING, PAGE 3

Houston's R'Bonny Gabriel Wins Miss Universe

By Allan Jamail

New Orleans, LA. – Saturday, January 14, 2023 the newly crowned Miss Universe is Miss USA R'Bonny Gabriel of Houston, Texas. Gabriel closed her eyes and clasped hands with runner-up Miss Venezuela, Amanda Dudamel, at the moment of the reveal of the winner, then beamed after her name was announced. Thumping music rang out, and she was handed a bouquet of flowers, draped in the winner's sash and crowned onstage at the 71st Miss Universe Competition, held in New Orleans.

Gabriel was born in Houston, Texas March 20, 1994 and grew up in Missouri City with three older brothers. Her father is a Filipino, Remigio Bonzon "R.Bon" Gabriel, and an



R'Bonny Gabriel of the USA won the coveted title of Miss Universe, January 15th, 2023.

American mother, Dana Walker was married in the Philippines. Their daughter broke boundaries by becoming the first-ever Filipino-

American to win Miss USA. She graduated from the

CONTINUED. HOUSTONIAN WINS MISS UNIVERSE, PAGE 3

88th Legislature convenes in Austin

The Texas Legislative session has begun. Here are 6 things to watch. Lawmakers will debate over the state budget, school issues, border security and property taxes, among other issues.

BY JAMES BARRAGÁN
AND PATRICK SVITEK
JAN. 10, 2023
Texas Tribune

Lawmakers returned to Austin last week for their biennial assembly to pass new laws and decide how to spend the state's money for the next two years.

Republicans maintained their nearly 30-year dominance over Texas politics in last November's midterm elections, growing their majorities in both legislative



State Representative Ana Hernandez, representing Texas District 143, was sworn in at the Capitol last Tuesday, seen with her son Gregory above.

chambers and keeping their grasp on every statewide elected office. That means Texans can expect the Legislature to continue to swing conservative on both fiscal and social matters.

Just how conservative they go will be the

main question, as the battle between far-right, socially conservative Republicans and business-oriented GOP legislators, who have tried to move away from fights over social issues, continues within the party.

Democrats, who have been in the minority in both chambers of the Legislature for 20 years, will have limited tools to fend off Republican advances and will have to choose their battles wisely.

With a record-breaking budget surplus, lawmakers will be putting out their hands for funding for their pet projects across the state, and top leaders will no longer have the ready excuse of limited means. But with rising costs due to inflation, lawmakers will also have to factor in how much more they'll have to spend in the state budget to cover infrastructure and staffing costs that keep the state running.

Texas has seen major challenges since the last time lawmakers assembled in Austin in late 2021: a school shooting at an elementary school in Uvalde, higher inflation hitting Texans in their pocketbooks, a record number of migrants attempting to cross the state's south-

ern border, the outlawing of abortion following a U.S. Supreme Court decision and parents who have grown increasingly agitated about what public schools are teaching their children about gender, sex and race.

With major issues at play in the Capitol, here are six things to watch as Texas' 88th legislative session kicks off.

HOW TO SPEND THE BUDGET SURPLUS

The biggest topic of conversation heading into today is how to spend the state's \$32.7 billion budget surplus, and everyone — including top legislative leadership — is chomping at the bit over how to use that cash.

Texas lawmakers will have \$188.2 billion available for the next budget after

record-breaking revenue growth

The surplus, or one-time money that was left over from the previous budget cycle, is historic in its enormity. But not all of it is up for grabs. A share of it is reserved for highway funds, and some of it will flow into the state's rainy day fund, also called the Economic Stabilization Fund.

Gov. Greg Abbott promised during his campaign to deliver "the largest property tax cut in the history of the state." He said he wanted to use half of the budget surplus to deliver on that promise. But Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, another property tax relief hawk, has introduced a note of caution,

Continued. See 88th Legislature, page 5

SHELDON ISD NEWS

Community Partnerships Make Big Impact at Garrett Elementary



Thanks to a partnership with Inspire Church, Garrett Elementary students at all grade levels will receive school supplies and personal care items. On Friday, January 13, the school, in partnership with Inspire Church and Care Source, held a Welcome Back Give Back event. Students were able to register for a backpack filled with supplies as well as food items from the Houston Food Bank. The campus held an assembly where the school's step team, drumline and cheerleaders performed.

Inspire Church is a partner through Sheldon ISD's Adopt-a-School Partners in Education program. The Partners in Education program exists to build relationships that benefit both the school and community businesses. Any local businesses inter-

Sheldon Prekindergarten Programs Thrive Thanks to New Program

This school year, Sheldon ISD prekindergarten classrooms at Sheldon and Cravens early childhood academies introduced Ready Set Grow: a new curriculum focused on how children learn while personalizing the experience for each child. Ready Set Grow is provided for all prekindergarten students and prepares Sheldon ISD's youngest learner for the academic classroom in years to come.

"Brain development plays an important part in education," said Director of Early Learning Dr. Denise Mustin. "By learning early on how to focus, problem solve, listen and regulate emotions, students can prepare their minds for academic success."

Sheldon ISD has partnered with Fueling Brains and has implemented their left brain, right brain, movement approach to instruction to develop the executive functions (cognitive flexibility, working memory, and inhibitory control) of each child. Prekindergarten classrooms are divided into teams of two - one teacher focuses on left-brain learning and another focuses on right-brain learning. The right-brain classroom allows for collaboration and dramatic play, while the left brain classroom encourages independent stations and logical thinking strategies. Units are broken up into themes throughout the year and teach children how to take ini-



tative in their learning, offering choice and focusing on the skills needed to learn first followed by the specific learning outcome.

"We have seen tremendous growth in this year's prekindergarten classrooms," Dr. Mustin said. "We are appreciative of the support from our families at home as we know education is a partnership between parents and the school."

Architect Selected for New 9th and 10th Grade Campus

Sheldon ISD Trustees have approved Huckabee as the architect for the new 9th and 10th Grade Campus. Now that an architect has been selected, the district can move forward with the design and contractor proposals to stay on schedule for an anticipated opening during the 2025-26 school year. The facility will be located adjacent to C.E. King High School and the exterior will complement the look of the senior campus (which would house 11th and 12th grades, as well as career and technical programs). The capacity will be for an enrollment of approximately 2,500 students.

Once the new 9th and 10th Grade Campus opens, the current 9th Grade Campus on C.E. King Parkway, will revert to its intended purpose as the Sheldon Education and Community Center. This center would serve as a building for the community with a mobile health unit in partnership with

Harris County Public Health as well as opportunities for adult and community education courses.

Lessons learned during Hurricane Harvey have shown a need for a community facility to provide services in times of a crisis as well as provide support. Sheldon is an unincorporated community and a renovated Community Center is a way to give back through taxpayer dollars by providing services to assist residents.

Sheldon ISD Launches Construction Update Webpage

Thanks to the support from the community in the November 2022 Bond Election, Sheldon ISD trustees have been able to make decisions to move forward with construction projects from the referendum. Community members can follow construction updates at www.sheldonisd.com/grow.

Two major projects from Proposition A on the bond ballot included classroom additions to Null Middle School and Cravens Early Childhood Academy. Stan-

tec is the architect for Null Middle School, and Huckabee has designed the addition for Cravens Early Childhood Academy. As part of the additions to the buildings, Cravens ECA will receive eight additional classroom spaces and Null Middle School will receive ten. The additional classrooms will accommodate campus enrollment growth.

Now that architects have been selected, the district and Board will review contractor proposals this spring with hopes to break

ground on construction for the additions in the summer of 2023.

Funds from Proposition A will also address facility improvements at existing schools and buildings. Campuses will begin discussions with immediate needs to be reviewed by the school and administration. A variety of factors will be considered such as the age and condition of the building. Some improvements may include updating roofs, HVAC, playground equipment and other facility needs.

King High School Receives 22 Nominations for Musical Performance



King High School's theater department has been notified that the school's winter performance of "Little Shop of Horrors" has received a record-breaking number of nominations, 22, for the Tommy Tune Awards. The Tommy Tune Awards (TTA) Program is sponsored by Houston's Theatre Under the Stars and celebrates the educational value, artistry and community of high school musical theater in the Greater Houston Area. Houston area high schools produce a full-length musical to compete in over 15 TTA categories. Each school is adjudicated by a team of volunteer Mentors, professional Houston-based music/theater artists, based on a 100-point scale rubric.

The 22 nominations are listed below:

Outstanding Lead Actor
Caleb 'CJ' Johnson
Alexandra Cordova

Outstanding Supporting Actor
Daniel Martinez Rivera
Aylecia Soto
Yvonne Orozco
Jazlyn Lastrappe

Outstanding Singer
Sara Saeed
Alexandra Cordova

Outstanding Actors
Alexandra Cordova
Caleb 'CJ' Johnson
Donovan Davis

Outstanding Director
Adam Brandner

Outstanding Stage Management
Joanna Gonzalez-Clawson

Outstanding Lighting

Design
Josaphine Gonzalez-Clawson

Outstanding Set Design
Hugo Palacios
Kelvyn Amaya

Outstanding Choreography
Aylecia Soto

Outstanding Costume Design
Annuiska Villarreal

Honorable Mention
Sara Saeed

The Theater Department was also honored by being nominated for Outstanding Technical Achievement, Outstanding Ensemble, and Outstanding Musical.

In May, the awards show will be presented to the community in celebration of the participant's artistic accomplishments.

GALENA PARK ISD NEWS

Geography Bee Winners Recognized at GPISD Board Meeting



Houston, TX: Galena Park ISD recognized its top individual and team Geography Bee winners:

Elementary Overall Top Scorer:
Luis Guerra, North Shore Elementary

Elementary Overall Top Scoring Team Members:
Luis Guerra, North Shore Elementary
Mario Razo, North Shore Elementary
Eduardo Saldana, North Shore Elementary

Middle School Overall Top Scorer:
Sarva Patel, Cunningham Middle School

Middle School Overall Top Scoring Team Members:
Gareth Forbis, Galena Park Middle School
Andrea Duron Midence, Galena Park Middle School
Elijah Washington, Galena Park Middle School

The Geography Bee is an annual competition designed to encourage the study of geography. Students are selected by their campus to compete among their peers. During the competition, participants are asked a series of geography questions and earn points for correct answers.

A medal and certificate were presented to each Geography Bee winner on behalf of the Galena Park ISD Board of Trustees and Dr. John Moore, Superintendent of Schools.

Story Credits: Dr. Tommie L. Smith
Photo Credit: Christopher Gause

Check us on the go at
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CHARLOTTE'S WEB

By Charlotte Jackson



Fighting Fatigue

“The great news is that there are no signs of leukemia or pre-leukemia, yet the amount of fatigue is unbearable for a person your age.” Those words spoken by an oncologist who had performed a full battery of tests on my blood were comforting or at least welcomed. For many years, I have experienced an increased white blood cell count. And with each test, the results were the same. The doctor would prescribe more antibiotics, more rest and to come back in a few months.

However in 2022 my physician was finally able to get me referred to one of the most recommended internists in the city. After a very detailed initial appointment where she spent almost three hours with me, I felt a glimmer of hope. She was determined to find out what was happening with my blood. She prescribed two supplements and instructed me to document every food or drink I put in my mouth. That may sound simple enough but at my age, it was a challenge. If you do not believe me, try it yourself. Imagine, if you are cooking and you test your meal as you are cooking, document that. If you are at work and someone offers you a piece of fruit or a pastry, document it.

She also wanted me to document my wake-up time as well as my exact bedtime. She wanted me to document every response to an email, a phone call or human contact.

After a challenging six months of this with my blood cell count steadily increasing, she referred me to an oncologist to rule out any signs of cancer.

Today, this doctor had results from the bloodwork as well as an array of questions. While he ruled out all signs of cancer, he shared some thoughts about something that is being seen more and more often. He said that especially since the pandemic, there are more of the remaining Baby Boomers who are being pulled in so many directions that they are dealing with chronic fatigue syndrome combined with compassion fatigue and caregiver fatigue. He asked me to tell him a few things about my family, my occupation, and my hobbies. Within ten minutes he told me he needed a nap just from listening to me. I laughed as I have heard this so many times over the years. You see, Baby Boomers typically burn the candle at both ends and still find the energy to continue. Then when you add in the emotions of being a single parent of multiple children, you realize the candle needs to be a three wick candle. And if a person works in an occupation where they listen to the needs of others, such as what I do, it is just normal to push yourself even harder trying to solve the issues at hand.

He told me that since the pandemic, he has seen an increase in those like me who are trying to juggle so many things that eventually the fatigue catches up with them. He gave me the same advice I have heard before. Slow down. Learn to say no. Do not feel guilty that you cannot be all things for all people. And the best advice? Stay away from people who bring you down, no matter who they are. If they are not a positive influence, walk away. Avoid fatigue. You know your body, mind, and spirit better than anyone.

HOUSTON REMMEMBERS DR. KING,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Kennedy, Feb 21, 1965, Malcolm X (an outspoken Black calling for racial equality), April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King Jr is assassinated and June 5, 1968 Robert Kennedy is assassinated as he was running for President.

“All we say to America is, ‘Be true to what you said on paper,’” Dr. King said in 1968, in the last public address he made before he was assassinated. King was referring to the US Constitution. “Somewhere I read of the freedom of assembly. Somewhere I read of freedom of speech. Somewhere I read of the freedom of the press. Somewhere I read that the greatness of America is the right to protest for right.” Dr. King never wavered from his invocation that truth — regardless of how uncomfortable it may be — is critical to America’s ability to live up to its stat-

ed ideals. He never lost his faith in the power of truth, either. As he said in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech in 1964: “I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality,” Dr. King said.

Dr. King emphasized, “We are not wrong, we are not wrong in what we are doing. If we are wrong, the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong. If we are wrong, the Constitution of the United States is wrong. And if we are wrong, God Almighty is wrong. If we are wrong, Jesus of Nazareth was merely a utopian dreamer that never came down to Earth. If we are wrong, justice is a lie, love has no meaning. And we are determined here in Montgomery to work and fight until justice runs down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.”

HOUSTONIAN WINS MISS UNIVERSE,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

University of North Texas with a bachelor’s degree in fashion design with a minor in fibers. She works as a designer creating “eco-friendly-clothing” and as a model. She’s worked as a sewing instructor at a non-profit. Gabriel is a former high school volleyball player, she’s also CEO of her own sustainable clothing line.

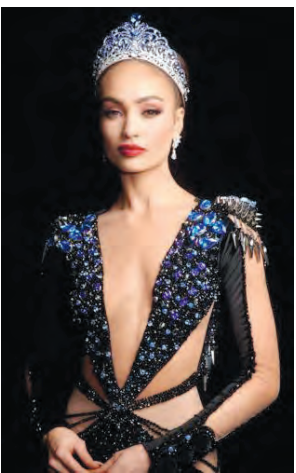
The pageant, which was held in New Orleans with Access Hollywood’s own Zuri Hall holding down the fort as one of the hosts, was a glamorous affair, but it also shined a light on some of the outdated practices at the event.

When R’Bonney made it to the Top 5 she was asked her on-stage interview question, which was what she’d like to see changed about the pageant. The interviewer asked, “Miss Universe recently made an inclusive change allowing mothers and married women to compete this year. What’s another change you’d like to see and why?”

R’Bonney had a solid answer, sharing that at 28, which is the maximum age to compete in the pageant, she’d like to see a change on the age limit. “For me, I would like to see an age increase because I am 28 years old. And that is the oldest age to compete. And I think it’s a beautiful thing. My favorite quote is ‘if not now, then when?’ Because as a woman, I believe age does not define us. It’s not tomorrow, it’s not yesterday — but it’s now. The time is now,” she said.

In the Q&A at the last stage of the competition for the three finalists, Gabriel was asked how she would work to demonstrate Miss Universe is “an empowering and progressive organization” if she were to win.

“I would use it to be a transformational leader,” she responded, citing her work using recycled materials in her fashion design and teaching sewing to survivors



R'Bonney Gabriel Miss Universe 2023

of human trafficking and domestic violence.

“It is so important to invest in others, invest in our community and use your unique talent to make a difference,” Gabriel continued. “We all have something special, and when we plant those seeds to other people in our life, we transform them and we use that as a vehicle for change.”

In addition to competing in pageants, she also runs her own eco-friendly clothing line, and she put her designs on display on Sunday as she hit the stage in a bright orange one-shoulder swimsuit with a cutout midriff, which she teamed with an eye-catching cape which featured the words “If Not Now, Then When?”

R’Bonney designed the cape herself which was made using sustainable dyes and plastic bottles to demonstrate “how art can be made out of what we perceive as trash.” She also made headlines for designing her own swimwear for her Miss Universe competition.

Nearly 90 contestants from around the world took part in the competition, organizers said, involving “personal statements, in depth interviews and various categories including evening gown & swimwear.” Miss Curacao, Gabriela Dos Santos, and Miss Puerto Rico, Ashley Carino, rounded out the top five finalists.

ASK DIAMOND JIM

Diamond Jim: “When it Comes to Rolex, Trust Your Source”



As you can see by our previous articles on “How to Spot A Fake Rolex”, there is a multitude of tips, tricks, signs, and indicators for how to spot a fake Rolex (If you missed one of the articles or would like to read them again, [click here](#) or go to [www.pineforestjewelry.com](#)). As the most counterfeited luxury watch brand, Rolex replicas are not only becoming more common, the “quality” of these fake watches has also reached a level of sophistication previously unseen in the luxury world. Counterfeiters have become highly advanced in their craft of replicating Rolex timepieces, as we continue to see more Rolex “superfakes” in the market – counterfeits that are so well made they’re nearly impossible to detect by anybody short of highly trained watch experts who have the necessary knowledge, skills, and tools to identify them.

There are a plethora of Rolex replicas that are considerably easier to detect as a counterfeit with its multiple tells – many that are obvious giveaways, as well as some not-so-obvious – the increasing amount of extremely sophisticated and well-crafted counterfeits circulating in the market is alarming and worthy of the extra time, attention, and money spent for a closer inspection. We highly recommend having any watch in question authenticated by a brand authorized dealer, qualified watchmaker, high-end watch shop, or brand service provider. The last thing you want is to end up with a very convincing high-quality fake Rolex that you bought at a *real* Rolex price.

At the risk of sounding painfully obvious, an even more secure way to ensure the Rolex timepiece you buy is genuine is to be confident you are purchasing from a source that is equally genuine, trustworthy, and reputable. Finding a seller that stands by every watch they sell is critical. Especially when in the market for a pre-owned Rolex, there is of course more risk involved than buying brand new from a retail store. Particularly when looking on online marketplaces, doing your homework is imperative. Researching which sources are vetted for with a solid reputation, whether they guarantee authenticity of their products, if they offer a warranty with every sale, what their return policy is (if any), and any other info that will increase your trust in the seller is absolutely crucial for ensuring your confidence in your decision to buy something as extravagant, not to mention *expensive*, as a Rolex watch.

Credit to The Watch Standard for this article

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OPINION

By U.S. Representative SYLVIA GARCIA



Remembering Sandy Hook

December 14 is the 10-Year Remembrance of the tragic school shooting that took place at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Sadly, 20 innocent elementary school students and 6 brave teachers were taken from their families by a senseless act of gun violence that day.

No family should ever experience the pain of losing a loved one to gun violence. A decade later, my House colleagues and I remain committed to ending this epidemic.

That’s why this Congress we passed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act – which President Biden signed into law this summer.

- This will save lives because it delivers:
- 750 million for states to create laws that keep guns out of the hands of people who are a danger to themselves and/or to others.
 - enhanced background checks for people under age 21.
 - more than \$2.3 billion for school safety programs, mental health support for students, and improved learning conditions.
 - \$250 million in community-based violence prevention programs.
 - better protection for victims of domestic violence by stopping convicted abusers from purchasing firearms.

This is the most significant gun violence reduction effort in the last 30 years. But we must do more to protect families and children.

That’s why today, on the 10-Year Remembrance of the Sandy Hook Shooting, I’m continuing to fight for gun control legislation in Congress.

I won’t stop until we are all safe from preventable gun violence. That’s my promise to all my constituents.



with Slim Randles

Running... the easy way

Doc was just getting up to leave the philosophy counter as Herb walked in. Herb was grinning and flexing muscles and had the look of eagles in his eyes. We stared.

“Herb,” said Doc. “You know, you can overdo a good thing.”

“Why Doc ... whatever do you mean?”

“I realize that getting more exercise is your resolution for the new year, but a man your age ... you need to pace yourself a little, that’s all. Don’t try to get in shape all at once.”

“Why Doc, I’ve never felt better in my life. Hey, you were so right to get me on this exercise kick. I’ve been meaning to thank you. It’s just what I’ve been needing. What would you think about my playing some football in the spring? I mean, it’s just touch football, but I miss the ol’ razz-matazz, you know?”

Doc shook his head sadly and walked out. Herb started laughing and sat down with us and flipped his cup over for his morning eye opener.

“What was that all about, Herb?” Dud asked.

“A little joke I’m playing on Doc, that’s all,” Herb said. “You remember how Doc has been on my case to get more exercise and slim down some? Well, there was only one way to shut him up, so I started running. I bought a sweat suit and started running. I run past his house each morning. Then, about an hour later, I run past his house the other direction, huffing and puffing and looking at my watch.”

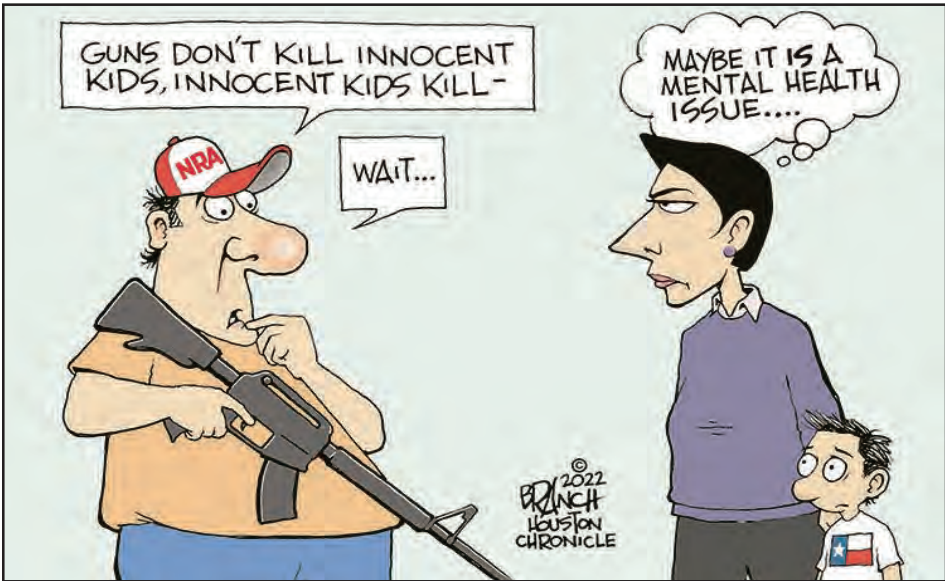
“An hour? You run for an hour each morning?”

“Of course not,” Herb said, laughing. “I run past Doc’s house then walk the block to the library. An hour later, I run past Doc’s house and then walk two blocks home.”

We stared at him.

“What?” he said. “You know Doc’s going to worry about me one way or the other. I just thought I’d change it up a bit.”

Brought to you by Saddle Up: A Cowboy Guide to Writing by Slim Randles. Now available as a Kindle book on Amazon.com.



☆

STATE CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS

By Gary Borders



Texas Speaker open to resort-style Casinos in the state

House Speaker Dade Phelan, R-Beaumont, told The Dallas Morning News and other media outlets that he is open to bringing resort-style casinos to Texas. But don’t expect to find slot machines in 7-Eleven stores if casino gambling is legalized.

“What I don’t want to see is to walk into every convenience store and see 15 slot machines,” Phelan said. “I want to see destination-style casinos that are high quality and that create jobs and that improve the lifestyle of those communities.”

The gambling industry is preparing for another strong push to bring gaming to one of the few major markets that doesn’t allow it. But other state leaders seem more hesitant, including Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, who said in December that he “doesn’t see any movement on it.”

Gov. Greg Abbott has softened his once-strong opposition to legalized gambling, echoing Phelan’s support for casinos that also feature golf courses, luxury hotels and other amenities.

The Morning News report said the Dallas-Fort Worth area would be a top location because of its strong convention and tourism industry, as well as access to major airports.

HOUSE RULES ALLOW DEMOCRATS TO CHAIR COMMITTEES

New House rules adopted in the first week of the legislative session allow the appointment of Democrats to chair certain committees, despite being in the minority in that chamber. The Texas Standard reported that was a victory for Phelan, who defied Republicans wanting to ban Democrats from holding chair positions.

In Phelan’s first speech after being reelected speaker, he talked about the importance of both parties working together.

“After watching Congress attempt to function last week, I cannot imagine why some want Texans to be like D.C.,” Phelan said, referring to the



protracted battle over electing a U.S. Speaker of the House.

Another provision is aimed at stopping legislators from skipping sessions to break quorum by levying fines every day they are absent without leave. During the 2021 session, House Democrats left Texas for 38 days in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to block passage of a slate of voting restrictions.

WILDFIRE DANGER RETURNS TO STATE

A series of dry cold fronts sweeping through the next this week bring the potential of increased wildfire risk to parts of the state, according to the Texas A&M Forest Service. On Jan. 11, the service responded to five requests for assistance on wildfires that burned more than 740 acres across the state. The largest of these was the Cellers Hill Fire in Throckmorton County.

As of Sunday, the only active blaze was the 23-acre Grub Hill Fire in Wise County, which was 90% contained. Currently, 69 counties are under burn bans.

PRISONERS LAUNCH HUNGER STRIKES OVER SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

A large-scale hunger strike protesting the state’s solitary confinement practices began last Tuesday, with about 300 people in Texas prisons reportedly participating, according to the Texas Standard. The prisoners are protesting the state’s practice of placing inmates in solitary indefinitely.

Michele Deitch, director of the Prison and Jail Innovation Lab at the University of Texas at Austin, said prisoners have gone on hunger strikes to push the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to meet months-long demands for change. Besides ending indefinite solitary confinement, also called restrictive housing, the prisoners want to move to a behavioral-based system rather than a status-based system. Under the latter, prisoners can be placed in solitary simply by being labeled a gang member, not necessarily for breaking any rules.

“I do believe that it is something that the agency should take a very hard look at, whether there are ways that they could be approaching this issue that are both safe and more appropriate,” Deitch told the Standard.

FROM LA NIÑA TO EL NIÑO? POSSIBLY

The 2022 drought didn’t turn out to be as severe as that of 2011, but it still caused widespread economic damage to crops and livestock, as well as shrinking water-supply reservoirs. As the state heads into 2023, Dr. Mark Wentzel, hydrologist with the Texas Water Development Board, is among forecasters predicting an end to the conditions that resulted in reduced rainfall and warmer temperatures for the last few years.

“The National Weather Service is expecting that La Niña will dissipate, and then, possibly by the summer to next fall, we might actually be in El Niño conditions, the opposite to La Niña. And those conditions (could) actually bring Texas a wetter and cooler winter than is normal,” Wentzel wrote.

The most severe drought now is centered in the Texas Hill Country, in Kendall and surrounding counties, and in the extreme northern boundary of the Texas Panhandle. Drought conditions have ended in East and Southeast Texas.

Wentzel wrote he expects “some easing” of drought conditions this spring.

WILDLIFE VACCINE BAIT AIRDROP UNDERWAY

The Texas Department of State Health Services has renewed its battle against rabies along the Texas border by air-dropping vaccine bait from planes leaving Edinburg, Del Rio and Alpine.

“Our goal is to vaccinate wildlife, with target species being coyotes and gray foxes, along the border to maintain herd immunity and to keep past variants from being reintroduced or new variants from entering Texas,” said Dr. Susan Rollo, director of the Oral Rabies Vaccination Program. “We will be delivering vaccine baits to 18 counties this year.”

About 814,000 oral rabies vaccine baits will be dropped in the 29th year of the program.

☆

THE POSTSCRIPT

By Carrie Classon

Imperfections

I almost threw away my old lace napkins.

They have rust stains on them. In order to cover the stains, I threw them in a pot of green dye and boiled them. The dye was not a success. The napkins all came out in slightly varying shades of green, and the rust stains—while less noticeable—were still there. I used them once and was self-conscious the whole time.

“People are going to think I didn’t wash the napkins!” I worried. But I washed them again, ironed them and kept them anyway.

Then, over the holidays, I had the whole family over. I eyed the old green napkins.

They have what appears to be handmade lace around the edges and a crocheted medallion in one corner. They are a generous size and made of good, sturdy cotton. They are serviceable napkins in every way except for the small spots that appear on almost every one of them.

“Not one person in 10 can see those spots!” my husband, Peter, says when I tell him I’m thinking of throwing out the old napkins.

(There are 12 napkins so, even if Peter is right, that still means one person might notice and think, “Did she wash these napkins?”)

But I used them anyway. I don’t think anyone noticed. Then I washed them again and looked at them before I ironed them. The stains were just as noticeable. The shades of green are no more uniform.

And I realized I kind of liked them.

I have no idea where these napkins came from. I found them when I was cleaning out my barn, preparing to sell my old farmhouse years ago. They are not family heirlooms. I have to assume I picked them up at a garage sale somewhere. I probably didn’t look at them closely until I got home, saw the rust stains on them and tucked them away—unsure from the very beginning whether or not I should keep them.

I wonder who made them. It was a lot of work. I wonder where the rust stains came from. That must have been disappointing for whoever owned them. I’m guessing it happened many years ago. And here I am, still using them. And I do like them.

Things don’t have to be perfect. That’s what I’m finally coming to accept.

My own inability to reach perfection was an ongoing source of frustration for decades until I reconciled myself to the fact that I was, in fact, good enough. Good enough was a laudable goal. And these napkins, while they would never be featured on any magazine cover, are good enough—more than adequate, in fact—for the celebrations I host, which will also not be perfect, but hopefully good enough for everyone in attendance.

It is nice to use something that is old and loved and imperfect.

I look at these napkins and imagine the life they must have had when they were new. Likely they were a wedding present to somebody a very long time ago. They were used for festive gatherings I cannot imagine by people I never knew and maybe just a little of that history is left, maybe a little of that laughter remains, somewhere in their imperfections.

I ironed the old napkins. I folded them. I put them in the drawer for another use in another celebration with different people—of whom, perhaps, one in 10 might wonder about the rust stains, now camouflaged with green dye.

They still have a purpose—imperfect as they are. And I take inspiration from that.

Till next time, Carrie
Photos and other news can be found at CarrieClasson.com.

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88th Legislature convenes in Austin

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

warning the Legislature could not spend half of the surplus without busting its self-imposed spending cap. (The Legislature can vote to spend beyond the cap.)

Patrick, whose railing against property taxes swept him into the Senate in 2007, has said he is committed to cutting property taxes but wants to move cautiously to ensure the state has enough money left over in its rainy day fund for emergency spending and for other state priorities.

In the House, Speaker Dade Phelan, R-Beaumont, has suggested allocating some of the surplus to one-time infrastructure spending. That plan carries the advantage of not having to reproduce that spending in the budget every two years, like with property tax relief, which is a recurring state cost.

Lawmakers will also have to weigh additional costs to running the state. Because of inflation, the costs for state services will be more expensive, and state employees will be lagging behind without a cost-of-living adjustment in their salaries.

“PARENTAL RIGHTS”

Republican leaders and lawmakers have targeted “parental rights” at the center of their agendas this session. They want to give parents more say in their children’s education, whether it be the school they attend or the books they read.

How exactly that goal manifests itself in the session remains to be seen. Abbott campaigned for reelection on a “parental bill of rights” that, among other things, seeks to increase the transparency of school curricula and crack down on what he’s called “pornographic” materials in books available to schoolchildren. In some ways, it is a continuation of GOP efforts from 2021 that led to restrictions on how teachers talk about race and gender in classrooms in an effort to ban critical race theory from being taught in schools.

A more divisive concept inside the GOP could be the revival of an effort for school vouchers, or redirecting tax dollars to let parents take their kids out of public schools and send them to other kinds of schools. Abbott voiced his clearest support yet for the idea during his campaign, but it has historically run into opposition from rural Republicans in the House.

Patrick, who oversees the Senate and has considerable power over legislation, has long supported the concept. In a podcast interview posted Sunday, he said he sees it as part of this session’s focus on “parental freedom.”

“Those who oppose school choice, [they say], ‘Oh, vouchers are terrible!’ No, parents deserve the freedom to decide where their kids go to school,” Patrick said.

LGBTQ ISSUES AND WOMEN’S HEALTH

Social conservatives are also attempting to crack down on LGBTQ rights this session. Around three dozen bills targeting LGBTQ people had been filed as of last week.

These bills vary from putting restrictions on drag shows to restricting gender-affirming care for transgender children and even criminalizing it. Such care is recommended by major medical associations to treat gender dysphoria, but socially conservative legislators have decried gender-affirming care as “genital mutilation” and “child abuse.”

Still, major leaders like Abbott have supported the push by conservatives to launch child-abuse investigations of parents

who provide such care to their children.

Backlash against drag shows has also grown, with far-right groups targeting the shows and accusing performers of “grooming children” — a trope that has historically been used against LGBTQ people.

Lawmakers will also have to figure out how to tackle access to abortion in the state after the procedure was outlawed in Texas law following the U.S. Supreme Court’s reversal of the landmark Roe v. Wade abortion case last summer.

Before the November elections, some Republican candidates and lawmakers had expressed an openness to creating exceptions to the state’s abortion ban in cases of rape or incest. But after Republicans maintained their dominance in state politics on Election Day, Smith said he does not see a political motivation for GOP leaders to revisit the issue.

BORDER SECURITY

Last session, the Legislature allocated a record \$3 billion toward border security efforts, including Abbott’s highly touted border mission, Operation Lone Star, which has sent thousands of state troopers and National Guard service members to the Texas-Mexico border. Some of that money has also been used to build a border wall, the first in the country funded by state coffers.

But with a record number of migrants trying to cross into the country — U.S. Customs and Border Protection recorded 2.4 million attempts to cross the U.S.-Mexico border in 2022 — the funding could not keep up with the large number of resources sent to slow the crossing of migrants.

State lawmakers had to transfer another \$1 billion to keep Abbott’s border mission going through 2022, often taking money from underfunded state agencies like the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and the Texas Juvenile Justice Department. More money — ranging from hundreds of millions of dollars to another billion — is expected from the state to continue the effort until the end of the fiscal year in August, DeLuna Castro said.

Still, the number of migrants crossing the southwest border has remained stubbornly high, and state lawmakers will have to decide whether they want to continue spending multiple billions of dollars on an effort that has failed to produce a resounding success

“People say, ‘Well, they’re still crossing.’ Yes, they’re still crossing because of President Biden,” Patrick said at a news conference unveiling his legislative priorities. “Without our DPS, without our National Guard, without the state doing what we’re doing, the situation would be far worse ... so we have to keep that up until we get a new president in the White House who hopefully will make border security No. 1 in 2024.

But there could also be other ramifications and questions lawmakers will attempt to respond to legislatively. As Abbott ramped up the mission to deploy 10,000 service members to the border in the fall of 2021, troops began complaining about poor living conditions, a lack of pay and no sense of mission. The mission has also seen the deaths of 10 troops tied to Operation Lone Star, including five suspected suicides and the death of Bishop Evans, a servicemember who died in the Rio Grande while trying to rescue drowning migrants. The mi-

grants survived.

THE “BIG THREE” DYNAMIC

Sessions always hinge on the relationship among the Big Three — the governor, the lieutenant governor and the House speaker. This time around, there is ample cause for tension from the outset of the session.

The two chamber leaders do not like one another, especially after the marathon of sessions in 2021. Patrick repeatedly criticized Phelan’s management of the House after Democrats broke quorum over the GOP’s priority elections bill. And then Patrick wielded his clout with former President Donald Trump to try to gin up primary opposition to Phelan, who ultimately ran unopposed.

Phelan, speaking at the Texas Tribune Festival in Austin in September, added it had “been a while” since he talked to Patrick.

Abbott and Patrick are also a duo to watch. Like Phelan, Abbott saw Patrick meddle in his primary and took note. And more recently, they are especially at odds when it comes to the fallout from the 2021 power grid collapse.

After Abbott declared later that year that lawmakers had done all they needed to do to fix the grid, Patrick campaigned on improving the grid and has named it a top priority for this session. He wants to build more natural gas capacity, a topic on which Abbott has been silent. Patrick has sought to downplay any leadership tensions on the issue. The grid is “fixed for now, but we need to fix it forever,” Patrick told Spectrum News in December.

DEMOCRATIC STRATEGY

Democrats are returning to the Legislature with very similar numbers — 64 members in the House and 12 in the Senate. But in the House, they have a new caucus chair, Rep. Trey Martinez Fischer of San Antonio, who is known as more sharp-elbowed than his predecessor, Rep. Chris Turner of Grand Prairie.

“Trey is a much different leader,” Rep. Ron Reynolds of Missouri City, chair of the Texas Legislative Black Caucus, said in a recent interview. “I anticipate there’ll be a more aggressive nature when combating Republicans on the issues.”

House Democrats already showed a new willingness to fight in 2021 when they broke quorum for weeks in protest of new voting restrictions. Martinez Fischer has not ruled out doing that again as a last resort for trying to derail Republican legislation.

Democrats in the House are also watching to see how much of a seat at the table they get as Phelan faces pressure to do away with committee chairs from the minority party, a long-time tradition. Phelan is highly unlikely to give in, as he has defended the practice as one that sets the Legislature apart from the gridlock in Washington. But he could take other steps to reduce Democratic influence in the House.

House Republicans have a new leader, too. On Monday, their caucus elected a new chair, Rep. Craig Goldman of Fort Worth, previously the treasurer of the caucus. The chair during the 2021 sessions, Rep. Jim Murphy of Houston, did not seek reelection to the House.

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GOVERNMENTAL FUNDS						
FOR THE YEAR ENDED AUGUST 31, 2022						
Data Control Codes	General Fund	Debt Service Fund	Capital Projects Fund	ARP Act ESSER III	Nonmajor Governmental Funds	Total Governmental Funds
Revenues						
5700 Local, intermediate, and out-of-state	\$ 108,966,612	\$ 32,590,573	\$ 486,923	\$ -	\$ 2,367,230	\$ 144,411,338
5800 State program revenues	120,370,802	261,413	-	-	2,348,769	122,980,984
5900 Federal program revenues	8,755,287	-	-	12,634,398	40,575,030	61,964,715
5020 Total Revenues	238,092,701	32,851,986	486,923	12,634,398	45,291,029	329,357,037
Expenditures						
Current:						
0011 Instruction	130,728,986	-	-	9,060,514	14,529,166	154,318,666
0012 Instructional resources and media services	2,615,570	-	-	80,106	102,253	2,797,929
0013 Curriculum and instructional staff development	5,591,565	-	-	139,226	4,665,206	10,395,997
0021 Instructional leadership	5,778,337	-	-	392,957	533,610	6,704,904
0023 School leadership	16,713,041	-	-	399,942	156,710	17,269,693
0031 Guidance, counseling and evaluation services	9,212,737	-	-	485,054	1,266,370	10,964,161
0032 Social work services	628,859	-	-	16,630	452,985	1,098,474
0033 Health services	2,312,924	-	-	257,078	146,192	2,716,194
0034 Student transportation	9,619,398	-	-	305,972	478,732	10,404,102
0035 Food services	173,564	-	-	413,709	16,190,251	16,777,524
0036 Extracurricular activities	4,021,550	-	-	172,941	1,225,416	5,419,907
0041 General administration	9,070,821	-	-	149,688	48,727	9,269,236
0051 Facilities maintenance and operations	27,784,779	-	-	581,321	1,002,056	29,368,156
0052 Security and monitoring services	3,978,925	-	-	41,240	19,956	4,040,121
0053 Data processing services	4,657,073	-	-	57,203	320,590	5,034,866
0061 Community services	1,651,659	-	-	76,493	1,033,970	2,762,122
Debt service:						
0071 Principal on long-term debt	746,343	17,980,716	-	-	13,577	18,740,636
0072 Interest on long-term debt	5,163	18,362,422	-	-	93	18,367,678
0073 Bond issuance costs and fees	-	7,000	-	-	-	7,000
Capital outlay:						
0081 Facilities acquisition and construction expenditures	940,564	-	20,968,105	4,324	-	21,912,993
Intergovernmental:						
0093 Payments related to shared services arrangements	-	-	-	-	376,824	376,824
0099 Payments to appraisal district	1,046,378	-	-	-	-	1,046,378
6030 Total Expenditures	237,278,236	36,350,138	20,968,105	12,634,398	42,562,684	349,793,561
Excess (deficiency) of revenues over (under) expenditures	814,465	(3,498,152)	(20,481,182)	-	2,728,345	(20,436,524)
Other Financing Sources (Uses)						
7912 Sale of real and personal property	125,583	-	-	-	21,382	146,965
7913 Proceeds from right-to-use leased asset	30,442	-	-	-	-	30,442
7915 Transfers in	-	-	-	-	45,706	45,706
8911 Transfers out	(155,706)	-	-	-	-	(155,706)
7080 Total Other Financing Sources (Uses)	319	-	-	-	67,088	67,407
1200 Net change in fund balance	814,784	(3,498,152)	(20,481,182)	-	2,795,433	(20,369,117)
0100 Fund Balance - Beginning	193,868,422	6,021,294	86,476,162	-	5,877,180	292,243,058
3000 Fund Balance - Ending	\$ 194,683,206	\$ 2,523,142	\$ 65,994,980	\$ -	\$ 8,672,613	\$ 271,873,941

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