

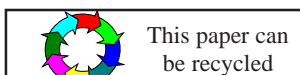


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RAPPIN'
Thomas Wyatt

Austin Exposed

WOW! Oracle didn't just trim its workforce — it **detonated** it. In a pre-dawn wave that blindsided employees across the U.S., India, Canada, and Mexico, the tech giant fired thousands with a single 6 a.m. email, part of what analysts say could be **20,000 to 30,000** job cuts, the largest in company history.

The justification? "Current business needs." The reality? **Oracle** is gutting human labor to bankroll an aggressive **\$50 billion plus** AI infrastructure buildout, a bet so massive it has investors cheering even as livelihoods evaporate. The company's stock jumped as much as **6%** on the news — a perverse celebration of economic violence.

For **Austin**, where Oracle's flashy campus has long been held up as proof of the city's tech ascendancy, the layoffs land like a warning shot. This isn't just a corporate restructuring — it's a referendum on the fragility of Austin's tech driven economy. Oracle employed **162,000** people globally as of 2025, and while the company refuses to disclose Austin specific numbers, the region's heavy dependence on tech jobs means the ripple effects will be felt across housing, consumer spending, and the city's already strained frugal fiscal mismanagement.

The layoffs also expose a deeper truth: Austin's **tech boom** has been built on a foundation far more volatile than city leaders admit. Oracle's cuts are driven by ambition, not failure. A pivot toward **AI** demands staggering capital, funded in part by eliminating the very workers who helped build Oracle's success. **TD Cowen** analysts estimate the cuts could free up **\$8-\$10 billion** in cash flow annually.

Austin officials love to tout innovation. But innovation without worker stability is just extraction dressed up in buzzwords. Oracle's move should force Austin city officials to confront a hard question: What happens when the companies **they've** bet **our** future on decide **we're** expendable?

Is The CIA for Sale?



Trump didn't privatize the CIA. He didn't have to. A buyout program did the quiet work for him.

By Thomas Wyatt | EIC, The Villager

(VILLAGER) - For weeks, social media has been buzzing with claims that **Donald Trump** plans to "buy out the entire CIA intelligence force," a phrase that sounds like a plotline ripped from a **John Grisham** novel. But like so many viral political claims, the truth is both less sensational and far more revealing about the country's political trajectory. There is no evidence that Trump ever sought to privatize the Central Intelligence Agency or **CIA**, purchase the agency, or replace its entire intelligence corps through any literal buyout. What did happen, however, is a sweeping voluntary buyout program initiated under his administration—one that offered financial incentives for employees to resign as part of a broader effort to shrink and reshape the federal workforce. The CIA became the first intelligence agency to extend buyout offers to its entire staff, a move that aligned with Trump's long standing hostility toward the intelligence community and his desire to install a workforce more aligned with his national security priorities.

The scale of the program was unprecedented. Offering roughly eight months of pay and benefits to any employee willing to walk away, the initiative aimed to reduce more than a thousand positions over several years. It was framed as a "holistic strategy," but the political context was impossible to ignore. Trump had spent years attacking the intelligence community as part of the so called "deep

state," accusing career analysts of undermining his presidency. When an administration with that posture suddenly opens the door for mass departures, it is not surprising that observers saw the move as a purge in all but name. Critics warned that the program risked hollowing out institutional memory and weakening national security. Supporters countered that the agency needed a reset after years of internal resistance. But even at its most aggressive, the program remained a standard federal workforce tool: voluntary, incentive based, and limited in scope. It did not dissolve the agency or privatize its functions. The viral language of "buying out the CIA" is a distortion, but the underlying political intent—reshaping the intelligence community to fit a president's worldview—was legit.

This is where the story becomes less about bureaucratic restructuring and more about the political moment we are living through. The fight over the CIA is not just a fight over staffing. It is a fight over truth, power, and who gets to define national security in an era when political loyalty is increasingly treated as a qualification. Trump's relationship with the intelligence community has always been adversarial, rooted in his belief that career officials are obstacles rather than guardians of continuity. The buyout program, even if voluntary, signaled a willingness to weaken the institutional guardrails that traditionally protect intelligence work from political interference. It also reflected a broader

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Affordable Housing Efforts Expand
New funds approved for low-income units

City Council ends March with key votes in tow.
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Did city give another tech startup a tax break?
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New SNAP restrictions in effect.
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32,600+ ATTEND NO KINGS 3 IN AUSTIN AS PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT SPREADS ACROSS CENTRAL TEXAS

by No Kings Austin Coalition / Hands Off Central TX

(AUSTIN, TX) — **March 31, 2026** — The No Kings Austin Coalition announced today that an estimated **32,606 people** attended the No Kings 3 rally at Auditorium Shores on Saturday, March 28. The crowd size was verified using aerial drone photography and statistical analysis.

The 32,606 figure reflects Austin's Auditorium Shores rally alone that took place Saturday March 28, 2026. It was one of 3 simultaneous No Kings events in Travis County with 9 additional events in the five surrounding counties, stretching from Bastrop to Marble Falls, Belton to New Braunfels, and one of more than 3,100 events nationwide.

The estimate was produced using the Jacobs Method of statistical modeling for crowd counting and density. No Kings Austin is releasing



Thousands of demonstrators march from Austin City Hall to Auditorium shores during Saturday's "No Kings" protest. Simultaneous Rallies from Pflugerville to New Braunfels Signal Regional Depth Beyond Austin Turnout. Photo credit: Patricia Lim/KUT News

this methodology in the interest of full transparency. Analysis technique is detailed below.

"This is what it looks like when Austinites come

together to fight for our democracy and each other," said Salvador Espinoza, Board Member with Hands Off Central TX and organizer with the No

Kings Austin Coalition. *"This movement is powerful because it's built by everyday people organizing alongside lifelong activists. It's*

your neighbors, your co-workers, your family. And we're not going anywhere. We will keep showing up."

No Kings Austin is a

coalition of non-profit organizations mobilizing Central Texans around constitutional values and pro-democracy principles. Austin is one of 14 major metropolitan areas identified as key areas by the national No Kings coalition. Saturday's event featured fully bilingual English/Spanish main stage programming with live interpretation, open soapbox areas, and participation from more than 80 nonprofit organizations across the ideological spectrum.

No Kings Austin is a nonpartisan coalition of Central Texas organizations united around constitutional and pro-democracy values.

The coalition operates through nonviolent action, broad community engagement, and the principle that democracy belongs to everyone.

Austin City Council Wraps March with Key Votes on Infrastructure, Small Business, and Public Safety

AUSTIN CITY COUNCIL ROUNDUP

Key Votes on Infrastructure, Small Business, and Public Safety



I-35 Caps Funding in Doubt
Rising costs prompt caution amid lack of private donors

Home Business Pilot Moves Forward
Council advances plan allowing micro-retail, food stands

Affordable Housing Efforts Expand
New funds approved for low-income units

Police Reform Briefing Set
Task force to present latest use-of-force updates

Next Council Meeting: April 9 • Speaker Sign-Up Opens April 6

By Villager staff

AUSTIN, Texas — The Austin City Council closed out March with a series of actions that signal shifting priorities on transportation, neighborhood level economic activity, and long term infrastructure planning, according to recent council agendas and meeting records from March 12–26, 2026.

At its **March 26 regular meeting**, the Council advanced multiple items tied to mobility and public services, including preparations for the upcoming April 9 meeting where additional transportation and land use items are expected. The meeting followed a week of committee sessions focused on climate, water, parks, and economic opportunity.

One of the most closely watched developments remains the city's ongoing debate over funding for the **I 35 "caps and stitches" project**, a multi year effort to reconnect neighborhoods divided by the

interstate. While no final vote occurred in March, council members signaled growing concern about rising costs and the lack of secured private funding. Financial staff urged caution, recommending the city avoid committing additional dollars until firmer cost projections are available. The issue is expected to resurface in April work sessions.

Council also continued work on **neighborhood scale economic initiatives**, including follow up discussions on a pilot program that would allow certain **home based micro businesses**—such as cottage food stands and small retail setups—to operate more visibly in residential areas. The proposal, which received broad support earlier in the month, is now moving into a planning phase where staff will return with implementation details.

In addition, the Council reviewed updates from the **Austin Police Use of Force Task Force** during its **April 7 work**

session agenda posting, which includes a scheduled briefing from national policing researchers. The briefing is part of the city's ongoing effort to evaluate APD practices and align them with national standards.

Housing and affordability remained central themes throughout March. The **Austin Housing Finance Corporation**, which meets in tandem with the Council, approved several items on March 26 aimed at preserving and expanding affordable units. These actions follow a month of committee level discussions on mobility, public health, and audit and finance matters, reflecting the city's broader push to coordinate policy across departments.

The Council's next major votes are scheduled for **April 9**, with speaker registration opening April 6. Work sessions continue to shape the agenda as the city enters a spring cycle dominated by transportation planning, budget previews, and long term infrastructure decisions.



Closing Blackshear Is an Assault on Black Austin’s Legacy, not a Budgeting Decision

by Thomas Wyatt | EIC, The Villager

(VILLAGER) - Austin ISD’s plan to close historic Blackshear Elementary in 2028 is more than a policy failure. It is a direct attack on the cultural, educational, and political legacy of East Austin’s Black community — a legacy embodied in the school’s namesake, **Edward L. Blackshear**.

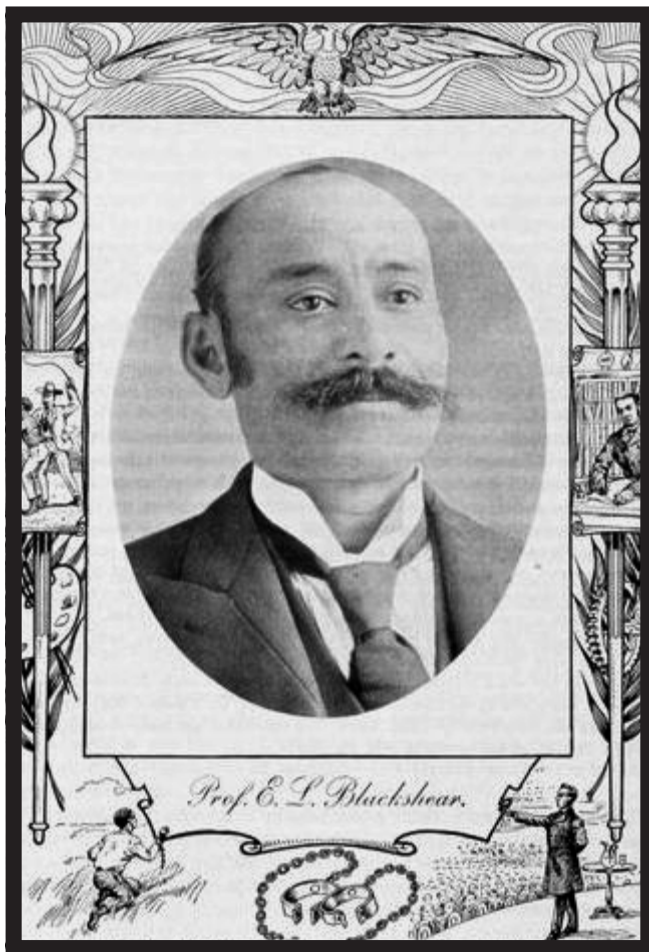
Blackshear wasn’t just an educator. He was a nationally respected Black academic leader, a former principal of Prairie View State Normal and Industrial College (now Prairie View A&M University), and a fierce advocate for Black self determination during the Jim Crow era. He fought for Black Texans to have access to rigorous education, vocational training, and pathways to economic independence at a time when the state was actively denying them both dignity and opportunity.

When East Austin residents named the school after him in 1936, it wasn’t symbolic. It was a declaration: **Black children on the Eastside deserved excellence, investment, and a future.** For generations, Blackshear Elementary fulfilled that promise — surviving segregation, redlining, urban renewal, and waves of displacement. It became home to the district’s only elementary level fine arts academy; a program families built with sweat equity and cultural pride.

And now AISD wants to shutter it under the guise of “efficiency.”

Let’s be clear: if this were a West Austin campus named after a historic educational leader, with a specialized program and a century of community investment, the district would be bending over backwards to preserve it. But when it’s East Austin — a community already stripped of housing, institutions, and political power — closure becomes the “practical” option. Or, to be frank, a welcomed conclusion!

AISD isn’t just closing a school. It is erasing a monument to Black resilience, Black scholarship, and Black history. This isn’t a school named after some confederate officer during the civil war. Nor a bird symbolizing a



Edward Lavoisier Blackshear

Image available on the Internet and included in accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107

“chaparral-esque” landscape on the westside because some believe it to be cute. The school was founded by and named after a cherished person of significance in the momentous spirit of equal education and civil rights.

In fact, instead of closing Blackshear down, AISD and the COA should be investing heavily into renovating it - representing the pride of East Austin’s antiquity, strength, and courage through its malleableness during Austin’s 1928 master plan. This city wants to celebrate **Black History** when its month comes around like the circus. But when the shows over...

If district leaders think East Austin will quietly accept the destruction of a legacy Edward L. Blackshear spent his life fighting to build, they are gravely mistaken.

Alpha Kappa Sigma to Host 42nd Biennial Debutante Ball

AUSTIN, TX — The Alpha Kappa Sigma (Austin, Texas) Alumnae Chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Incorporated will host its **42nd Biennial Debutante Scholarship Program**, culminating in the Debutante Ball on **December 19, 2026**, at the **DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel in Austin, Texas**.

This year’s theme is “**Unveiling Royalty: An Evening of Elegance.**” Established in 1947, the program is the **oldest debutante scholarship initiative in Central Texas**, providing mentorship, leadership development, and scholarship

opportunities for young women. “This program is more than a presentation—it is a transformative journey that equips young women with confidence, leadership skills, and purpose,” said Chapter President **Jennifer Hicks**. The program is open to **high school juniors, seniors, and college freshmen for the 2026–2027 academic year**. Applications are due **May 31, 2026**. Please visit our website to complete the application at: www.sigmagammarhoatx.com. For more information, contact AustinSGRhos.DebBall2026@gmail.com.

“Criminal Attack” Cuts Spectrum Fiber Lines in North Austin

by Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) — Spectrum is calling a major North Austin service outage a “**criminal attack**” after multiple fiber optic lines were deliberately cut near the Wells Branch area, disrupting internet and phone service for homes and businesses across several neighborhoods.

The company says the damage occurred early Tuesday morning and appears to be **intentional sabotage**, not an equipment failure. Technicians located several severed fiber bundles along a utility corridor and spent much of the day splicing and restoring service.

Spectrum reports that this incident mirrors a **growing national trend of attacks on communica-**

tions infrastructure, where vandals or thieves target fiber lines, cell towers, or electrical equipment. The company has offered a **\$25,000 reward** for information leading to an arrest.

APD confirmed it is investigating and has not ruled out the possibility of coordinated activity. No suspects have been identified.

Residents in parts of Wells Branch, North Lamar, and surrounding areas experienced outages lasting several hours, with some businesses reporting lost revenue due to point of sale disruptions.

City officials have not yet commented on whether the attack raises broader concerns about the vulnerability of Austin’s critical infrastructure.

before midnight. The suspect fled at high speeds, ultimately crashing into another vehicle. As officers exited their patrol cars, Guevara allegedly **fired multiple shots through his windshield**, prompting officers to return fire and strike him in the clavicle.

District Attorney **José Garza** said the grand jury reviewed all evidence and determined the officers’ actions were **not unlawful**, closing the criminal case. Internal APD administrative investigations are still pending, and the department has released **body worn camera, dash cam footage, and radio audio** related to the incident.

Guevara survived, was treated at a hospital, and remains in custody on multiple charges, including **aggravated assault of a public servant, evading arrest, and unauthorized use of a motor vehicle**.

Grand Jury Clears Four APD Officers in 2025 High Speed Chase Shooting

by Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) - A Travis County grand jury has declined to indict four Austin Police Department officers involved in a **May 31, 2025 high speed chase** that ended in an exchange of gunfire with an 18 year old suspect, **Devin Guevara**.

According to reporting from **Yahoo News, KXAN, and Hoodline**, officers **Joseph Duesler, Kai Finch, Martin Vela, and Vincent Nguyen** attempted to stop a stolen vehicle shortly

The dander isn’t the attempt, the danger is the sensationalism.


Continued from page 1

pattern: the systematic effort to bend federal agencies toward ideological alignment rather than professional independence.

The danger is not that Trump tried to “buy out the CIA.” The danger is that the country has grown accustomed to political narratives that flatten complex institutional shifts into sensational claims, while the real erosion happens quietly, through policy changes that sound technical but carry profound consequences. A voluntary buyout program may not grab headlines the way a conspiracy theory does, but it can still reshape the agency’s internal culture, drain expertise, and create openings for political loyalists to fill the void. That is the story that matters—not the false claim of a literal takeover, but the very real effort to redefine the role of intelligence in American democracy.

At a time when voter suppression tactics, institutional distrust, and partisan loyalty tests dominate the political landscape, the fight over the CIA’s workforce is part of a larger struggle over whether federal institutions serve the public or serve the president. The viral claim may be false, but the political arc behind it is unmistakable: a country wrestling with the boundaries of executive power, the fragility of its democratic norms, and the ease with which misinformation can overshadow the quieter, more consequential shifts happening inside the machinery of government.

AISD 2025–2026 School Year Calendar



AUSTIN
Independent School District

Austin ISD serves a large portion of students in the Austin area. For the 2025–2026 school year, the AISD calendar includes the following highlights:

- First Day of School: **August 19, 2025** (Tuesday)
- Fall Break / Thanksgiving Week: **November 24–28, 2025**
- Winter Break: **December 22, 2025 – January 2, 2026**
- Spring Break: March 16–20, 2026
- Last Day of School (Students): **May 28, 2026** (Thursday)

For the full calendar and official updates, visit the AISD Academic Calendar.

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Austin Startup Saronic Raises \$1.75B to Build Autonomous Warships

By Thomas Wyatt | EIC, The Villager

(AUSTIN, TX) — Defense technology startup **Saronic Technologies**, headquartered in Austin, has secured a **record-breaking \$1.75 billion Series D funding round**, more than doubling its valuation to **\$9.25 billion**, according to CNBC and TechStartups.

The raise, led by **Kleiner Perkins** and joined by Advent International, Bessemer Venture Partners, DFJ Growth, and BAM Elevate, marks the **largest single investment in Austin's tech sector history**. It positions Saronic among the most valuable private defense firms in the U.S.

Founded in 2022, Saronic builds **autonomous surface vessels**—unmanned ships designed for surveillance, patrol, and fleet coordination. Its flagship models include the **24-foot Corsair** and the **180-foot Marauder**, both capable of operating without onboard crews. The company completed its first Marauder in under six months, a timeline unheard of in traditional naval procurement.

CEO **Dino Mavrookas** said the funding will accelerate production at Saronic's facilities in Texas and Louisiana, including a new shipyard dubbed **Port Alpha**, which may be sited in South Texas. The company aims to produce **over 20 vessels annually by 2027**, restoring U.S. shipbuilding capacity to levels not seen since World War II.

Saronic holds a **\$392 million contract with the U.S. Navy** and is part of a growing wave of venture-backed firms reshaping military procurement. The investment comes amid rising tensions in the Strait of Hormuz and a push to counter China's shipbuilding dominance.

"This is not about incremental upgrades," Mavrookas told CNBC. "It's about rethinking the entire ship."

Saronic now employs over **1,300 people** across Austin, San Diego, Washington, D.C., and Franklin, Louisiana. The company ranked 19th on the latest CNBC Disruptor 50 list.

Current investigative reporting of public city finance records show Saronic Technologies received **no City of Austin tax break** to set up shop here. It still remains to be seen if tax abatements *were* required from city officials to lure yet another tech company.

Nonetheless, that absence isn't a footnote. It's the story.

Because Austin is staring down a **\$95 million budget deficit**, the predictable result of years of corporate subsidies, rising public safety costs, and a tax base eroded by deals that promised "innovation" but delivered little to the communities that needed it most. For decades, East Austin residents have watched the city hand out incentives to multinational corporations while telling longtime families there was "no money" for sidewalks, flood miti-

gation, or basic public health infrastructure.

So, when a company backed by Kleiner Perkins, Advent International, and the U.S. Navy arrives **without** asking Austin taxpayers to underwrite its growth, it forces a long overdue question:

Has Austin finally learned from its mistakes — or is this just a temporary pause in a familiar pattern of corporate favoritism?

Austin's deficit didn't appear out of thin air. It is the cumulative cost of a development strategy that treated tax breaks as a default setting, not a tool of last resort.

For years, the city approved incentive packages that:

- Reduced the general fund revenue needed for public safety, parks, and libraries
- Accelerated displacement in East Austin by signaling to investors that the city would subsidize growth at any cost
- Promised job creation that rarely materialized in the neighborhoods most harmed by inequitable development

Residents remember the deals that were supposed to "pay for themselves." They remember the glossy press conferences. They remember the promises of "shared prosperity."

What they don't remember is that "*prosperity*" ever reaching *them*.

Therefore, when Saronic arrived **without** a hand outstretched, it exposed a truth city leaders rarely say aloud: **Companies will still come to Austin even when the city stops giving away its tax base.**

Let's be clear: Saronic is not anti incentive. The company is actively pursuing **major tax abatements in South Texas** for its proposed \$3.2 billion "Port Alpha" shipyard at the Port of Brownsville, including:

- A **10 year property tax abatement** from Cameron County and Point Isabel ISD
- A **JETI Act agreement** from the Texas Comptroller allowing up to **75% property tax limitation**

Votes on those abatements were delayed until June. This matters because it shows the company understands the value of public subsidies — it simply didn't need Austin's. And that raises the question:

How many of the companies Austin subsidized in the past would have come here without incentives anyway?

The answer, if we're honest, is most of them.

Some council members have framed the absence of incentives for Saronic as a sign of "fiscal responsibility." Others quietly acknowledge the reality: **Austin simply can't afford to keep giving away revenue while running a deficit.**

If Austin's pause on incentives is merely a budget driven timeout, the cycle will repeat the mo-



Dino Mavrookas | CEO, Saronic Technologies

ment the city's finances stabilize. And East Austin will once again be asked to absorb the consequences.

Saronic didn't ask for Austin's money, *that we currently know of*, but the next company will. And the one after that.

The real test of whether Austin has learned anything will come when:

- A multinational corporation dangles "1,000 jobs"
- A developer promises "affordable housing" that never materializes
- A tech giant threatens to locate in another city unless Austin pays them to stay

Will the city hold the line? Or will it return to the familiar reflex of subsidizing private profit with public dollars? Justice demands the former. History predicts the latter.

If Austin wants to rebuild trust — especially in communities east of I 35 — it must commit to a new economic development model grounded in equity, transparency, and measurable public benefit.

That means:

- **No incentives without enforceable community benefits**
- **No subsidies for companies that accelerate displacement**
- **No deals that reduce general fund revenue during a deficit**
- **No more "innovation" that leaves East Austin behind**

And above all: **No more pretending that tax breaks are the price of admission to a city companies already want to be in.**

Saronic's arrival proves what residents have said for years: Austin doesn't need to give away its future to attract investment. It only needs the courage to stop.

The Manufactured Crisis: How War Hype, Market Shock, and Political Theater Are Fueling Profiteering

By Thomas Wyatt | EIC, The Villager

(VILLAGER) - Oil didn't surge because Iran suddenly became more dangerous. Markets didn't convulse because global fundamentals changed overnight. They reacted because the President of the United States delivered yet another televised threat—one that extended the war timeline, escalated the rhetoric, and injected fresh uncertainty into an already shaken global economy. Oil prices spiked more than 4–5% within hours of the speech, while stocks across Asia tumbled in response to the renewed promise to "hammer Iran" for weeks to come.

Furthermore, Trump's speech was not a national security update. It's a market moving event that has somewhat become part of a pattern.

For weeks, the administration has issued contradictory statements about the war's duration, the status of negotiations, and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz—one of the most critical arteries in the global energy system. Each shift has sent oil and equities lurching in opposite directions. Each televised threat or walk back has created volatility so sharp that traders, hedge funds, and politically connected insiders have been able to profit from the chaos.

This is not speculation; it's the predictable outcome of a communication strategy built on unpredictability.

Earlier this week, markets had begun to stabilize after earlier comments suggesting the war might end "very soon." Then, Wednesday evening, in less than 20 minutes on national television, that fragile recovery was shattered. Brent crude shot back above \$105 a barrel. West Texas Intermediate surged past \$103. Asian markets plunged. Analysts describe Trump's



speech as "unfinished business"—the kind of open ended threat that fuels volatility rather than resolves it.

Let's be clear: Volatility is not a side effect. It is the engine.

Every time the administration signals escalation, oil spikes. Every time it hints at de escalation, stocks rebound. Every time it contradicts itself, the market whipsaws. And every one of those swings creates opportunities for those with **advance knowledge**—or those positioned to benefit from the chaos.

Meanwhile, the public is told this war is about an "imminent threat." Yet, the President offered **no plan** to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, no diplomatic pathway, and no timeline for withdrawal. Instead, he issued a threat to "bring them back to the Stone Ages," a line guaranteed to rattle markets without offering any strategic clarity.

The result is a crisis that keeps ordinary people paying more at the pump, more for food, and more for basic goods—while the politically connected stand to profit from the very instability they help create.

Even global institutions are sounding alarms. The World Bank told reporters it is "extremely concerned" about the impact on inflation, jobs, and food security. That is not the language of a tempo-

rary conflict. That's the language of a global economic shock—one amplified by political decisions and public messaging that appear designed to keep markets on edge rather than stabilize them.

This is why so many observers argue that the war narrative has drifted far from national security and deep into the territory of market manipulation. When a president's words can move billions of dollars in commodities within minutes, and when those words are delivered with maximal ambiguity, the beneficiaries are not families in Austin or workers throughout Texas. They are traders, defense contractors, and political allies positioned to profit from the swings.

The simple story from a surface level reaction is oil up, stocks down, and uncertainty rising. But the deeper story is about how that uncertainty is being manufactured—and who gains from it.

A war sold as necessity is increasingly functioning as a lever for economic extraction. And every new speech, every new threat, every new contradiction widens the gap between those who can profit from volatility and those who are crushed by it.

Let's call Trump's so-called wars for what they are: This ain't just some foreign policy crisis. It's an economic one—engineered to make the rich richer through the most corrupt means in plain sight.

The SNAP Lawsuit That Could Decide Who Gets to Eat in America

How a Quiet USDA Rule Change Triggered a National Food Access Crisis

By Thomas Wyatt | EIC, The Villager


(VILLAGER) - The lawsuit challenging the USDA's new SNAP food restrictions has become one of the most consequential fights over food access in a generation, not because it is flashy or loud, but because it strikes at the quiet infrastructure that keeps millions of Americans fed. What began as a bureaucratic rule change under the Trump administration has now fractured the nation's largest anti-hunger program into a confusing patchwork of state-by-state food lists, leaving grocers scrambling, families bewildered, and entire communities—especially Black and low-income neighborhoods—at risk of deeper hunger. The plaintiffs argue that the USDA sidestepped federal law by allowing states to decide which foods SNAP recipients can buy, effectively outsourcing national nutrition policy to governors and state agencies without scientific standards, public input, or congressional authorization. In doing so, they say, the agency created a backdoor national policy that punishes the poor under the guise of promoting health.

The consequences are already visible. Twenty-two states have adopted some form of restriction, and the rules vary so widely that a family traveling across state lines could find their benefits accepted in one grocery aisle and rejected in the next. In Tennessee, processed foods and beverages are banned. In South Carolina, entire categories of sweetened products are off-limits. In Iowa, the list is so broad that grocers warn they cannot keep up with the coding changes required to enforce it. These are not nutrition guidelines; they are administrative landmines. Independent grocers—especially those serving rural towns and urban food deserts—say the rules require reprogramming checkout systems, recoding tens of thousands of items, retraining staff, and managing the inevitable confusion and humiliation that SNAP recipients face at the register. When stores cannot comply, they stop accepting SNAP altogether. And when stores stop accepting SNAP, neighborhoods lose access to food.

All of this is happening while the average SNAP benefit remains just over six dollars a day, and while the "One Big, Beautiful Bill Act" has already cut \$187 billion from the program over ten years. For the 10.2 million Black SNAP recipients nationwide, the stakes are not theoretical. They are lived daily, in the gap between rising rents and shrinking paychecks, in the grocery aisles where choices are already constrained by cost, and in the neighborhoods where full-service stores are scarce. Nowhere is this more evident than in Austin, where more than 3.5 million

Who Decides What's on the Table?


The SNAP Lawsuit That's Putting Millions at Risk of Hunger



New Rules on SNAP:
22 States Restricting Food Choices

Benefits Cut by \$187 Billion


The Crisis for East Austin



MORE SNAP RECIPIENTS FEWER GROCERY STORES HIGHER FOOD COSTS CHECKOUT CHAOS

"It's \$6 a Day, and Now We Can't Buy Basic Food."

- 50 Million Lose Food Access
- States Set Their Own Rules
- Grocers Drop SNAP Program
- Chaos at Every Checkout



Food Is a Right, Not a Privilege

Will Courts Protect the Right to Eat?

Texans will soon be subject to new restrictions. In East Austin, where displacement, gentrification, and wage stagnation collide, SNAP is not supplemental—it is survival. The area's limited grocery options mean that when a store opts out of SNAP or struggles to implement the new rules, residents are forced to travel farther, pay more, or go without. This is how food deserts expand: not through dramatic closures, but through slow administrative erosion that chips away at access until the system collapses under its own contradictions.

If the lawsuit fails, the USDA's waiver system becomes a permanent precedent, allowing every state to craft its own food list and turning SNAP into a political battleground every election cycle. Recipients could face inconsistent rules depending on where they live, grocers could abandon the program in large numbers, and the federal guarantee of food access—SNAP's foundational promise—would be shattered. The deeper story is not about candy or soda; it is about the policing of poor people's diets. Wealthier Americans can buy whatever they want. SNAP recipients, meanwhile, are subjected to moral

judgment, administrative surveillance, and state-level experimentation that echoes a long history of regulating the lives of the poor, particularly Black families, through welfare programs.

The lawsuit will take months or years to resolve, but the damage is unfolding now. States continue rolling out restrictions, grocers continue warning that the system is unworkable, and families continue navigating a maze of rules that change depending on the state line or the store's software. Without intervention, SNAP risks becoming so fractured that it no longer functions as a national anti-hunger program at all. For East Austin, the implications are immediate and personal: if SNAP becomes unstable, thousands of households lose their last reliable source of food security. For the country, the question is even larger. Will America allow hunger to be governed by political preference rather than federal protection? The plaintiffs are asking the courts to restore a simple principle—that every person, in every state, deserves the same right to eat. The answer will determine not just the future of SNAP, but the moral direction of the nation.

Texas's New SNAP Restrictions Took Effect Wednesday. Here's What Families Need to Know Now.

by Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) — Texas's new restrictions on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) officially took effect on April 1, reshaping what more than three million Texans can buy with their monthly benefits. The changes, approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture after the passage of Senate Bill 379, limit the purchase of several common grocery items and introduce new rules that many families will feel immediately at the checkout line.

Under the new policy, SNAP benefits can no longer be used to buy candy bars, gum, taffy, or any sweetened drink containing five grams or more of added sugar. Drinks made with artificial sweeteners, including diet sodas, are also prohibited. Items such as nuts, raisins, or fruit that are candied, glazed, or coated in chocolate, yogurt, or caramel are now ineligible as well. These changes apply statewide and are enforced automatically through store point of sale systems.

Most staple groceries remain eligible. Fresh produce, meat, dairy, bread, cereal, rice, pasta, and beverages made primarily from fruit or vegetable juice are still covered. Drinks sweetened only with natural sweeteners and containing less than five grams of added sugar per serving remain allowed. Seeds and plants used to grow food continue to qualify.

State leaders have framed the restrictions as a health driven effort to encourage more nutritious purchases. Critics, including food access advocates and public health researchers, argue that the policy places the burden of nutritional reform on low-income families rather than on the food industry or



retailers. They warn that the rules will create confusion at checkout, increase stigma for SNAP users, and push more families toward food banks already operating at capacity.

In Austin, where food access varies sharply by neighborhood, the impact will be uneven. Families in East Austin, who already face limited grocery options and higher transportation barriers, may spend more time navigating labels and more money filling the gaps left by newly restricted items. Seniors and disabled Texans who rely on predictable, easy to prepare foods may also experience disruptions as familiar items become ineligible.

The new rules do not reduce anyone's benefit amount, but they do change how far those benefits can stretch. If an item is rejected at checkout, the shopper will not lose funds; the system simply will not allow the purchase. Grocery stores are responsible for enforcing eligibility, but families will bear the practical consequences of navigating the new landscape.

Texas's SNAP restrictions arrive at a moment when affordability pressures are already high. With rising rents, higher food prices, and a widening gap between wages and basic needs, many households depend on SNAP to stabilize their monthly budgets. These new rules add another layer of complexity to a system that millions rely on for survival.

For families seeking help understanding the changes, the state's 2 1 1 hotline can provide guidance, and local food banks are distributing updated eligibility information. Community organizations across Austin are preparing to assist residents who may experience disruptions in their grocery routines.

The policy's long term effects will become clearer in the months ahead, but its immediate reality is already here: Texas has reshaped what low income families can put in their grocery carts, and the consequences will be felt most acutely in the communities that have historically carried the weight of the state's policy experiments.

EDITORIAL | Tiger Woods: The Rise, the Ruin, and the Unfinished Reckoning of an American Prodigy

By Thomas Wyatt | EIC, The Villager

(VILLAGER) - Tiger Woods was never just a golfer. He was a cultural event — a seismic shift in a sport that had long treated whiteness as both its gatekeeper and its default setting. When Woods burst onto the scene in the late 1990s, he didn't simply dominate; he redefined what domination looked like. He shattered records, rewrote expectations, and forced a historically exclusive institution to confront the brilliance of a young Black man who refused to shrink himself to fit its mold.

His rise was mythic. His fall has been something far more tragic — not because it was inevitable, but because it has unfolded in slow motion, in public, and in pain.

The Making of a Global Icon

Woods' ascent was the kind of story America loves to claim: a child prodigy molded by discipline, precision, and a father's relentless belief. He became the youngest Masters champion in history, the face of Nike's most lucrative golf campaign, and the embodiment of a new era. For Black communities, his presence on the green was a quiet revolution — a reminder that excellence can bloom even in the most inhospitable soil.

But America's love for its prodigies is conditional. It celebrates their rise, but it feasts on their collapse.

The Cracks Beneath the Greatness

The injuries came first — the kind that would have ended most careers. Woods kept returning, each time more battered, each time more determined. Then came the scandals, the tabloid frenzy,



Tiger Woods mugshot after being arrested for DUI Friday afternoon, March 27, in Jupiter, Florida.

the unraveling of a carefully curated image. And now, the latest chapter: another car crash, another DUI arrest, another public humiliation.

According to ESPN's Scott Van Pelt, Woods' downward spiral cannot be separated from the "significant loss" of his mother, Kultida, whom he had long described as his "rock." Her death early last year, combined with years of physical trauma, has left a man who once seemed invincible now visibly fractured.

This is not an excuse. It is context — the kind America often withholds from Black men until it's too late.

The Human Being Behind the Headlines

Van Pelt said something rare in sports media: that he no longer cares whether Woods shows up at the Masters, only that he gets well. That sentiment cuts through the noise. Because the truth is that Tiger Woods, the global icon, has been allowed to overshadow Tiger Woods, the human being — one who is grieving, aging, and clearly struggling.

The Tragedy of a Public Unraveling

Woods' fall is disappointing not because he owed us perfection, but because he once embodied a possibility so powerful that it felt like a collective victory. His decline feels communal too — a reminder of how quickly America turns prodigies into cautionary tales.

But the tragedy is not that Tiger Woods is no longer the golfer he once was. The tragedy is that we, as a society, have been quicker to sensationalize his pain than to understand it.

What Comes Next

Tiger Woods may never again dominate a fairway. He may never reclaim the aura that once made him untouchable. But perhaps that is not the point anymore.

The point is whether he can reclaim himself.

If there is any justice in the way we tell this story, it will not end with a mugshot. It will end with a man — flawed, brilliant, wounded, resilient — finding a way to live beyond the myth America built around him.

Because Tiger Woods' rise was extraordinary. His fall has been heartbreaking for his supporters. But his humanity is still unfolding, and that is the part of the story we have too often ignored.

Ilhan Omar's Reported \$30M Net Worth Sparks Federal and House Scrutiny

By Villager staff

(VILLAGER) - Rep. Ilhan Omar is facing intensifying scrutiny in Washington after new financial disclosures suggested her household wealth may have surged to as much as **\$30 million** — a dramatic rise that House investigators say demands answers about timing, transparency, and potential conflicts of interest.

The House Oversight Committee has already begun reviewing Omar's filings, with attorneys examining how her family's finances "ballooned" in such a short period, according to reporting from the *New York Post* and MSN's political desk. Oversight Chair James Comer has publicly questioned whether the pace and scale of the wealth accumulation align with federal ethics rules.

At the center of the inquiry is Omar's husband, **Tim Mynett**, a longtime political consultant whose firms have cycled through Democratic-aligned clients for more than a decade. His previous company, the E Street Group, was a major vendor for Omar's 2019–2020 reelection campaign. His newer ventures — including a California winery and a venture capital management firm — appear to account for much of the reported net worth spike.

But the disclosures raise more questions than they answer.

A Wealth Surge with Few Public Explanations

According to Omar's filings, the couple's assets — once negligible — now fall somewhere between **\$5 million and \$30 million**, depending on valuation ranges. The upper bound is what has captured headlines, but even the lower bound represents a dramatic shift for a sitting member of Congress who, until recently, reported modest means.

The Oversight Committee is reportedly examining:

- **How Mynett's firms grew so quickly**, including one venture that reportedly jumped from near-zero valuation in 2023 to as much as \$25 million within a year.

- **Why senior officers' biographies disappeared from LinkedIn**, a move that fueled speculation about transparency and governance.

- **Whether any of the couple's income intersects with federal programs or political entities Omar influences**, directly or indirectly.

Federal investigators are also watching the situation, according to the MSN report, though no agency has publicly confirmed the scope of its review.

A Minnesota Backdrop Already Shaken by Fraud Scandals

The timing of Omar's financial ascent lands awkwardly against Minnesota's ongoing public aid



Ilhan Omar

Mandel Ngan/AFP/Getty

fraud investigations — including the **\$250 million Feeding Our Future scandal**, which has already produced dozens of indictments and convictions. Federal officials have emphasized that pandemic era fraud remains a top enforcement priority.

While Omar has not been implicated in those cases, the proximity of her financial disclosures to Minnesota's broader accountability crisis has amplified public skepticism. For many Minnesotans — especially those watching public dollars evaporate while communities struggle — the optics alone demand a fuller explanation.

Ethics, Trust, and the Burden of Public Office

Omar's supporters argue that her husband's business success should not be conflated with wrongdoing. But ethics experts note that members of Congress carry a heightened responsibility to maintain public trust, especially when their personal finances shift rapidly or intersect with political networks.

The question is not simply whether the wealth is legal — it is whether the public can see enough to be confident that it is.

In an era when Americans across the political spectrum distrust institutions, the burden of transparency is higher than ever. And for a lawmaker who has built her brand on moral clarity and progressive accountability, the stakes are even sharper.

What Comes Next

House investigators are expected to continue reviewing Omar's filings, and federal agencies may follow suit if they determine that any part of the financial picture warrants deeper inquiry. Omar's office has not yet provided a detailed public explanation of the valuations, the business structures involved, or the timeline of the wealth accumulation.

Until that happens, the \$30 million figure will continue to loom — not just as a number, but as a test of transparency, ethics, and the public's right to understand how power and money move in Washington.

WE INVITE YOU AND YOUR FAMILY TO THE 11th ANNUAL

EASTER EGG ROLL

SATURDAY, APRIL 4, 2026
10:30AM - NOON
LBJ LIBRARY LAWN

GENEROUS SPONSORSHIP PROVIDED BY:

LBJ LIBRARY FUTURE FORUM

H-E-B Helping Here

Blue Bell

11th Annual Easter Egg Roll

Saturday | April 4, 2026 | 10:30 am CT | LBJ Presidential Library Lawn

LBJ Future Forum presents the 11th Annual Egg Roll

The LBJ School community is invited to join Future Forum and Partnerships for Children for our 11th Annual Egg Roll on the lawn of the LBJ Library. This event is intended for families with young children and will include an egg roll, petting zoo, face painting, balloon artists, and egg hunt (for children 5 and under).

Trump's Latest U.S. Supreme Court Defeats Show an Alarming Trend

By Villager staff

(VILLAGER) - For more than a year, the Trump administration treated the Supreme Court like a pressure valve: whenever a federal judge blocked a policy, the White House rushed to the justices for emergency relief — and almost always got it. Those early victories created a powerful narrative that the Court was firmly aligned with the administration's agenda. But the Court's recent actions tell a more complicated story, one that suggests the era of near automatic wins is ending.

According to reporting from *Politico*, the administration prevailed in nearly all of the roughly 30 emergency appeals it filed during its first year, spanning immigration crackdowns, mass firings of federal employees, and abrupt cancellations of federal grants and contracts. Critics, including some of the Court's liberal justices, warned that the justices were granting extraordinary deference — treating every lower court setback as a national emergency requiring immediate intervention. But as those same disputes return to the Court through the normal, slower, and more rigorous merits process, the justices are showing sharper skepticism.

The shift has already produced major consequences. The Court struck down the administration's sweeping tariff program, a signature economic policy. It also rejected the use of the

National Guard to control anti ICE protests. And during oral arguments this week, the justices signaled deep concerns about the administration's attempt to end birthright citizenship for undocumented immigrants and short term visa holders — a policy that once seemed destined for a friendlier reception. These are not procedural hiccups; they are substantive rebukes that cut to the core of the administration's legal strategy.

Legal experts quoted in the reporting say the explanation is straightforward: the emergency docket is built for speed, not scrutiny. When Solicitor General John Sauer selected which cases to elevate on an emergency basis, he chose only the strongest ones — the disputes most likely to win quick relief. That strategy worked. But now, as those same cases return for full briefing and argument, the justices are no longer operating under the compressed timelines that once favored the administration's position. "It's going to be much harder," one former Supreme Court clerk told *Politico*, noting that the administration will "win some, but they're also going to lose some" as the Court evaluates the full merits of each case rather than the urgency of the moment.

The administration's internal dynamics are also complicating its path. In one recent episode, the Justice Department abruptly told an appeals court it would abandon efforts to revive executive orders targeting specific law firms — only to reverse itself

the next day after reports that the president had not been consulted. The inconsistency underscored a broader tension: as cases mature, the solicitor general loses control over which disputes reach the Court, and the administration's own decision making becomes more exposed.

None of this means the Court has turned against the president. The reporting does not suggest a political rupture. Instead, it points to an institutional correction. The justices appear to be reasserting the boundaries of their role after a year in which the emergency docket became a fast track pipeline for sweeping executive actions. The Court's conservative majority remains intact, but its appetite for rapid, far reaching interventions seems to be waning as the justices return to the slower, more deliberative process that defines their work.

What is emerging is a more familiar balance of power. The administration can no longer rely on the Court as a guaranteed backstop. The justices, for their part, are signaling that they will not rubber stamp policies simply because they arrive wrapped in the urgency of executive authority. As the next round of high stakes cases reaches the Court, the country will see whether this recalibration holds — and whether the Court's renewed skepticism becomes a defining feature of its relationship with the current White House.

East Austin Students Shut Out as Voucher Funds Flow Upward

By Villager staff

(VILLAGER) - The latest voucher application data confirms what East Austin families have warned for years: this program was never designed for the students who rely most on public schools. According to the comptroller's preliminary numbers, **73% of applicants already attend private school or homeschool, and white, higher income families make up the largest share of applicants** despite being a minority of Texas' public-school population. Meanwhile, the students who stand to lose the most — the Black, Latino, low in-

come, multilingual, and disabled students concentrated in East Austin — are barely represented in the applicant pool.

This is not a story about "choice." It's a story about **public dollars leaving public schools** while the children who depend on them are left with fewer teachers, fewer counselors, fewer buses, and fewer safe, stable campuses. East Austin schools have already endured closures, consolidations, and chronic underfunding. Now, with vouchers siphoning money toward families who were never in the public system to begin

with, the inequities deepen.

The state's own priority list makes the problem plain. Even if low income families or students with disabilities apply, they still face the barrier that **private schools are not required to accept them or provide the services they need**. Many East Austin families cannot afford the remaining tuition gap, cannot transport their children across town, and cannot gamble on a lottery that favors those already positioned to benefit.

So, what happens to the students who stay? They inherit the consequences: larger class sizes, fewer supports, and cam-

pusés forced to do more with less. Public schools remain the only institutions legally obligated to serve every child who walks through the door. When the state drains resources from those schools, it is East Austin students — not the families already in private education — who pay the price.

This moment demands honesty: vouchers don't expand opportunity. They redistribute it upward, away from the communities that need it most.

PUBLIC NOTICE REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS JOERIS GENERAL CONTRACTORS, LTD.,

Joeris General Contractors will be accepting competitive Proposals from Subcontractors and Suppliers for the: **Texas Facilities Commission** until **2:00PM on Tue, April 21st, 2026**. Proposals will be received by email at bidsaustin@joeris.com
Project Description: This CSP includes demolition and abatement, as well as utilities for **Camp Hubbard**.
Anticipated site walk on April 14th. Confirmation will be posted on Building Connected.
Plans may be reviewed at:
Joeris Website - www.joeris.com
or at Joeris General Contractors,
9211 Waterford Centre Blvd, Suite 150, Austin, TX 78758
O: (512) 920-0338; F: (512) 920-0339
Participation by S/M/W/DBE firms & Certified HUB firms is encouraged. Joeris General Contractors is an equal opportunity (EEO) employer.

PUBLIC NOTICES

Travis County Healthcare District d/b/a Central Health
1111 E. Cesar Chavez Street
Austin, TX 78702

RFP 2603-002 Compensation System Due Date: 04/24/2026 by 2:00 PM CT

Central Health is soliciting proposals from qualified vendors to provide implement a centralized, automated Compensation Management System (CMS) that replaces fragmented, manual, and email-based processes with a secure, auditable, and data-driven platform.

The CMS will serve as the system of record for compensation-related activities and will support the full lifecycle of compensation decisions, including job architecture, market pricing, offer management, equity analysis, career progression, merit administration, and reporting.

Ordering Instructions: Package can be downloaded from: <https://www.bidnetdirect.com/texas/traviscountyhealthcaredistrictdbcentralhealth>
OR <http://www.centralhealth.net/finance/purchasing>
OR <https://www.txsmartbuy.com/esbd>

Integral Care is currently soliciting proposals through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process for Banking, Treasury, and Cash Management Services. RFPs may be requested electronically by contacting Christina Lundy at procurement@integralcare.org or (737) 424-4349 beginning March 19, 2026. The deadline to submit a proposal under the RFP is 5p.m. CDT on May 7, 2026. Historically Underutilized Businesses, including Minority-Owned Businesses and Women-Owned Businesses, are encouraged to apply.

Integral Care is currently soliciting proposals through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process for Food Pantry Operations Support and Onsite Event Services. RFPs may be requested electronically, by contacting Christina Lundy at procurement@integralcare.org or (737) 424-4349 beginning March 23, 2026. The deadline to submit a proposal under the RFP is 5 p.m. CDT on April 16, 2026. Historically Underutilized Businesses, including Minority-Owned Businesses and Women-Owned Businesses, are encouraged to apply.

Integral Care is currently soliciting proposals through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process for Conference Venue, Catering, and Event Support. RFPs may be requested electronically, by contacting Christina Lundy at procurement@integralcare.org or (737) 424-4349 beginning April 14, 2026. The deadline to submit a proposal under the RFP is 5p.m. CDT on May 6, 2026. Historically Underutilized Businesses, including Minority-Owned Businesses and Women-Owned Businesses, are encouraged to apply.


My Community Needs

**Tuesday, April 14th at
Community Development
Commission**


**Austin City Hall
(301 W. 2nd Street)**

**Thursday, April 23rd at
Austin City Council**

**Austin City Hall
(301 W. 2nd Street)**



Share your community needs by attending a Public Hearing and/or filling out the Needs Assessment Survey that informs the Action Plan. The programs from this grant fund affordable housing, job creation, and public service needs for low- and moderate-income families, persons with disabilities, and seniors.



SpeakUpAustin.org/MyCommunityNeeds

AUSTIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE (ACC) DISTRICT is requesting sealed proposals from interested and qualified firms for the purpose of selecting a respondent to provide **District-Wide Single Stream Recycling Services for the following solicitation.**

• **Request for Proposal (RFP) No. 926-26-271-00-S-JG-RFP**

All sealed proposals must be submitted to the Procure to Pay (P2P) Department by no later than **on Friday, April 17, 2026 at 12:00 p.m., Central Standard Time (CST)**. See solicitation for details.

Solicitation documents are available on the ACC P2P's website at:

- <https://offices.austincc.edu/business-services/procure-to-pay/procurement/advertised-solicitations/> or at
- <https://us.workdayspend.com/rfps/public/1098471>

If you are not able to view this solicitation, please send an email to the Buyer/Sole Point of Contact for the solicitation as soon as possible.

SOLE POINT OF CONTACT:

- **John Gross, Buyer**
- **Email:** john.gross@austincc.edu
- **Telephone Number:** (512) 223-1329

Only electronically transmitted responses will be accepted by the date and time indicated above, unless otherwise stated in the solicitation documents.

ACC will host an optional virtual solicitation conference on **April 8, 2026 at 2:00 p.m., CST via Zoom Virtual Meeting**. See solicitation documents for details.

AUSTIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE (ACC) DISTRICT is requesting sealed proposals from interested or qualified firms for the purposes of selecting a respondent to provide **Bookstore Management Services for the following solicitation.**

• **Competitive Sealed Proposals (CSP) No. 958-26-269-00-S-JD-CSP**

All sealed proposals must be submitted to the Procure to Pay (P2P) Department by no later than **on Friday, April 17, 2026 at 12:00 p.m., Central Standard Time (CST)**. See solicitation for details.

Solicitation documents are available on the ACC P2P's website at:

- <https://offices.austincc.edu/business-services/procure-to-pay/procurement/advertised-solicitations/> or at
- <https://us.workdayspend.com/rfps/public/1070193>

If you are not able to view this solicitation, please send an email to the Buyer/Sole Point of Contact for the solicitation as soon as possible.

SOLE POINT OF CONTACT:

- **Jennifer Dias, Buyer**
- **Email:** jennifer.dias@austincc.edu
- **Telephone Number:** 512-223-1114

Only electronically transmitted responses will be accepted by the date and time indicated above, unless otherwise stated in the solicitation documents.

ACC will host an optional solicitation conference on **April 7, 2026 at 2:30 p.m., CST at the via Zoom Virtual Meeting**. See solicitation documents for details.





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or visit www.austintexas.gov/snbr.



The Rise, Reckoning, and Rupture of Sheila Cherfilus McCormick

A narrative account based on the Ethics Committee's findings

By Villager staff

(VILLAGER) - Sheila Cherfilus McCormick entered Congress with the kind of improbable momentum that turns local candidates into national stories. A daughter of Haitian immigrants, a health care executive, and a relentless campaigner, she carved her way into Florida's 20th Congressional District after the death of longtime Rep. Alcee Hastings. Her victory was narrow, expensive, and hard fought — but it was also historic. She became the first Haitian American Democrat elected to Congress, a symbol of representation long overdue.

For a moment, it looked like she was building a new political dynasty in South Florida.

But Washington has a way of turning triumph into scrutiny, and scrutiny into crisis.

A Promising Start Meets a Growing Shadow

From the beginning, Cherfilus McCormick's political ascent was intertwined with money — how much she raised, how much she loaned herself, and how aggressively she funded her campaigns. Her 2021 special election bid was fueled by millions in personal loans, a strategy that helped her outspend rivals but also raised eyebrows.

Still, she won. And for a time, the questions quieted.

Then came the investigations.

The Ethics Committee Steps In

By 2024, whispers had become formal inquiries. The House Ethics Committee — a bipartisan body known for moving slowly and speaking sparingly — launched a probe into whether Cherfilus McCormick had misused federal funds connected to disaster relief programs.

The allegations were serious: that she had improperly directed or benefited from **millions in federal disaster relief dollars**, and that some of those funds were used to support her political campaign. The Committee also examined whether she had failed to properly disclose financial information, misrepresented the nature of certain transactions, or blurred the lines between public resources and political ambition.

For months, the investigation unfolded quietly. Then, in a rare move, the Committee held a **public hearing** — a sign that the evidence was substantial and the stakes were high.

The Verdict: 25 Ethics Violations

When the findings were released, they landed like a thunderclap.

The Committee concluded that Rep. Sheila Cherfilus McCormick had **violated 25 ethics rules** — an extraordinary number for any sitting mem-



Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, D-Fla., appears for the House Ethics Committee trial Thursday, March 26, 2026. The panel announced Friday, March 27, Cherfilus-McCormick was found guilty of 25 ethics charges for allegedly stealing millions in FEMA money and using it for her campaign. Andrew Harnik / Getty Images

ber of Congress. The violations centered on:

- **Misuse of federal disaster relief funds**, including allegations that millions intended for emergency assistance were diverted or misapplied.
- **Improper financial conduct** connected to her 2021 campaign.
- **Failures in disclosure and transparency**, including incomplete or misleading financial statements.
- **Conduct unbecoming of a member of Congress**, a broad category that encompasses actions that undermine public trust.

The Committee did not find her guilty on two of the 27 charges — but the overwhelming majority stood.

Members of her own party, including Reps. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez and Vicente Gonzalez, publicly called for her resignation, marking a rare moment of intraparty rebuke.

A Career at a Crossroads

Cherfilus McCormick denied wrongdoing. She insisted that the allegations were politically motivated, that the Committee had misinterpreted her actions, and that she had always acted in good faith. Her supporters echoed this, arguing that she was being targeted because she was a newcomer, a disruptor, and a Black woman representing a district long shaped by entrenched political interests.

But the Ethics Committee's findings — and the looming possibility of an expulsion vote — placed her in the most precarious position of her political life.

The Human Cost Behind the Headlines

Behind the legal language and political maneuvering is a more intimate story: a first generation American who rose quickly, governed boldly, and now faces the possibility of a historic downfall. Her constituents, many of whom saw her as a symbol of representation and possibility, are left navigating disappointment, confusion, and uncertainty about what comes next.

And in Washington, where scandal is currency and accountability is often selective, her case has become a flashpoint — a test of how Congress handles alleged misconduct within its own ranks, and whether the standards applied to one member will be applied to all.

Where the Story Goes from Here

The Ethics Committee will reconvene after recess to determine next steps. Expulsion requires a two thirds vote — a threshold rarely met in American history. But the political winds are shifting, and the pressure is mounting.

For now, Sheila Cherfilus McCormick remains in Congress, fighting to defend her name, her seat, and her legacy.

Her story is still being written.

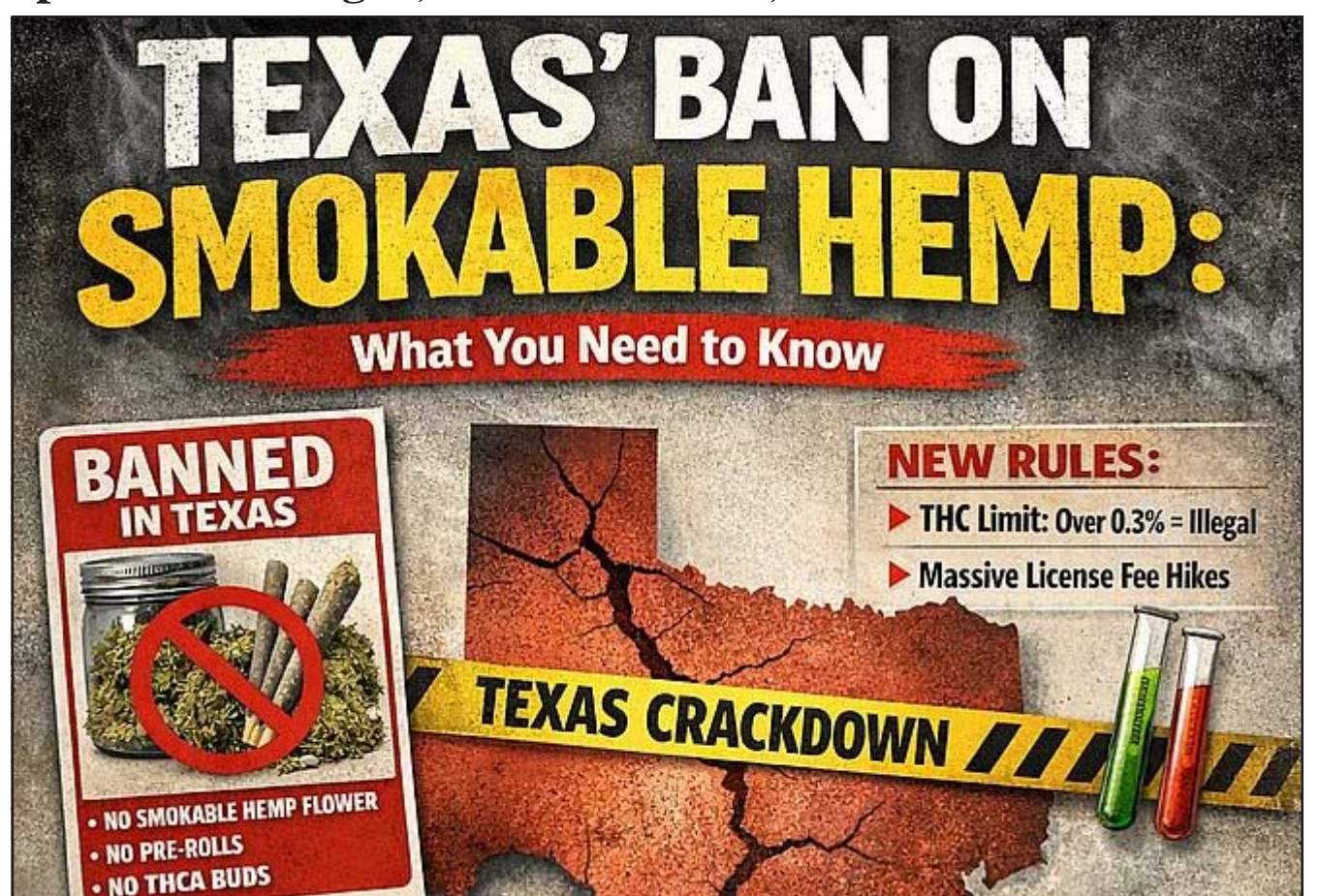
Texas's Ban on Smokable Hemp: What Changed, Who's Affected, and What Comes Next

By Villager staff

(VILLAGER) - Texas has quietly enacted one of the most sweeping crackdowns on the state's hemp industry since legalization in 2019, and the effects are immediate. As of March 31, new rules from the Department of State Health Services have effectively eliminated all natural smokable hemp products from the legal market. The state did not pass a legislative ban; instead, regulators rewrote the rules in ways that industry leaders say achieve the same outcome. By lowering the allowable threshold of total THC to 0.3 percent and requiring labs to measure all THC forms—not just Delta 9—the state has rendered popular products like THCA flower and pre rolled joints noncompliant. These items make up more than half the inventory for many shops, and their removal represents a seismic shift for retailers and consumers alike. The rules also codify a purchasing age of 21, expand testing and labeling requirements, and impose extensive bookkeeping obligations that smaller shops say they cannot meet.

The financial impact is just as severe. Licensing fees for manufacturers have jumped from \$258 to \$10,000 per facility, and retail registration fees have risen from \$155 to \$5,000. Business owners describe these increases as a targeted squeeze designed to force closures, especially in rural areas where shops operate on thin margins. One manufacturer told reporters that regulators had “done a ban with their own regulatory scheme,” arguing that the state has chosen to eliminate legal products rather than enforce existing safety standards. Many in the industry say they welcomed age verification, child resistant packaging, and clearer labeling, but they view the THC cap and fee hikes as punitive measures that go far beyond consumer protection.

Consumers, meanwhile, face a confusing landscape. Possession of smokable hemp remains legal, and attorneys emphasize that Texans will not be committing a crime by carrying or using these products. But because hemp and marijuana are visually indistinguishable and field tests cannot differentiate them, lawyers expect a wave of mistaken ar-



rests as law enforcement agencies misinterpret the new rules. Retailers are rushing to clear inventory, but they cannot sell to out of state customers, leaving many with thousands of dollars in unsellable product. Some warn that the crackdown will push half the legal market into illicit channels, where products are untested and unregulated, undermining the very safety goals state officials claim to prioritize.

State leaders and youth focused advocacy groups argue that the restrictions are necessary to protect children from high THC products that have become widely accessible. They point to a rise in cannabis related poison control calls since 2019, though experts caution that such increases are common after legalization and require more context before drawing conclusions. Lawmakers attempted a full ban last year, citing concerns that the THCA loophole had created a de facto recreational market without legislative approval. Although the governor vetoed that bill, he directed agencies to

tighten regulations, and these rules are the result. Supporters of the fee increases say the billion dollar hemp industry should bear the cost of oversight and the “societal burden” associated with intoxicating products.

The future of the industry is uncertain. A coalition of hemp businesses is preparing to sue the state, continuing a legal battle that began in 2021 when regulators attempted to outlaw Delta 8. Attorneys expect consumers to seek out semi synthetic or chemically converted products that appear compliant on paper, while edibles and beverages—regulated separately by the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission—may temporarily fill the gap. But advocates warn that demand for smokable products will not disappear, and the state's attempt to regulate them out of existence may simply drive Texans toward untested alternatives. As one attorney put it, people who want to smoke will “find something that appears compliant,” even if it is less safe than what the state just banned.