

Texas offers Trump administration more land and support for mass deportations



By Berenice Garcia
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Two events in the Rio Grande Valley on Tuesday made clear Texas officials will work with the Trump administration on immigration.

STARR COUNTY — Texas officials sent a clear message during twin events in the Rio Grande Valley on Tuesday that they would be a willing partner to the incoming Trump administration and its immigration crackdown.

First, Texas Land Commissioner Dawn Buckingham announced the state will continue to offer up more land to them for mass deportation facilities, stating that her office is identifying property to be ready for when the new administration takes office in January.

Then during a pre-Thanksgiving visit to service members involved in Operation Lone Star, the state's own border security initiative, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott signaled strong cooperation between the state and federal government now that President-elect Donald Trump is returning to the White House.

"There's help on the way," Abbott said to members of the Texas National Guard and the Texas Department of Public Safety.

"The cavalry is here, quite literally with us here today," Abbott said before introducing Tom Homan, whom Trump picked to lead his immigration enforcement efforts. Homan pledged support from the federal government to the Texas servicemen and women.

"Hopefully, we get enough help to you where some of you, men and women, go home with your families," Homan said, adding that the administration would run an interior enforcement operation involving mass deportations.

Buckingham started the day at the 1,402-acre Starr County ranch she offered to Trump last week to build a deportation facility and where the state is currently constructing a border wall.

"We have 13 million acres around the state, and if there's something that meets the federal government's needs, we want them to be able to utilize that," Buckingham told the Tribune.



Tom Homan, President-elect Donald Trump's "border czar" appointee, speaks to Texas Department of Public Safety troopers and National Guard troops at a Thanksgiving dinner event in Edinburg on Nov. 26, 2024. Credit: Michael Gonzalez for The Texas Tribune

The new project is called "Jocelyn's Initiative" after Jocelyn Nungaray, a 12-year-old girl from Houston who police say was killed by two Venezuelan men who were in the country illegally. Jocelyn's mother and grandmother, Alexis and Jackie, joined Buckingham to announce the initiative during a news conference.

"Our goal is to ensure that no other parent has to, unfortunately, experience what Alexis has experienced," Buckingham said.

With a population of approximately 65,934 people, Starr County is about 13 times smaller than neighboring Hidalgo County. Undeveloped land stretches on for miles. Even within the county's largest city, Rio Grande City — where city officials celebrated the opening of its first Starbucks in 2022 — an open field is only a few blocks away.

Starr County is also unique in the Valley in that it is home to sprawling hills unlike the flatlands that characterize the rest of the region. On one hill overlooking the city, stands a white cross that evokes the iconic Christ the Redeemer statue of Rio de Janeiro.

It's here where the Texas General Land Office newly acquired the 1,400 acres of property in October. Last week, Buckingham offered it up to the incoming Trump administration as a site for detention centers.

In a letter to Trump, Buckingham said the General Land Office was "fully prepared" to enter an agreement with the federal government to allow a facility to be built there for the "processing, detention, and coordination of the largest deportation of

violent criminals in the nation's history."

Under the state constitution, the land office must lease property it owns to raise funds for the public schools. The land in Starr County is currently leased to a farmer who has planted rows of green onions that can be seen growing for acres.

If a detention facility is to be built there, flooding might be an issue, said Jason Smalley, a land office manager. He noted any facility might need to be built closer to the main road to avoid inundation.

A car wash operates off that road, Farm-to-Market Road 1430. A group of employees who were working on Tuesday declined to be interviewed at length and identified. But they suggested heavy rains brought water right up to the road.

Immigration detention facilities are already a familiar presence in the Valley.

A processing center in McAllen, dubbed the Ursula Central Processing Center after the street it is located on, became infamous for its chain-link detention cells and the cold temperatures inside the facility that led to the nickname "la heilera" or "ice-box."

The chain-link fencing was removed as part of a renovation from October 2020 to March 2022. During the renovation process, CBP opened a facility in Donna which remains open.

While those facilities were set up to process migrants coming into the U.S., the detention center in Starr County, if built, would be alone in being used to process migrants being deported out of the country.

OPINION: It's not hypocrisy, it's power



by Aswad Walker
DEFENDER

(OP-ed) - NOT HYPOCRISY, IT'S POWER

When we see Donald Trump and crew nominate former Republican congressman Matt Gaetz, who is accused of having sex with a minor, for the position of the nation's top law enforcement officer (U.S. Attorney General), we scream "Hypocrisy." When Trump then nominates to head the U.S. Department of Defense, Fox News weekend anchor Pete Hegseth, we scream "Unqualified." Why? Because Hegseth was thrown out of the Army National Guard, suspected of literally being an "enemy from within." Why? He has a chest-sized white nationalist tattoo and openly criticizes the U.S. Military's attempts to

remove anti-Black, anti-women white nationalists from their ranks. But we're missing the point. We know Gaetz and Hegseth are both grossly underqualified and morally unfit for those positions. But Republicans have the power to do whatever they want; rules and qualifications be damned. So, while we scream about overqualified Black women and men having their credentials attacked and belittled, Republicans say so what; this is what power can do—anything it wants. We then make the mistake of viewing power as inherently evil when it's actually neutral and takes on the flavor of the person or group who wields it. Suggestion: we better get us some.

BLUESKY POWERS X-ODUS

You might have heard. People are leaving Twitter (X) in droves and joining BlueSky. Now, there have always been mass moves away from one social media platform or technology to another, newer version. We all left MySpace for Facebook. When all



the old-schoolers joined Facebook, younger folk moved in mass to Instagram, TikTok and Twitter (X). But this new exodus isn't age-driven. It's not about some new, shiny breakthrough technology. Rather, it's about a return to older, more traditional things, like conversations driven by respect, debates without demonization, and an acknowledgment of the humanity and opinions of others. With the white nationalist purchase of X, and Elon Musk opening X's doors

to and encouraging all the racist crazies to come in, X members are voting with their feet and leaving that toxic spot for hopefully, greener, more respectful pastures.

BLACK BOY LYNCHED IN MARYLAND

Elections have consequences. Just 10 days after Election 2024, a 7-year-old Black boy was hospitalized with serious injuries suffered in a school bathroom after an older, white student (a 4th grader) reportedly

told the young brother, "I'm going to show you how I did people back in the day." The family of the Black child said their baby was hung from a bathroom stall-door hook. The child's mother said, "The principal went into the bathroom and found my baby foaming out the mouth and unconscious." The child was then rushed to the hospital, where they found "serious injuries" to his neck, including a neck contusion, according to the hospital, that was caused by blunt

trauma. Miraculously, the boy survived. But while recovering, he has countless scars and bruises from the ordeal, which officials from the child's school (Barnhart Elementary School in Charles County Maryland) blew off. The school's principal, Carrie Burke, reduced the horrific incident to "horseplaying." Not sure which is more painful: discovering your baby was almost killed or your child's school leader dismissing the assault as child's play.