



L-R; Dolores Lozano, JP in Precinct 2 place 2 & Pct. 2 Commissioner Adrian Garcia. (Photo by Allan Jamail)

See Story below & on page 6.

# NORTH CHANNEL STAR

Your News, Your Newspaper

Serving all of the North Shore -- Channelview, Cloverleaf, Sheldon, Galena Park, Jacinto City

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## Judge Delores Lozano's History Making Family Home Workshop

By Allan Jamail

Jacinto City, Texas ~ January 6, 2026 at Jacinto City's Heritage Hall Justice of the Peace Dolores Lozano and Harris County Commissioner Precinct 2 Adrian Garcia partnered to host the County's history making first fully translated and interpreted Family Legal Workshop.

Judge Lozano opened the workshop and welcomed everyone; the table's setup for the attendees had a wealth of information which was presented by individual county officials.

She said, "This workshop is about removing barriers and empowering families with clear, practical information during some of life's most difficult moments," "No one should be prevented from understanding their rights and responsibilities because of language."

Commissioner Adrian

Garcia greeted everyone and thanked Judge Lozano for her forward thinking to help families with so many needed issues they're faced with.

Garcia also gave praises to Lozano for her work in 2025 in which Harris County was awarded by Texas Association of Counties (TAC) The Best Practice Award for the county's new Eviction Diversion Initiative (EDI) which is under the leadership of Justice's of the Peace Dolores Lozano.

He gave some personal experiences he knew about how those facing eviction benefited by the EDI services Lozano ushered into the county.

Mentioning too Lozano's leadership in providing the new free Virtual Legal Kiosk computer service which expands access to residents so they'll have greater access to various legal resources by way of the John Phelps Court-



Family Home Workshop presenters. L-R: Pct. 2 HC Comm'r Adrian Garcia, Dolores Lozano, JP in Precinct 2 Place 2, HC Probate Ct. No.2. Judge Medina & HC Public Probate Admin. Brandon Cofield. (Photo by Allan Jamail)

house (101 S. Richey Street, Suite B; Pasadena, TX 77506) and in partnership with Texas Legal Services Center (TLSC).

Commissioner Garcia concluded by urging everyone to take their pen and paper provided and to take notes on all the important services that were to be presented.

His Community Liaison Pct. 2 Laura Alvarado provided handouts of many of

the services Garcia provides precinct 2 residents. Some were, Access2Rides Transportation Program, Nuisance and Abatement Program to remove neighborhood nuisances, health services, jobs and small businesses services, parks and community centers, bike and walking trails, for a complete list of services and how to obtain them Visit: hcp2.com.

Harris County Officials

in attendance or who had representatives there other than the hosts were, Probate Administrator Brandon Cofield, Judge Pamela Medina, County Clerk Teneshia Hudspeth, Tax Assessor Annette Ramirez and Pct. 2 Community Liaison Laura Alvarado.

The free event was so well attended it had moments of standing room only for participants who were eager to learn about the many different topics pertaining to their lives.

Judge Lozano made sure all topic presentations were fully translated and interpreted in whatever language needed to ensure meaningful access for all the attendees.

She used Master Word Inc a translation service that connects people across language and culture barriers. Participants regardless of their language desiring the free translation service received a

wireless electronic pendant with wired ear buds so they could better understand the valuable information.

Topics presented were; accessing bank accounts after death, wills versus trusts, clearing property titles, small estate affidavits, Transfer on Death Deeds (TODDs), where and how to file official records, Texas property tax exemptions and deferrals, and addressing abandoned homes or missing heirs.

Tax Assessor Annette Ramirez office presented a new way to pay property taxes which included benefits such as; receive email reminders of due dates, link and pay multiple properties at once, see past payments and bill history and save your payment methods, receipts, and documents all in one place;

Continued. See JC HOSTS COUNTY'S HIRST FULLY, Page 6

### CHANNEL CURRENTS

#### NCA Chamber 49th Awards & Installation Gala

The North Channel Chamber invites you to the 49th Awards & Installation Gala "An Evening With The Stars."

Friday, January 30, 2026 at the Hyatt Regency Baytown. Reception 6:30, Dinner 7:00pm.

Attire: Cocktail Hollywood Vibes. Individual Tickets \$100, RSVP 713-450-3600 or yesenia@ncachamber.com.

#### Highlands Rotary Club 51st Annual Chilli Feast

When: Saturday, February 7, 2026 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Where: St. Jude's Catholic Church, 808 South Main, Highlands. - Live Auction Begins at 1pm

Win a new 2026 Chevrolet Trailblazer or Trax from Turner Chevrolet. YOUR CHOICE!

Raffle Tickets \$100 Donation (includes 2 Chilli dinners)

Meal Tickets at the Door \$10

## North Shore Mustangs Cage Falcons, 89-53

By Allan Jamail

January 6, 2026 at the GPISD North Shore gymnasium the East Side varsity boys basketball team under Head Coach Stephen Woods won their second district game, easily defeating the neighboring Channelview Falcons 89 - 53. North Shore's Team Captains were Dillon Colbert and Joshua Richardson.

Nshore had 5 players in double-digits scoring and nine 3 point shots and with 10 fouls. The Mustangs have 10 players over six-foot tall on their 13 player roster.

Scorers: #0 La'Damian Defreeze 3, #1 Jorge Pacheco 7, #2 Da'marcus Sloan 15, #3 Dereion Moore 10, #4 Dillon Colbert 11, #5 Rashaad Williams 10, #10 Blake Colbert 4, #11 Joshua Richardson 4, #15 Sam Walker 10, #20 Jaime Perez 6 & #21 Sean Mayberry 7. Linda Jamail statistician.

Continued. See NS BASKETBALL, MUSTANGS, Page 3



#15 Mustang's Sam Walker goes airborne & slam-dunks for score. (Photo By Allan Jamail)

## Major Apartment Fire Leaves Dozens Homeless; One Firefighter Injured



Firemen remain on scene watching for hotspots after the devastating fire at the South Lake Villa Apartments destroyed at least 13 apartments.

By David Taylor  
Managing Editor

A devastating fire tore through the South Lake Villas apartments at 12355 Tidwell and C.E. King Parkway, leaving 13 units heavily damaged and dozens of residents displaced. The blaze, which began after a domestic dispute led a woman to burn her boyfriend's clothes on a second-floor balcony, quickly spread to nearby units, according to the Harris County Fire Marshal's Office.

Investigators identified the woman as Crystal Randall, 28, who now faces charges of reckless arson. In court docu-

ments, she allegedly set fire to her husband's clothes in a barbecue pit because she alleges he was cheating on her.

"It spread way over here," said witness Mario Thompson to ABC-13. "The roof had caved in. It was like stuff falling off the back. I'm like, 'Dang.'"

Firefighters' efforts were hampered by locked

Continued. See LOCKED GATES HAMPER FIRE RESPONSE, Page 5

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

By David Taylor  
Managing Editor

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

**A Legacy of Grass-roots Leadership**  
CHEJ, founded nearly

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

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



Jackie Medcalf

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

**A New Chapter for THEA and CHEJ**

Beginning in 2026, CHEJ's decades

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

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

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

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

**Ramifications of the Merger**

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

Continued. See MERGER EXPANDS ENVIRONMENTAL, Page 5

# SHELDON ISD NEWS

## Sheldon ISD Appoints Tacarra Williams as Executive Director of Communications and Community Partnerships

Sheldon Independent School District has named Mrs. Tacarra Williams as its new Executive Director of Communications and Community Partnerships. Mrs. Williams succeeds Mrs. Emily Conklin, who was recently appointed Chief Community Engagement Officer for Humble ISD.

Mrs. Williams has served Sheldon ISD

since 2019 and is currently the Director of Federal Programs and Grants. She previously led Garrett Elementary School as principal for three years and brings 11 years of experience in public education to her new role.

She holds a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Saginaw Valley State University and two master's degrees—Ed-



ucational Administration from Texas A&M University—Commerce and Business Administration from Texas Southern University. Mrs. Williams is currently pursuing her doctorate in Educational Leadership.

"I am excited to transition into this role," Williams said. "I am deeply passionate about the Sheldon ISD community and look

forward to continuing our commitment to transparent communication and meaningful community engagement."

In her new role, Mrs. Williams will oversee the Communications Department, the Sheldon ISD Education Foundation, and all community partnership initiatives. She will begin her position on January 5.

## Sheldon Honors two employees for exemplary customer service



Sheldon ISD recognized outstanding staff members for exceptional customer service with the CARE Award—which stands for Caught Acting and Responding with Excellence—in partnership with the Chick-fil-A Summerwood location. This week's honorees were Stephanie Mata and Alejandrina Piedra-Saucedo, who were surprised with a visit from campus administrators and the district superintendent.

Stephanie Mata, Head Custodian at CE King High School, was recognized for her dedication, leadership, and proactive approach to maintaining a safe and welcoming campus. Alejandrina Piedra-Saucedo, attendance clerk at Carroll Elementary, was honored for her professionalism, compassion, and outstanding service to students, families, and staff, earning multiple nominations from both parents and colleagues.

## Sheldon ISD STEM Students Explore Innovation at Houston's Annual Energy Day Festival



Sheldon ISD Middle School STEM Students Explore Innovation at Houston's Annual Energy Day Festival

Over Fall Break, students and teachers from the Sheldon ISD Middle School STEM Academy took a field trip downtown to participate in the annual Energy Day Festival, hosted by the Consumer Energy Education Foundation.

The event, which brings together thousands of students and families from across the Houston area, celebrates innovation and education in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM).

Each year, Sheldon ISD's 6th grade STEM students attend the festival for a full day of interactive learning and exploration. Students had the opportunity to engage with STEM professionals, college representatives, and leading Houston companies, gaining hands-on experience through exciting demonstrations and exhibits.

The Energy Day Festival continues to be one of the region's premier events promoting STEM education, sparking curiosity and innovation among the next generation of scientists and engineers.

## King High School Receives National Recognition



King High School has been awarded NABSE (National Alliance of Black School Educators) Demonstration School, marking a significant achievement for the school community. The recognition highlights KHS's commitment to high academic standards, innovative teaching practices, and continuous professional development. District and school leaders were recognized at the national conference in Chicago.

## Sheldon Announces Winner of Holiday Greeting Card Contest



This fall, Sheldon ISD students across the district participated in a holiday greeting card contest. Art students at all grade levels had an opportunity to design the cover of the district's holiday greeting card. Selections were narrowed down and were voted on by staff members at the administration building. The following students, winner and four finalists, are being recognized in the district's annual holiday greeting card contest:

- Overall Winner - Chris Cano, King High School
- District Runner-Up - Rodrigo Rea, King Middle School
- High School Winner - Cynthia De Leon Lara, King High School
- Middle School Winner - Kayla Myers, Null Middle School
- Elementary Winner - Rachell Cruz Caceres, Sheldon Elementary

Their artwork is featured on the district's Christmas card sent to community members, families, staff and business partners. The overall winner will receive a \$100 gift card and the four finalists will receive \$25 sponsored by the Sheldon ISD Education Foundation. Winners were recognized at the December 18 School Board Meeting.

**CHARLOTTE'S WEB**

By Charlotte Jackson



**NS Basketball, Mustangs cage Falcons 89 - 53,**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



Mustang's #21 Sean Mayberry goes airborne & slam-dunks for score. (Photo By Allan Jamail)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Final
Mustangs	23	28	17	21	89
Falcons	7	15	14	17	53

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**Elections Matter**

"We the people, of the United States of America" .... Do you recognize that from your high school years? Perhaps like me, you attended schools within the Galinda Park ISD boundaries and learned American History as well as US Government. So much has changed in our world over the years and at some point, the curriculum changed and I often have younger neighbors ask questions such as "Why vote?" or a more common question, "My mailing address says Houston, but why are the Mayor and City Council Candidates not on my ballot?" or one of my favorites "Why do some neighborhoods have speed bumps but we do not?"

If you are fortunate enough to have someone in your life over the age of sixty, you most likely will hear about how they were taught not only the importance of voting but also plenty of history in the community about leaders who were involved in serving others long before they decided to run for an elected position. There was a time when your commitment to the community and your dedication to serving others were characteristics that helped others understand why you were the most deserving candidate to be elected. Oftentimes, once the campaign season starts, you will hear about candidates with no ties to the community other than the businesses they own, their supporters and many promises. Where is their record of getting to know the community? I had one candidate invite me to a Sunday event that starts at 1 p.m. When I asked him to verify the time, his words were "Yes, it starts at 1 p.m. so those who attend church will already be out and able to attend." After he shared the location and about who his supporters are, I respectfully shared that since I do not get out of church until 1 p.m. and then with a twenty-minute drive, I would have to decline the invitation as he also had mentioned that it was scheduled for two hours. He seemed caught off-guard that I would put a priority on attending church as well as that I asked if he planned to hold another gathering anywhere closer to me. He went on to mention several locations within the new Congressional District, yet none were in my immediate area, so he suggested that I read his website to learn more. I explained that many of the weekly contacts I have do not use the internet due to their age. This did not seem to phase him. He again started telling me about his professional background, which had nothing to do with the citizens in my community. He shared names of donors to his campaign. I explained that it meant nothing to me. I wanted to know about his character, his plan to help all residents and what other than his profession his life had been dedicated to. As you can imagine, the answers were slim.

In the next few weeks, before you vote in the Primary Election, or decide to skip it, I want to encourage you to put forth the effort to research candidates, attend community forums, ask your elders and if need be, reach out to me and let me help you find resources to learn about why elections matter.

**ASK DIAMOND JIM**



**Diamond Jim: "What is the birthstone for January?"**

January's Birthstone is Garnet  
For babies born in January, the garnet is the perfect gem to represent their birthstone. This beautiful stone, which is most commonly red but can be found in a range of other colors, symbolizes peace, prosperity and good health. Some say it even has the power to give the wearer eternal happiness, health and wealth.

We say it's the perfect way to start each year!



Garnet is actually the name of a group of minerals that comes in a rainbow of colors, from the deep red of the Pyrope garnet to the vibrant green of Tsavorites. Some rare garnets are even blue, colorless, or—most rare of all—change colors in different lights. But the most common color is a beautiful range of reds, from rust colored to deep violet-red.

The garnet is a very durable gemstone (6.5-7.5 on the Mohs scale) found all over the world, including Wyoming, Czech Republic, Greece, Russia, Tanzania, Madagascar, Sri Lanka and India.

The folklore on garnet is extensive. Legend has it that the garnet can bring peace, prosperity and good health to the home. Some even called it the "Gem of Faith," and it's believed that to those who wear it and do good, more good things will come. (Conversely, it was also said to bring very bad fortune to those who commit bad acts while wearing it.)

It is also believed that the garnet symbolizes deep and lasting friendship. With that "legend" in mind, give a garnet to someone whose friendship you deeply value. No matter why or how you wear garnet, this beautiful gemstone is perfect for those who share January birthdays and get to start each New Year with a sense of goodwill, happiness, and purpose.

**HOW TO BUY GARNET**

If you're looking to purchase a garnet for yourself or a loved one, it is a great way to celebrate friendship, toast a 2<sup>nd</sup> wedding anniversary or recognize the wearer's January birthday. When you're ready to buy a garnet, visit a jeweler you can trust to assist you like Pineforest Jewelry. Look at how the garnet reacts under light and check for an intense, saturated color.

Try to find a cut that spreads light evenly over the surface of the gemstone. This will help to bring out the overall beauty and color of the garnet. No matter which stone or piece you choose, remember that the garnet is known for its durability and richness of color, so your investment will not only have great emotional value but could be a piece that stands the test of time.

Thank you for reading the "Ask Diamond Jim" column and for supporting the North Channel Star Newspaper!

Diamond Jim is a master jeweler, diamond dealer and precious metals broker. Pineforest Jewelry has been a proud member of the Independent Jewelers Organization (IJO) and the Retail Jewelers Organization (RJO) for many years. See more at: [www.pineforestjewelry.com](http://www.pineforestjewelry.com).

If you have questions pertaining to jewelry, watches, diamonds, precious stones, precious metals, and other questions related to the jewelry industry, email [jmills@pineforestjewelry.com](mailto:jmills@pineforestjewelry.com).

**Galena Park Rotary Spreads Holiday Cheer at Annual Christmas Event**

The Galena Park/Jacinto City Rotary Club had an amazing time hosting their annual Christmas Event this last December 12th. Shoutout to Jennifer Ledwith for connecting us to these amazing partners, and to Patricia Trigueros & Maria Cortez for transforming our Flex Room into a Christmas Wonderland! Thank you to Constable Jerry Garcia and his team from Precinct 2 for their yearly sponsorship of pictures with Santa, and to our incredible student groups—National Honor Society, Student Council, and Interact Club—for helping us wrap gifts and spread holiday cheer. And a special treat: King of Kings Lodge #5; and Mosaic Women of Love and Faith, Order of the Eastern Star #12.

For they generously and our GPHS Mixed Choir under Mr. Ponce filled the room with beautiful Christmas carols!

What a joyful day for our community.



Top row, standing, from left to right: Patricia Trigueros, Robin Riley, Chastity Boudreaux-Hinton, Robert Simmons, Jeffrey Clark, Juan Ramirez, Julien Guillory. Seated, from left to right: Jodi Carmicheal, Tara Cation, Maria Cortez-Ochoa, Santa, Jennifer Ledwith, Norma Hernandez



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OPINION PAGE

OPINION

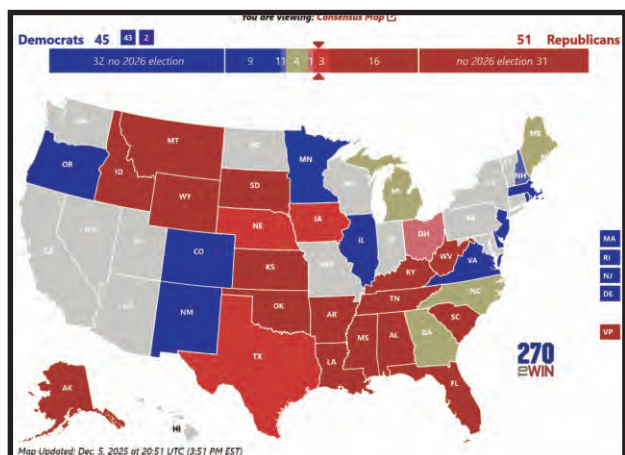
By BILL KING



Republicans Unlikely to Lose Senate but It Will Be Very Different

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

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



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

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

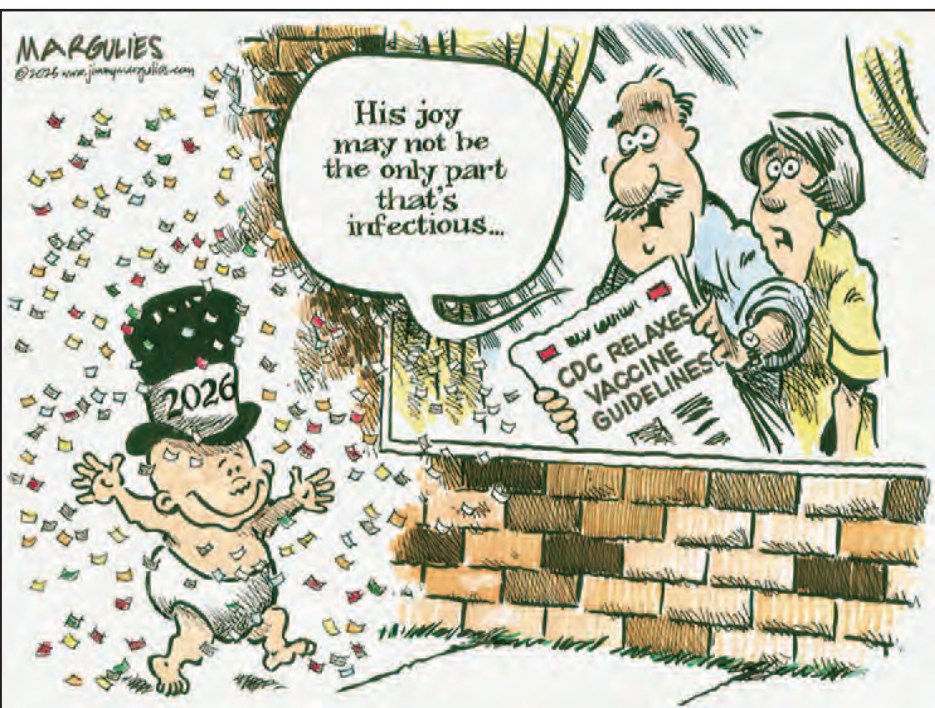
That would make Murkowski and Collins the most influential members of the Senate. They could essentially become a moderate caucus that would control what bills the Senate passes. Because of the Senate's 60-vote filibuster rule, their influence would be somewhat muted but still very significant. Also,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

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

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

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

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



STATE CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS

By Gary Borders



New Laws Taking Effect in New Year

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

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

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

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

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

TEXAS SMALL BUSINESSES OPTIMISTIC ABOUT 2026

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

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

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

TEXAS PRESS ASSOCIATION



STATE CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS By Gary Borders

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

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

TEXAS STUDENT LOAN BORROWERS IN DEFAULT COULD SEE WAGES WITHHELD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PAXTON LOSES BID TO ENFORCE RULES ON LARGE-COUNTY PROSECUTORS

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

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

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

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

AT LEAST 10 TEXAS INCUMBENTS IN CONGRESS NOT RETURNING

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

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

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

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

THE POSTSCRIPT

By Carrie Classon

Having Coffee



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

None of this has come true for me.

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

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

And so this will be my new habit. Even if it takes time away from whatever I'm working on. Even if I have to drive someplace I have never been for coffee. Instead of chasing friendship, I will meet people wherever they are. I will make the investment necessary to cultivate friendships with people who would like to be friends.

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

Till next time, Carrie

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

# Texas rings in 2026 with sweeping new laws Immigration, AI, and property taxes lead new changes in Texas law



By David Taylor  
Managing Editor

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

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

### Immigration Enforcement Tightens

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

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

### AI Regulation Arrives

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

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

### Property Tax Relief and Housing Changes

Homeowners and businesses will see notable tax changes. House Bill 9 raises the business inventory tax exemption from \$2,500 to \$125,000, a move hailed as a win for Texas businesses but expected to reduce local tax revenues by about \$442 million in fiscal year 2027.

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

Senate Bill 38 targets squatters, streamlining eviction procedures and allowing justice courts to schedule hearings within 10 to 21 days. The law restricts courts to ruling strictly on unlawful occupation, tightening notice requirements and enabling summary judgments in clear cases.

"These are commonsense reforms to keep bad things [from] happening to people's homes, and more importantly, to keep people out of property they don't own and they don't have any legitimate right to through a lease," according to bill sponsor Sen. Paul Bettencourt, R-Houston in an interview.

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

### Digital and Insurance Reforms

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

As Texas steps into 2026, residents and businesses alike will be navigating a new legal landscape—one shaped by lawmakers' push for safety, innovation, and economic relief.

Below is the full list of the 33 pieces of legislation now in effect as of January 1, 2026:

- HB 22 — Exempts intangible personal property from property (ad valorem) taxes.
- HB 30 — Limits how taxing entities calculate tax rates and raise taxes following a declared disaster.
- HB 149 — Regulates the use of artificial intelligence in Texas and allows civil penalties for violations.
- HB 851 — Changes how residence homesteads receiving tax benefits are counted and reported.
- HB 1244 — Allows land to keep its open-space tax appraisal after ownership transfers if use stays the same.
- HB 1392 — Extends tax payment deadlines if a tax office is closed on the delinquency date.
- HB 2067 — Addresses when insurance policies may be declined, canceled, or not renewed.
- HB 2525 — Exempts certain senior housing owned by charitable organizations from property taxes.
- HB 2723 — Requires an application for property tax exemptions on land used for human burial.
- HB 2742 — Allows property owners to split property tax payments into installments.
- HB 3159 — Creates a severance tax exemption for oil and gas from certain restimulated wells.
- HB 3370 — Allows late timber land tax appraisal applications after a landowner's death.
- HB 3424 — Changes how dealer-owned heavy equipment inventory is taxed.
- HB 3699 — Modifies how initial unemployment compensation claims are handled.
- HB 4395 — Allows electronic filing and delivery of public securities and related records.
- HB 4738 — Eliminates the requirement to send a portion of certain loan fees to the state comptroller.
- HB 4739 — Ends the requirement to remit part of retail charge delinquency fees to the comptroller.
- HB 5654 — Creates Montgomery County Municipal Utility District No. 263 with taxing and bonding authority.
- SB 8 — Requires certain sheriffs to partner with ICE for immigration enforcement and creates state grants.
- SB 1023 — Changes how certain property tax rates are calculated.
- SB 1058 — Excludes certain securities transaction payments from taxable revenue.
- SB 1106 — Requires public improvement district plans and assessments to be posted online.
- SB 1453 — Revises how taxing units calculate debt and property tax rates.
- SB 1455 — Changes how workers' compensation regulation is funded, including new surcharges.
- SB 1502 — Allows school boards to adopt tax rates above voter-approved limits under certain conditions.
- SB 1522 — Updates regulations for continuing care retirement facilities.
- SB 1951 — Imposes penalties for failing to timely file required property tax reports.
- SB 1968 — Updates licensing and regulation of certain real estate professionals.
- SB 2206 — Creates tax credits and sales tax changes for research and development expenses.
- SB 2420 — Regulates mobile app marketplaces, including age verification and parental consent.
- SB 2520 — Adjusts school property tax limits for elderly and disabled homeowners.

# First New Born Baby of 2026 at Houston Methodist Baytown



The first baby born in 2026 at Houston Methodist Baytown Hospital.

Stellar Lee Schartz was born at 2:16 a.m. January 1st. Parents are Breyanna and Les Schartz. The parents shared, "A tiny heartbeat making this New Year brighter than we ever imagined."

# Merger expands environmental justice efforts nationwide,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

### National Reach, Local Impact:

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

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

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

Medcalf highlighted the importance of listening to

community voices during this transition. "The first thing and most important thing I intend to do is listen. The environmental movement has struggled in recent years. There is a growing sense that changing times call for new voices and new approaches. As we bring THEA and CHEJ together, I need to hear directly from you—the people who believe Americans have a right to live in neighborhoods free of toxic waste and to drink water that is safe from carcinogens."

### Carrying Forward a Movement

Lois Gibbs' legacy is central to this new chapter. As she has often said, "Average people and the average community can change the world. You can

do it just based on common sense, determination, persistence and patience."

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

### What's Next?

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

# locked gates hamper fire response as dozens displaced in Apartment fire,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and padlocked gates at the complex, causing a critical seven to 10-minute delay in response time.

"The complex here didn't have the proper gates," explained Matt Hathorn, district chief with the Sheldon Community Fire Department. "The gate was messed up, so we had to cut gates and stuff like that to get into the apartment complex, (and) get all the big apparatus into the apartment complex."

The nearest water hydrants were also located across the street, further complicating the response.

After the initial fire was extinguished, crews remained on scene until a rekindle alert went out at 6:42 p.m. During this second battle, a fire captain was injured when part of the second floor collapsed beneath him. He was transported to Memorial Hermann Medical Center for treatment.

"On Channel 2, they had the video of him crashing through the flooring. You see him kind of just like slide and drop down," recounted Leila Webb, spokesperson for Sheldon Community Fire Department. Fortunately, the firefighter was released that night and returned to work the next day.

Residents described the



Firefighters were both inside and outside checking out the damage following the fire at the South Lake Villa Apartments.

emotional toll of the disaster.

"I almost had a panic attack, honestly. My kids were shaking, you know, asking my mama, the house is gone," said Shanteria White, one of the displaced residents. "I worked so hard for my stuff. So to know that everything's just gone in the blink of an eye is kind of devastating. It's terrible when you don't do it, and it happened (because of) somebody else."

The building is considered irreparably damaged, and residents are not al-

lowed to return or retrieve belongings due to concerns about structural collapse. The Red Cross was on site to assist those affected.

Multiple fire departments, including Channelview, Westfield, Crosby, Eastex, and ESD No. 12 (formerly Cloverleaf), responded to the emergency, providing crucial mutual aid.

The investigation into the fire and the circumstances surrounding the delayed emergency response continues.

LEGAL NOTICE

LEGAL NOTICE

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NOTICE OF STREET ADDRESS OF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

The street address of the administrative office of Harris County Emergency Services District No. 6 is 332 Freeport St., Houston, Texas 77015.

LEGAL NOTICE

LEGAL NOTICE

LEGAL NOTICE

Legal Notice

To All Interested persons, The City of Jacinto City has received a Variance Hearing Application for the following address.

1013 Mercury Dr. Suite A - Abram Saucedo is requesting permission use this location, to run a Utility Construction Company, which is not in compliance with the Light Commercial Zoning at this location.

The Board will hear the petition on Tuesday, January 20, 2026, Starting at 6:00 p.m. at the City Hall Annex, 10301 Market St. Any Interested person may attend.

Legendary Katy Coach Mike Johnston Remembered for Character, Championships

By David Taylor Managing Editor



Mike Johnston, who grew up in Galena Park, passed away peacefully on Saturday, Jan. 10, 2026. Johnston played on the 1964 football team for Galena Park who made it to the state title game and later became a legendary coach at Katy.

Coach Mike Johnston, the iconic head football coach of Katy High School and a beloved mentor, leader, and man of faith, passed away on January 10, 2026, at the age of 78. His legacy, built over decades of service to the Katy community, is defined not only by championships but by the character, discipline, and unwavering belief he instilled in generations of young men.

Born on June 28, 1947, in Huntsville, Texas, and raised in Galena Park, Johnston's love for football and leadership emerged early. As a student-athlete at Galena Park High School, he played on the 1964 state finalist football team—a formative experience that shaped his competitive spirit and lifelong respect for teamwork and perseverance. Johnston played linebacker and center, and the memory of that dramatic state final, decided by a controversial call, stayed with him for life.

"My uncle Mike had the old film of that game that he got a long time ago. He would make his coaches out there at Katy watch it in the fieldhouse," recalled his nephew, Kyle Johnston, a former GPISD school board member.

"At some point they got the film transferred over to VHS tape, but the film had been played so many times back-and-forth on that final play at the end of the game that stole the win from Galena Park that you couldn't see the final play anymore," Kyle added.

After playing college football at Stephen F. Austin State University, Johnston began his coaching career at Hull-Daisetta High School, with subsequent stops at Nacogdoches, Beaumont For-

est Park, and Abilene High Schools. In 1980, he joined Katy High School as an assistant coach, and by 1982, he was named head football coach and campus athletic coordinator. At that time, the Katy football program was searching for direction and consistency. Through discipline, belief, and tireless work, Coach Johnston transformed the Katy Tigers into one of Texas's most respected high school football programs.

Over 22 seasons at the helm (1982-2003), Johnston ended a years-long playoff drought and led the Tigers to three Texas state championships (1997, 2000, 2003), five state championship game appearances, numerous district titles, and more than 200 career victories. The culture of excellence he established continues to define Katy football today.

Yet, Coach Johnston believed his greatest responsibility was to mold young men of character.

"He was a devoted man of faith who was never afraid to share God's message with his players, whether during team meetings, practices, or quiet one-on-one conversations," the obituary notes. "He taught his teams that faith, integrity, humility, and accountability mattered far more than the final score and his influence is still felt in the lives of countless former players."

Known for his trademark red suspenders and his commanding yet compassionate presence on the sideline, Johnston's leadership extended beyond Katy High School. He served as president and director of the Texas High School Coaches Association and was inducted into its Hall of Honor, earning respect from coaches across Texas. In recognition of his extraordinary impact, the playing surface at Legacy Stadium proudly bears his name—Mike Johnston Field—a permanent tribute to a coach whose influence will endure for generations.

After retiring from Katy ISD in 2003, Johnston continued his coaching journey at Houston Christian High School from 2004 to 2011. Coach Mike Johnston is survived by his loving wife of 57 years, Donna, their two sons, Russ (Cynthia) Johnston and Paul Johnston; his brother, Steve (Judy) Johnston; his grandchildren, Elliott, Reece, and Sidney Johnston; his step-grandchild, Joshua Greenmun; and his nieces and nephew, Staci Johnston, Kyle Johnston, and Deetra (Dr. Chad) Hammett.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Burl and Altha Johnston. Visitation will be held on January 15, 2026, at Schmidt Funeral Home in Katy, Texas, with funeral services on January 16 at First Baptist Katy.

As the community gathers to honor his memory, the words "Well done, good and faithful servant" echo the sentiments of all who knew him.

Carter-Conley Funeral Home

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JC hosts County's first fully translated family legal workshop,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Visit: MyHarrisCountyTax.com. Also online voter registration at

https://www.hctax.net/ County Clerk Teneshia Hudspeth office presented how to obtain information and records of commissioner court, personal records, public records, archived records, civil court records, probate court records, real property records; Visit: https://cclerk.hctx.net/; and election results; www.harrisvotes.com.

County Probate Court No.2. Judge Medina presented decedents' estates matters, including probate of wills, determination of heirships, and appointment of executors and administrators guardianship

proceedings.

County Public Probate Administrator Brandon Cofield explained how to open an Estate, how to transfer ownership of property, what can be done with abandoned property, how to untangle heir's property, the importance of wills, trusts and TODDs and how to navigate the probate process; visit: publicadministrator@harriscountytx.gov.

Partners for the event was provided by Judge Lozano: HC Attorney, HC Tax Office, HC County Clerk, HC Pct. 2, Adrian Garcia, PCT. 2, Judge Dolores Lozano, City of Jacinto City, C & S Cares, Regions Bank, Houston Land Bank and iQUE Onda! Magazine.



L-R: Dolores Lozano, JP in Precinct 2 Place 2 & Pct. 2 HC Comm'r Adrian Garcia. (Photo by Allan Jamail)

Twenty lucky families got the fees covered for their Transfer on Death Deeds (TODDs); the four hour workshop included a lunch with refreshments.

Judge Dolores Lozano made history as the first woman to be elected as Harris County Justice of the Peace in Precinct 2, Place 2 on November 8, 2022.

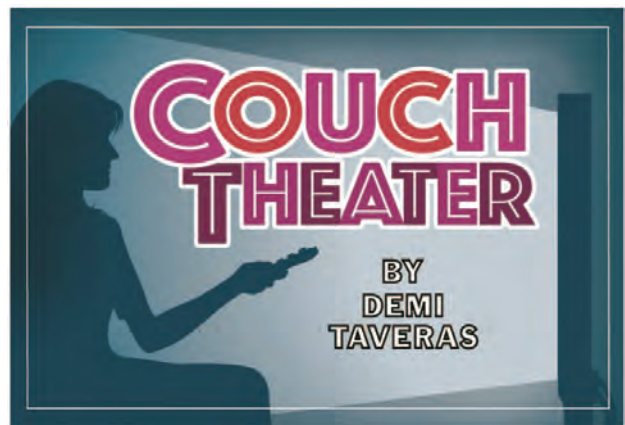
Precinct 2 encompasses significant regions of the Greater Houston Metro area, including the City of Houston, City of South Houston, Galena Park, Jacinto City, Pasadena, Pearland, Friendswood, Webster, Clear Lake, and League City.

Born and raised in Southeast Houston, Judge

Lozano shattered barriers as the first in her family to attend college, earning her bachelor's degree from Baylor University. Her commitment to community development, public affairs, and public relations has made a profound impact throughout her career, particularly in championing the voices of youth to drive positive change across the State of Texas.

Judge Lozano currently presides over a wide range of cases as Justice of the Peace in Precinct 2 Place 2, including evictions, small claims, traffic violations, and truancy matters. To contact email: MYJP22@jp.hctx.net

Advertisement for Business Directory with various local business listings including Henderson Garage Doors, Central Auto Inspections, Graphics Unlimited, Inc., Weston Cotten, Attorney, Hill Materials, and North Channel Star.



Aron Paul, left and Eliza Gonzalez star in "Ash."

"Ash"

"If I Had Legs, I'd Kick You" (R) — Rose Byrne leads this psychological drama...

to drive anyone insane! (Apple TV+)

"The Copenhagen Test" (TV-MA) — This sci-fi spy thriller series premiered its first season recently...

("Abigail") co-stars. (Peacock)

"A GRAMMY Celebration of Latin Music" (TV-PG) — Out now to stream, this musical event presented by the GRAMMY Awards...

"Ash" (R) — Directed by Flying Lotus, this sci-fi horror film stars Eiza Gonzalez ("Fountain of Youth") and Aaron Paul ("Invincible")...

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HOLLYWOOD by Tony Rizzo

HOLLYWOOD — Original cast member of "Star Trek" George Takei is finally getting his due.

Takei, now 88, has been "out" since he wed Brad Altman in 2008, making them the first same-sex couple to apply for a marriage license in West Hollywood, California.

Saints preserve us! Surely you didn't think that after "Wicked: For Good" was released, this was the end of it?

Miley Cyrus received her third Golden Globe nomination, this time for her song in "Avatar: Fire and Ash," called "Dream as One."

The harpoon that Richard Dreyfuss sunk into the deadly white shark in "Jaws" (1975) is hitting an auction block, along with the 130-pound fishing rod that was used by Robert Shaw in the classic film.

Sugar meets honey is what you'd have to call Disney joining forces with the Hallmark Channel to make a Christmas movie.



George Takei ("Star Trek")

World Wish Come True" stars the Hallmark queen herself Lacey Chabert, Travis Van Winkle, and Richard Kind.

Actor Josh Lucas (54) has had an illustrious acting career, including hit films such as "American Psycho," "A Beautiful Mind," "Hulk," and most recently "Ford v Ferrari."

He met ABC meteorologist Brianna Ruffalo (34) on the set of the first season of "Palm Royale," and they were wed this July in the Vatican City.

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ENTERTAINMENT

Amber Waves



Weekly SUDOKU grid and instructions

HOCUS-FOCUS comic strip by Henry Boltinoff

King Crossword

Crossword grid with clues

Answers for King Crossword

Trivia test by Fifi Rodriguez

Answers for Trivia Test: 1. St. Lucia's Day; 2. Edward Norton; 3. Gillette; 4. The first women's rights convention in the United States; 5. "TGS with Tracy Jordan"; 6. Gas; 7. Squid; 8. "Much Ado about Nothing"; 9. Irrational; 10. The Roots

