

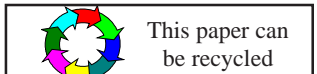
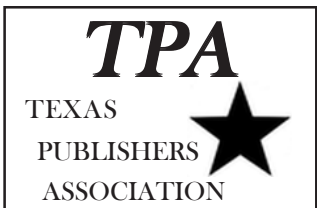


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RAPPIN'
Thomas Wyatt

UNEVENTFUL EVENING

President Trump's State of the Union ran long but delivered little clarity on the biggest foreign policy question facing the country: what he actually plans to do about Iran. Even with two U.S. carrier groups already deployed and talks set for Geneva, Trump repeated familiar lines without outlining a real strategy, leaving the public no closer to understanding whether he's pursuing diplomacy or preparing for confrontation.

At home, he leaned hard on economic messaging—touting stock market highs while rewriting the inflation story. The facts tell a different tale: inflation was not at "record levels" when he took office, and most Americans disapprove of his handling of rising prices. Still, he blamed Democrats for affordability struggles and cast their opposition to his tax bill as an attack on working families.

The night's most explosive moments came on immigration. Trump demanded applause for prioritizing citizens over "illegal aliens," scolding Democrats when they refused to stand. Tensions spiked when he accused the Somali community of "pillaging" taxpayer dollars, prompting Rep. Ilhan Omar to shout back that he was lying. It was a raw reminder of how deeply immigration divides the country—and how quickly Trump is willing to escalate.

Even his recent anger at the Supreme Court cooled in front of the justices. After blasting them for striking down his tariffs, he settled for calling the ruling "unfortunate," avoiding the showdown many expected.

In the end, Republicans got the culture war contrasts they wanted, and Democrats argued he failed to shift a political landscape already turning against him. Their response, led by Virginia Gov. Abigail Spanberger, boiled down to three questions: Is he making life affordable? Is he keeping people safe? Is he working for you?

For everyday readers, the takeaway is simple: Trump offered plenty of heat, but little direction—especially on Iran, affordability, and the issues shaping daily life.

Complicated Electability

EDITORIAL: Why I Voted for Talarico — And Why Texas Isn't Ready to Elect Jasmine Crockett Statewide



Top row (L-to-R): John Cornyn, Jasmine Crockett, Ken Paxton.
Bottom row (L-to-R): Colin Allred, Beto O'Rourke.

By Thomas Wyatt | EIC, The Villager

(VILLAGER) - Texas Democrats are having a hard conversation about electability, and it's not a theoretical one. It's happening in real time, in early vote lines, in living rooms, and — as the article *"White woman tearfully says she didn't vote for Crockett in Senate primary because 'We need somebody who can win'"* from *TheGrio*, written by Gerren Keith Gaynor, shows — even in tearful interviews that go viral. When Houston voter Sonya Bernhardt said, *"I was so ready to vote for Jasmine Crockett, because I love her, but I voted for Talarico because we need somebody who can win,"* she articulated a tension many of us have been wrestling with for months.

I love Crockett, too, but voted the same way Bernhardt did, for the same reason. I don't believe Crockett can win the Senate seat from Paxton or Cornyn. Not because she isn't qualified, but because this is Texas. And we're not there yet.

Do you know what I see when I look at Rep. Crockett? Colin Allred.

Let's be real. Allred has run for Texas offices more than he did in the National Football League. In 2018, Allred ran for a U.S. House of Representatives seat and lost to Pete Sessions. In 2024, Allred ran for a U.S. Senate seat against Ted Cruz and lost by nine points. And I'll be frank; anybody is better than having Ted Cruz as a representative of the great state of Texas. Anybody!

Rep. Crockett, in my humble opinion, runs circles around Allred in any capacity you could imagine.

This isn't about whether Crockett is smart, capable, or fierce — she is all three. It's about whether Texas, in its current political climate, will elect her to the U.S. Senate over a well funded, deeply entrenched Republican opponent. And when I look honestly at the statewide map, the voting patterns, and the coalition required to break a 30 year losing streak, I don't believe the numbers fall in her favor. However, Texas House of Representatives James Talarico has obvious qualities that Crockett lacks when it comes to conservative voters on the fence and independent voters ready to flip.

The Electability Question Isn't Manufactured — It's Structural

Gaynor's article makes clear that Crockett's supporters see critiques of her electability as rooted in bias. And they're not wrong to name that. Race and gender absolutely shape how candidates are perceived, especially Black women who lead with unapologetic strength. But acknowledging bias doesn't erase the political terrain we're forced to navigate. In order to beat the GOP incumbent or his challenger, we must play by their rules; for now.

Democratic strategist Jamarr Brown told *TheGrio* that some voters are weighing *"race of the candidate, gender of the candidate, and then also maybe some of her records."* He also noted that Crockett's reputation for *"fighting Republicans in Congress"* may make some Texans doubt her ability to appeal to moderates or disaffected Republicans.

That's the heart of the dilemma. Texas is not a state where Democrats can win on base enthusiasm alone. It's a

state where you must:

- Maximize turnout among Black, Latino, AAPI, and young voters
- Hold every inch of the Democratic base
- Win Independents
- Peel off a sliver of moderate Republicans

Brown himself said the pathway to victory requires a "deepening of the base" and crossover appeal.

Crockett energizes the base. But the question is whether she can do both.

Texas Voters Have a Pattern — And It Doesn't Favor Polarizing Candidates

Texas has repeatedly rejected Democrats who are perceived — fairly or unfairly — as too combative, too progressive, or too polarizing. That's not a judgment of their worth; it's a reflection of the electorate we have, not the electorate we wish we had.

Crockett's most viral moments are the ones that make her beloved online: the sharp takedowns, the committee room clashes, the refusal to back down. But those same moments are weaponized in GOP messaging, especially in rural and suburban counties where Democrats already struggle.

Bernhardt's emotional admission — *"That was one of the most difficult votes I've ever voted in my entire life"* — captures the painful truth. Many voters admire Crockett but don't believe she can win statewide.

And in Texas, admiration doesn't flip seats. Coalitions do.

Why I Believe Talarico Has the Better Shot

My vote wasn't a rejection of Crockett's talent. It was a calculation about the political math.

James Talarico has built a reputation for policy depth, bipartisan negotiation, and a tone that doesn't immediately trigger partisan reflexes in moderate voters. He's not as flashy, but statewide races in Texas aren't won on flash. They're won on persuasion, coalition building, and the ability to neutralize GOP attack lines before they land.

Crockett argues that critics aren't looking at her perceived achievements, saying, *"Holler at me and say that you have an issue as it relates to my credentials."* But for many voters, this isn't about credentials. It's about viability.

Texas Democrats Can't Afford to Lose Another Winnable Race

The stakes are too high to gamble on a candidate who electrifies the base but struggles with the middle. Texas Democrats have been burned by that pattern too many times. See Beto O'Rourke!

I voted for Talarico because I want a Democrat who can actually win the general election — not just the primary, not just the internet, not just the hearts of those already convinced.

Sonya Bernhardt said it plainly: *"We need somebody who can win."*

I agree.

And until Texas proves it's ready to elect a candidate with Crockett's style and profile statewide, I'm voting with the map, not the moment.

INSIDE



Early voting showing signs of high turnout for March elections. See **HISTORIC** Page 3



City of Austin attempting to correct its homeless situation. See **STRATEGY** Page 4



Former Xavier University president passes at 94. See **FRANCIS** Page 5

The Portal to Texas History

• Search for: **AUSTIN VILLAGER** to find over 11,000 documents of East Austin's true history recorded in the Villager newspaper.

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Extended-Hours During Early Voting Offers Voters More Opportunities Ahead of March 3RD Joint Primaries



(TRAVIS COUNTY, TX) – Travis County Clerk Dyana Limon-Mercado is reminding voters that the final two days of early voting for the March 3 Joint Primaries are approaching, with extended hours at seven locations to provide additional flexibility and convenient evening voting options. Over the first eight days of early voting, 93,572 voters have already cast their ballots, representing 10.17% of registered voters.

“Early voting is designed to give voters flexibility over when and where they vote,” said Clerk Limon-Mercado. “Extended evening hours help ensure that voters who work late, have family obligations, or busy schedules still have convenient opportunities to participate.”

Early voting hours for the final two days are:

- Thursday, February 26: 7 a.m. - 7 p.m.
- Friday, February 27: 7 a.m. - 7 p.m.

The following seven early voting locations will remain open until 10 p.m. on Thursday, February 26, and Friday, February 27:

- Ben Hur Shrine Center
- Carver Branch Library
- Lakeway Activity Center

- PflISD Rock Gym
- Randalls Brodie
- Travis County Clerk, 5501 Airport Blvd
- UT Texas Union

Ballot by Mail and Postmark Deadlines:

Completed Ballots by Mail must be postmarked by 7 p.m. on Election Day, Tuesday, March 3. Completed ballots must be received by the Travis County Clerk’s Office by 5 p.m. on

Wednesday, March 4. Ballots from military members or voters residing overseas must be postmarked by Tuesday, March 3 and received by Monday, March 9 by 5 p.m.

Voters who want to ensure their ballot receives a same-day postmark may request a free manual postmark at USPS retail locations.

Voters may also hand deliver their own Ballot by Mail to the County Clerk’s Office at 5501 Airport Blvd. on Election Day, March 3, between 7 a.m. – 7 p.m. and must present a **valid form of ID**.

Voter Changes for the Primary:

• Due to recent redistricting, some voters may now be assigned to new precincts or congressional

districts.

• The Travis County Democratic and Republican Parties are conducting a joint primary, allowing all voters—regardless of party affiliation—to cast their ballots at the same locations.

• During check-in, voters will be asked to select their preferred party on the ePollbook.

• Each polling place will display notices with additional information about upcoming Party Conventions.

• At the request of the Travis County Republican Party regarding early voting tabulation procedures, early voting ballots will not be counted until Election Day. As a result, complete early voting results may not be available when polls close at 7 p.m., and posting of complete results to the website could be delayed. This change is a step toward implementing a new state law that will take effect by 2027, requiring early voting and Election Day ballots to be counted and reported together after polls close on Election Night.

Voters can find early voting locations, hours, and their personalized sample ballot at **VoteTravis.gov**.

Texas NAACP Launches Election Protection Group to Safeguard Voter Rights in the 2026 Texas Primary Election on November 3, 2026.



The Texas NAACP is proud to announce the formation of an Election Protection Group, spearheaded by the NAACP Legal Redress Committee, alongside the Political Action and Civic Engagement Committees, and supported by legal experts from the national NAACP office. Key leaders include Legal Redress Chair Robert Notzon, Election Expert and Labor Chair Linda Lewis, Legal Redress Co-Chair Jesse Gaines, and NAACP Staff Member Lonzo Kerr. The National Office of General Counsel will be a partner in this effort.

With record voter turnout in Texas, we are

increasingly vigilant about potential irregularities that could undermine minority voting rights. Texans of all backgrounds recognize the critical importance of the upcoming election for the future of our democracy. The stakes have never been higher.

In recent years, Texas has enacted numerous voter suppression laws, making it easier to disenfranchise voters. The Texas NAACP is actively challenging several of these laws in court. Additionally, there are concerns about potential trial runs of voter suppression tactics that may be planned for the upcoming fall

elections.

If you encounter any irregularities or have concerns, please report those to the NAACP State Conference. Under the appropriate circumstances, if you feel comfortable doing so, you should report the irregularities or concerns to the appropriate governmental or party authority. The Texas NAACP offers a reliable option for reporting. Contact us on election day at (512) 985-9151. For more information, visit our website at Texasnaacp.org.

Stay informed and engaged. Together, we can protect the integrity of our elections.

APD Issues New Crime Bulletins as Theft, Auto Crime & Fraud Spike Across Austin



(AUSTIN, TX) – The Austin Police Department has released a new series of crime bulletins highlighting a rise in theft, auto-related offenses, and financial fraud across multiple parts of the city, urging residents to review surveillance footage and report tips that could help identify suspects.

According to APD, detectives are investigating **several vehicle break-ins**, including cases where suspects targeted apartment complexes and commercial parking lots. In multiple incidents, windows

were shattered and personal items stolen within minutes, suggesting coordinated or opportunistic activity.

Police also released images tied to **credit card fraud investigations**, where suspects allegedly used stolen cards at convenience stores and retail locations across South and Central Austin. Detectives say these cases often link back to earlier vehicle burglaries, where wallets and IDs were taken.

In addition, APD is seeking public assistance in **multiple theft**

cases, including shoplifting incidents and property crimes at local businesses. Officers emphasized that even small tips — such as identifying clothing, tattoos, or vehicles — can help move cases forward.

The department continues to encourage residents to secure vehicles, avoid leaving valuables in sight, and report suspicious activity. Anyone with information can submit tips anonymously through Crime Stoppers.

APD says the bulletins will be updated as new leads develop.

Inside the Texas Democratic Primary Driving Historic Turnout — and Deepening Party Fault Lines

by Thomas Wyatt | EIC, The Villager

(VILLAGER) - Texas is witnessing one of the most extraordinary primary seasons in decades. More than 1.25 million votes were cast in the first seven days of early voting — a number that eclipses turnout from the last two presidential cycles and nearly doubles 2022 levels. Democrats, for once, are outpacing Republicans in early ballots, a rarity in a state where the GOP has dominated statewide poli-

The most explosive moment came when a liberal content creator claimed Talarico had called former Rep. Colin Allred a “mediocre Black man.” Allred responded with a full-throated endorsement of Crockett, saying, “If you want to compliment Black women, just do it... Don’t do it while also tearing down a Black man.” Talarico insisted the remark was mischaracterized, saying he had described Allred’s campaigning as mediocre, not Allred himself. But the damage was done — and the con-

win but has repeatedly failed to crack. The historic turnout is real. The enthusiasm is real. But so are the fractures — racial, ideological, and strategic — that threaten to overshadow the numbers.

This primary is not just a contest for a nomination. It is an X-ray of a party wrestling with who it is, who it represents, and how it plans to compete in a state where every misstep is amplified and every division is weaponized. The turnout may be historic, but the stakes are even higher.



Voting signs outside the Carver Library in East Austin during early voting. Photo/Thomas Wyatt/VILLAGER

tics for more than thirty years. But beneath the surface of these historic numbers lies a far more volatile story: a primary defined by racial tension, ideological clashes, media hostility, and a party grappling with its own identity.

At the center of the storm are Rep. Jasmine Crockett and State Rep. James Talarico, two Democrats whose sharply contrasting styles have turned a routine primary into a national spectacle. The unusually high turnout is not simply enthusiasm — it is the byproduct of a race that has grown increasingly personal, increasingly racialized, and increasingly expensive.

Democratic leaders are publicly celebrating the surge. In Tarrant County — the state’s most competitive urban county — Democratic Party Chair Allison Campolo said voters “putting up bigger numbers than Republicans ... absolutely leads us into November with a really strong turnout and engagement.” But even as party officials tout momentum, the article reminds readers that Democrats have “dreamt about flipping the state for many election cycles now,” and those dreams have repeatedly collapsed under the weight of Texas’s political realities.

The Crockett–Talarico contest has become a flashpoint for those realities. Crockett has leaned into her identity as a Black woman and her reputation as a firebrand progressive. Talarico has leaned into a message that blends liberal policy with Christian language aimed at more conservative-leaning voters. What might have been a healthy ideological contrast has instead spiraled into a public feud over race, representation, and respect.

trovsky exposed a raw nerve within the party.

Crockett’s campaign has also clashed with the press in ways that have baffled longtime Democratic strategists. She called Capitol Police on a CNN journalist and removed an Atlantic reporter from one of her events — actions that would be unthinkable in a typical statewide campaign. These incidents have raised questions about transparency, media strategy, and whether the campaign’s confrontational posture is a principled stand or a self-inflicted wound.

Meanwhile, Republicans are watching the Democratic drama with amusement, not fear. GOP strategist Dave Carney dismissed the turnout surge as nothing more than the product of a rare, expensive Democratic primary, saying, “When was the last time the Democrats had a statewide primary where they spent millions of dollars? It hasn’t happened in my lifetime.” The implication is clear: Republicans believe the Democratic enthusiasm is temporary, not transformative.

The article also highlights a demographic shift that should concern Democrats: the GOP’s growing strength among Latino voters. Donald Trump’s “record inroads” into the demographic in 2024 dealt a major blow to Democratic hopes, and the trend has not reversed. Even with high early turnout, the party faces a long-term challenge in rebuilding trust with communities it once considered reliably blue.

What emerges from this reporting is not a story about two candidates, but a story about a party at a crossroads. The Texas Democratic primary has become a referendum on strategy, identity, and the future of the party in a state it desperately wants to

APD Investigating City’s 8th Homicide of the Year After Two Found Dead in South Austin

by Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) — The Austin Police Department is investigating the city’s eighth homicide of 2026 after a man identified as Samuel Rios and woman identified as Megan Montgomery were found dead inside a South Austin home late Saturday morning.

Officers responded around 11:30 a.m. to a welfare check at a residence on 6715 Windrift Way, where a family member let police inside. Both victims were discovered with obvious signs of trauma and were pronounced dead at the scene. Investigators believe the incident is isolated and have not identified any ongoing threat to the public.

APD has not released additional details about the circumstances surrounding the deaths, and the case remains active. Detectives are urging anyone with information to contact the department or submit an anonymous tip through Crime Stoppers.

This marks the latest in a series of early-year homicide investigations as Austin continues to track violent-crime trends across the city.



2026 BOND

Austin continues to face significant infrastructure challenges, including aging facilities, growing service demands, and affordability pressures.

Your input is important as the 2026 Bond Program team works to meet community expectations for the investments we make in our city’s future.

Get involved!
Share your priorities on which projects the City should invest in to improve Austin – visit AustinTexas.gov/Bond2026

AISD 2025–2026 School Year Calendar

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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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City Council Weighs Noise Ordinance Crackdown as Austin's Homelessness Strategy Enters New Phase

by Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) — The Austin City Council is preparing for a pivotal week as members take up two issues that have shaped neighborhood tensions and citywide policy debates for years: a proposed crackdown on loud vehicle noise and a newly unveiled strategic plan to guide the city's homelessness response through 2027.

Noise Ordinance:

Council Moves Faster Than Expected

The Council is expected to vote Thursday on amendments that would give officers clearer authority to cite drivers for excessively loud engine noise — a response to years of complaints from residents across the city. The proposal, which had originally been slated for late March, was moved up after a surge in reports from neighborhoods along RM 2222 and other corridors where residents say chronic racing and “unrelenting engine revving” have disrupted daily life.

City staff say the ordinance would close gaps in the current code, which bans intentionally creating loud vehicle noise but lacks explicit enforcement mechanisms. The updated language would allow officers to issue citations for loud engine noise, including from motorcycles and modified cars, and would phase in enforcement over time. The city has received a high volume of complaints from residents in recent months, particularly in dense residential areas.

The discussion comes as Austin continues to refine broader noise management policies, including rules governing amplified sound and temporary events. A separate ordinance revision — unrelated to vehicle noise — would update definitions, permitting structures, and enforcement responsibilities for outdoor music and sound amplification activities.

Homelessness Strategy:

A New Roadmap Through 2027

In the same week, the city's Homeless Strategy Office (HSO) presented its first comprehensive strategic plan outlining how Austin intends to coordinate, scale, and measure its homelessness re-



sponse through fiscal year 2027. The plan, introduced during a Council work session, emphasizes targeted investments, data driven accountability, and deeper collaboration across service providers.

HSO Director David Gray said the plan is designed to “build on what's working, scale what's proven, and stay accountable to measurable results,” noting that the city's homelessness response has expanded significantly in recent years but still lacks the unified structure needed to meet demand. The strategy outlines priorities such as expanding permanent supportive housing, strengthening crisis response systems, and improving reporting and transparency.

The plan marks the first time Austin has consolidated its homelessness goals into a single, multi-year framework. It arrives as the city continues to navigate rising housing costs, limited shelter capac-

ity, and ongoing public pressure for visible progress.

A Converging Debate About Quality of Life

Though the noise ordinance amendments and homelessness strategy address different policy arenas, both reflect a broader tension in Austin's rapid growth: how to balance neighborhood livability with equitable, long term solutions to systemic challenges.

For some residents, loud vehicle enforcement represents a long overdue quality of life fix. For others, the homelessness plan signals a shift toward more coordinated, accountable governance after years of fragmented efforts.

Council members are expected to continue discussions throughout the week, with votes on the noise ordinance likely Thursday and further deliberation on homelessness investments unfolding over the coming months.

Rep. Tony Gonzales Faces Mounting Pressure to Resign Over Scandal Involving Former Staffer's Suicide

by Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) — Republican Congressman Tony Gonzales is under intensifying scrutiny following revelations about his relationship with a former staffer who died by suicide — a scandal that has shaken Texas' 23rd Congressional District and triggered bipartisan calls for his resignation.

The controversy erupted after *San Antonio Express-News* obtained text messages showing Gonzales repeatedly pressed Regina Ann Santos-Aviles, a former aide, to send him inappropriate photos and meet privately. Santos-Aviles died in September 2025 after reportedly setting herself on fire outside her home in Uvalde.

Gonzales has denied wrongdoing, claiming he is the target of “coordinated political attacks” and alleging that Santos-Aviles' husband attempted to blackmail him. “I will not be blackmailed,” Gonzales posted on social media, prompting backlash from critics who accused him of deflecting responsibility.

Political Fallout and GOP Tensions

The scandal has triggered a wave of condemnation from both parties. Several House Republicans have called for Gonzales to step down or abandon his reelection bid. However, House Speaker Mike Johnson has declined to demand a resignation, stating, “We must allow the process to play out”.

Democratic challengers and immigrant-rights



Credit : Tom Williams/CQ-Roll Call, Inc via Getty; Regina Santos Aviles/Facebook

advocates have seized on the moment. Ruben Garcia, director of the Annunciation House in El Paso, said the case reflects “a culture of impunity that surrounds power,” and called for deeper accountability.

Gonzales' district — which spans from El Paso to San Antonio and includes Uvalde — is one of the most contested in the country. The community, still reeling from the 2022 school shooting, now faces another tragedy tied to public trust.

Ethics and Accountability Questions Loom

The House Ethics Committee has not yet announced a formal investigation, but watchdog groups say the case warrants immediate scrutiny. “This is a test of whether Congress takes staffer safety seriously,” said a representative from the Congressional Accountability Project.

New details continue to emerge, including admissions from Santos-Aviles about the affair and the emotional toll it took. Advocates say the case highlights the need for stronger protections for congressional staffers and clearer boundaries around power dynamics.

Gonzales Resists Resignation

Despite the mounting pressure, Gonzales has not indicated any plans to withdraw from the race. His campaign remains active, though internal GOP tensions are reportedly escalating. He has continued fundraising and outreach, even as calls for accountability grow louder.

As the March primary looms, voters in Texas' 23rd District are left to weigh not only the facts of the case but the broader implications for leadership, transparency, and justice.

Victim Identified in Homicide Investigation at 1400 E. Rundberg Lane

by Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) - On Saturday, February 21, 2026, at 3:05 a.m., Austin Police (APD) officers responded to the call of a shooting at 1400 E. Rundberg Lane. When officers arrived on the scene, they located a male victim near a dumpster suffering from multiple gunshot wounds and immediately initiated life-



saving measures. The victim, described as a White male in his 40s, has been identified as Joshua Baker. Despite officers' efforts, he succumbed to his injuries and was pronounced deceased at 3:16 a.m.

Homicide detectives and crime scene special-

ists responded to the scene. Preliminary investigation indicates that the victim was shot and killed by an unknown suspect who then fled the area.

Anyone with information should contact the Austin Police at 512-974-TIPS. You may submit your tip anonymously through the Capital Area Crime Stoppers Program by visiting austincrimestoppers.org or calling 512-472-8477. A reward of up to \$1,000 may be available for any information that leads to an arrest.

This case is being investigated as Austin's 10th homicide of 2026.



Honoring The Trailblazer Dr. Norman C. Francis

Marc H. Morial President and CEO
National Urban League

(NUL) - "We've got to have people who believe that education belongs to everybody. The future is education for our kids, starting early. Let them know about Blacks who made history and did it from their own belief in themselves, and belief in that we have to make a change." - Dr. Norman C. Francis

There are times in history when we are called to meet the moment. During the Civil Rights Movement, the murder of Martin Luther King Jr. dimmed a lot in the eyes of many who had exalted him for courage in the face of violence and racism. For Dr. Norman C. Francis, who began his presidency at Xavier University of Louisiana on the day of Dr. King's assassination, it was a call to build something greater.

It was a call he answered for nearly five decades.

Dr. Francis did not simply lead a university; he opened doors to higher education and professional advancement that were systematically closed to Black Americans. He widened them and then insisted they remain open.

Under his leadership, Xavier became a national model of excellence, particularly in science and pre-medical education, producing generations of doctors, pharmacists, and scientists who now serve communities across this nation.

But the impact of that work cannot be measured solely in numbers or rankings. Dr. Francis understood something fundamental: health equity is not a niche issue. It is a national imperative. By investing in STEM education long before it was fashionable and by building world-class programs at a historically Black

university, he not only expanded opportunities for Black students but also strengthened America's health infrastructure.

The physicians trained at Xavier treat patients of every race, in rural towns and urban centers, in community clinics and major hospitals. The path he paved has improved outcomes not just for one community, but for all Americans.

That clarity of vision did not emerge by accident. Raised in a segregated New Orleans, educated

in Catholic schools, and formed by service in the U.S. Army and at Loyola University Law School, Dr. Francis understood both the cruelty of exclusion and the power of institutions to transform lives. He chose education as his battlefield and excellence as his strategy. He believed deeply that when you prepare people to lead in medicine, science, business, and civic life, you are advancing justice in its most practical form.

He also understood that leadership requires steadiness. For nearly half a century at the helm of Xavier, through economic downturns and the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, he modeled disciplined, values-driven stewardship. His singular intellect and devotion to service were matched by humility and humanity.

Today, as we face an adversarial government and renewed threats to equity, opportunity, and truth itself, Dr. Francis's example feels less like history and more like instruction. We are once again called to meet the moment. The forces that would roll back progress are organized and emboldened.

As this administration and its supporters continue their assault on access to health care, voting rights,

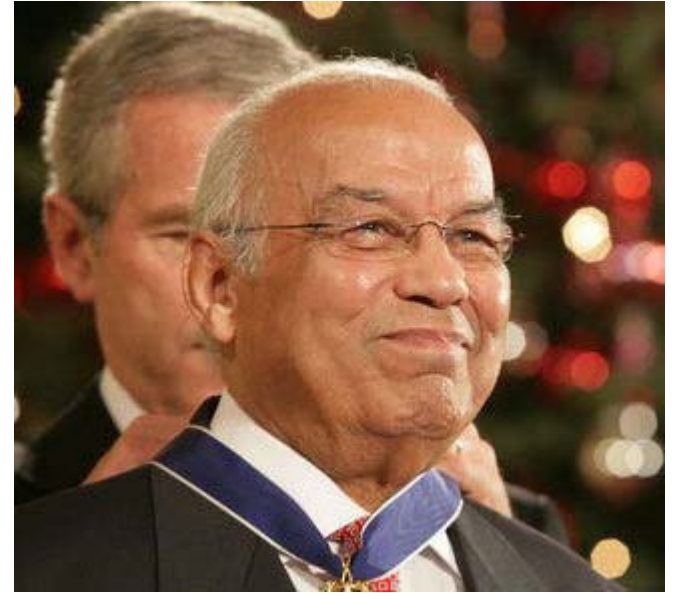
educational opportunity, and economic mobility, we need courage. We need leaders who understand that building institutions is one of the most powerful forms of resistance.

Dr. Francis showed us what that looks like.

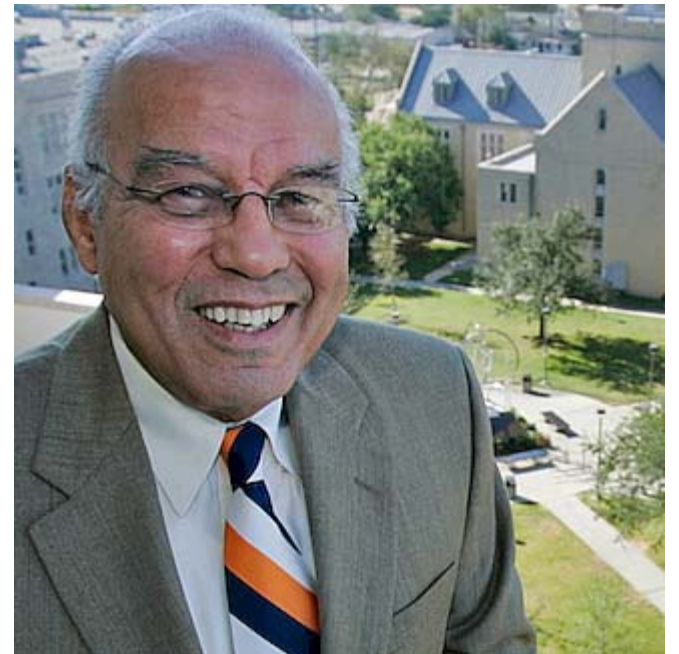
He demonstrated that fighting for equity does not always mean shouting the loudest. Sometimes it means preparing the next generation so thoroughly that they cannot be denied. Sometimes it means constructing pipelines where none existed. Sometimes it means holding steady when others falter.

The Urban League movement honors Dr. Norman C. Francis not only for what he accomplished, but for

how he accomplished it, with integrity, foresight, and an unwavering commitment to service. As the National Urban League rightly observed, his impact will resonate for generations.



Norman C. Francis, the former president of Xavier University of Louisiana, was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President George W. Bush in 2006.



Xavier President Norman Francis poses for a photograph at the the university in New Orleans, La., Tuesday, Nov. 18, 2008. Francis was celebrating 40 years as president of the prestigious predominately black university. (AP Photo/Bill Haber)

That resonance is our responsibility now.

We will honor his legacy the only way that truly matters: by fighting for what is right. By defending access to quality education. By advancing health equity. By insisting that opportunity in this country is not the privilege of a few, but the birthright of all.

Dr. Francis answered the call on one of the darkest days in modern American history and spent a lifetime building light. In this moment of challenge and uncertainty, may we find the courage to do the same.



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Austin Spent \$54 Million Converting Hotels into Housing for the Homeless: What the Program Delivered and What Comes Next

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) — After years of public debate, lawsuits, neighborhood pushback, and shifting political winds, Austin’s \$54 million effort to purchase and convert six hotels into housing for people exiting homelessness is now largely complete. Newly released city data shows how each property is being used, how many people are being housed, and how the investment fits into Austin’s broader homelessness strategy.

A multi year effort shaped by backlash and urgency

Between 2020 and 2022, Austin leaders approved the purchase of six hotels and motels across the city, aiming to rapidly expand shelter capacity and create permanent supportive housing. The plan drew intense opposition from some neighborhood groups and business owners, who raised concerns about crime, safety, and property values. Several projects faced threats of litigation, and one — the Candlewood Suites in Anderson Mill — became a flashpoint for county commissioners and nearby residents.

Despite the resistance, city officials argued that hotel conversions were the fastest and most cost effective way to add units during a period of rising homelessness and limited affordable housing stock.

What the \$54 million bought

City records show the six properties now serve a mix of functions:

- **Bridge shelters**, offering temporary rooms for people transitioning out of encampments or crisis situations.
- **Permanent supportive housing**, providing long term units with onsite services for residents with high needs.
- **Specialized facilities**, including age re-

stricted housing for older adults exiting homelessness.

The conversions collectively provide hundreds of rooms, significantly expanding Austin’s non congregate shelter capacity — a model that has proven more stable and safer for many residents than traditional mass shelters.

A turning point in the city’s homelessness strategy

The hotel conversions are now being integrated into Austin’s 2027 homelessness strategy, which emphasizes permanent housing, coordinated case management, and measurable outcomes. City leaders say the hotel program is a cornerstone of that plan, offering ready made buildings that can be renovated faster than new construction.

Advocates note that the properties have already helped move dozens of people from encampments into stable housing, including at the Northbridge and Southbridge shelters, which now serve as key “bridge” facilities for people preparing to transition into permanent homes.

Community tensions remain

Even with the conversions complete, some neighborhoods remain uneasy. The Candlewood Suites site continues to draw criticism from residents who argue the city pushed the project through without adequate consultation. Others say the hotels were placed disproportionately in areas already struggling with affordability and infrastructure strain.

Supporters counter that the city’s homelessness crisis requires bold action — and that the hotel program has delivered more units, more quickly, than any other recent initiative.

What comes next

With the initial \$54 million investment spent, Austin is now exploring funding for **hundreds more**

Where Austin’s \$54M Hotel Conversions Stand Now

Austin acquired six hotels between 2020–2022, spending a combined \$54 million to rapidly expand shelter and permanent supportive housing capacity.

What Each Property Is Used For

- **Northbridge Shelter (IH-35 North)** — Bridge shelter for individuals exiting encampments; provides short-term rooms and case management.
- **Southbridge Shelter (Ben White Blvd.)** — Bridge shelter with on-site services; key intake point for people transitioning into permanent housing.
- **Berkman Drive Hotel (Northeast Austin)** — Permanent supportive housing with long-term units and wraparound services.
- **Candlewood Suites (Anderson Mill)** — Permanent supportive housing for high-needs residents; site of significant neighborhood opposition.
- **Pecan Gardens (East Austin)** — Age-restricted supportive housing for older adults exiting homelessness.
- **Additional motel conversions** — Used for a mix of temporary shelter, stabilization, and long-term housing depending on renovation timelines.

supportive housing units in the coming years, building on the hotel conversion model while also pursuing new construction and nonprofit partnerships.

City officials say the next phase will focus on long term sustainability: ensuring the converted hotels remain fully staffed, adequately funded, and integrated into the city’s broader housing and health services network.

Austin’s hotel conversion program is now a defining test of whether the city can scale permanent solutions fast enough to meet rising need — and whether communities across the metroplex are willing to support the infrastructure required to make homelessness rare, brief, and non recurring.

Six Major Events Set to Energize the Austin Area Feb. 27–March 1

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) — Central Texas is heading into one of its busiest late winter weekends, with six major events scheduled across the Austin metro area from Feb. 27 through March 1. From national level motorsports to local artisan markets and Hill Country art showcases, the lineup reflects the region’s growing cultural and recreational footprint.

NASCAR Returns to COTA With Cup Series and O’Reilly Auto Parts Races

The biggest draw of the weekend will be the return of **NASCAR at Circuit of the Americas**, where the **NASCAR Cup Series** and **O’Reilly Auto Parts Series** will compete on the 17 turn, 2.4 mile National Course. The event includes a full fan zone with entertainment acts, driver appearances, and interactive activities, making it one of the largest sports gatherings in the region this season.

Leander Vendor Market Brings Local Makers Together

North of Austin, Leander will host a community vendor market featuring local artisans, small

businesses, and food vendors. The event offers a family friendly environment and continues the city’s push to support hyperlocal entrepreneurship.

Dripping Springs Artists Showcase Regional Talent

In the Hill Country, Dripping Springs will feature a curated display of local artists, giving visitors a chance to explore regional painting, sculpture, ceramics, and mixed media work. The event highlights the area’s growing reputation as a creative hub outside Austin’s urban core.

Spicewood Vineyards Hosts the Claret Chili Cook Off

Just west of the city, Spicewood Vineyards will hold its annual **Claret Chili Cook Off**, where more than 20 competitors will serve their best chili alongside live music, food trucks, and wine tastings. Attendees receive a complimentary glass of wine with admission, and organizers encourage advance ticket purchases for discounts.

HAAM Benefit Concert Featuring Aaron Behrens

Austin’s music community will rally for a **HAAM**

(Health Alliance for Austin Musicians) benefit concert featuring Aaron Behrens of Ghostland Observatory, joined by Kelly Green of Madam Radar and Marco Gutierrez of West Texas Exiles. The intimate performance blends philanthropy with Austin’s signature live music culture.

Additional Adult Focused Events Round Out the Weekend

February’s final weekend also includes a slate of adult focused entertainment across the city — from shows and nightlife to seasonal activities — as highlighted in regional event roundups. These offerings complement the larger anchor events and reflect Austin’s packed late winter calendar.

A Weekend That Reflects Austin’s Cultural Range

Together, these six events illustrate the breadth of Austin’s cultural identity: high octane sports, hyperlocal markets, Hill Country arts, charitable music performances, and culinary traditions. With warm weather expected and festival season approaching, the Feb. 27–March 1 window marks an early preview of Austin’s spring surge.

Event Times, Locations & Ticket Details (Feb. 27–March 1)

NASCAR at Circuit of the Americas

- **Dates:** Feb. 28–March 1
- **Location:** Circuit of the Americas, 9201 Circuit of the Americas Blvd.
- **Details:** NASCAR Cup Series + O’Reilly Auto Parts races on the 2.4-mile National Course; fan zone, driver meet-and-greets, live entertainment.
- **Tickets:** Tiered pricing; advance purchase recommended.

Leander Vendor Market

- **Date:** March 1
- **Location:** Old Town Leander district
- **Details:** Local artisans, small businesses, food vendors, family-friendly activities.
- **Admission:** Free.

Dripping Springs Local Artists Showcase

- **Dates:** Feb. 28–March 1
- **Location:** Dripping Springs Ranch Park & Event Center
- **Details:** Regional painters, sculptors, ceramicists, and mixed-media artists; indoor/outdoor exhibits.
- **Admission:** Free or low-cost depending on vendor area.

Spicewood Vineyards Claret Chili Cook-Off

- **Date:** March 1
- **Location:** Spicewood Vineyards, 1419 Co Rd 409
- **Details:** 20+ chili competitors, live music, food trucks, wine tastings; includes a complimentary glass of wine.
- **Tickets:** Discounted advance tickets available; higher at the gate.

HAAM Benefit Concert

- **Date:** Feb. 27
- **Location:** Austin venue (varies by HAAM programming)
- **Details:** Performances by Aaron Behrens (Ghostland Observatory), Kelly Green (Madam Radar), and Marco Gutierrez (West Texas Exiles); supports healthcare access for Austin musicians.
- **Tickets:** Donation-based or ticketed depending on venue.

Blanco County Mourns Veteran Sgt. Doug Bledsoe After Fatal Medical Battle

by Thomas Wyatt | EIC, The Villager

(VILLAGER) - Blanco County is grieving the loss of Sgt. Doug Bledsoe, a decades long veteran of the Blanco County Sheriff's Office whose death this week has prompted an outpouring of tributes from law enforcement agencies across the Hill Country. Bledsoe, widely regarded as a steady, respected presence in the department, died after a severe medical battle that began with acute pancreatitis, according to regional law enforcement statements.

A sudden medical crisis

Officials confirmed that Bledsoe's health declined rapidly following a three week fight with acute pancreatitis, a condition that can escalate into life threatening complications. The Texas Municipal Police Association acknowledged the seriousness of his medical struggle in the days leading up to his death, underscoring how quickly the illness overtook him.

A career defined by longevity and service

Bledsoe served the Blanco County Sheriff's Office for decades, according to the Precinct 1 Constable's Office, making him one of the department's most experienced and recognizable figures. His tenure spanned years of population growth, political change, and shifting public safety demands in the rural county, where long serving deputies often become community anchors.

Colleagues described him as a mentor whose influence extended far beyond his supervisory role.



Blanco County Deputy Sgt. Doug Bledsoe dies, agencies across the region mourn loss

The Johnson City Police Department called him "more than a supervisor," emphasizing his role as a friend, guide, and stabilizing force for younger officers navigating the pressures of small town policing.

Regional officials order flags lowered

Johnson City Mayor Stephanie Fisher ordered flags at City Hall lowered to half staff, calling Bledsoe's death a profound loss for the community. Her directive reflects the deep ties between local government and the sheriff's office in Blanco County, where law enforcement officers often serve as both first responders and community liaisons.

The Blanco Police Department and Johnson City Police Department also issued public statements mourning his passing, joining a growing list of agencies across the region acknowledging the void left by his death.

A community accustomed to resilience faces a new kind of loss

Blanco County, like many rural Texas communities, relies heavily on long serving deputies who build trust through years of visibility and familiar-

ity. Bledsoe's death comes at a time when many small departments are already strained by staffing shortages, rising call volumes, and the emotional toll of repeated critical incidents.

His passing also echoes a broader pattern of sudden medical emergencies among law enforcement personnel nationwide, a trend highlighted by a separate California case referenced on the page where a sergeant died after a medical emergency on duty. While unrelated, the juxtaposition underscores the physical and emotional demands placed on officers in an era of heightened public safety pressures.

Funeral arrangements pending

As of the latest updates, funeral arrangements and survivor information have not yet been released. Local officials say they expect a significant turnout from agencies across Central Texas once services are announced.

PUBLIC NOTICES

NOTICE OF PUBLIC SALE pursuant to Texas Property Code Chapter 59, **Right Space Storage**, Said property 4405 Highway 71 East Del Valle, TX 78617 ,512- 996- 7840, 21012 state highway 71 W Spicewood, Tx 78669, 512-996-7840, 9507 Manchaca Road Austin, TX. 78748 512-399-2829, 227 Park 35 Cove N Buda, Tx 78610 512-996-7828, 9023 HWY 71, Austin, Tx 78735, 512-996-7857, 3000 Highway 290 E Dripping Springs, Tx 78620, 512-996-7852, 4105 2nd St. Taylor, Tx 76574 ,512-883-6373,512-399-1518, 8956 Research Blvd Austin, Tx 78758, 7650 West Highway 29, Georgetown, Tx 78628, 512-729-6780, 11520 Hero Way West Leander, Tx, 78641 512-379-6998, 16450 North ranch road 620, Round Rock, Tx 78681, 512-399-1518, will hold a Public Sale in order to satisfy a landlord's lien **Thursday on 5th of MARCH 2026 at 10am**. Property will be sold to the highest bidder online and must be removed within 48 hours. The seller reserves the right to reject any bid and withdraw property from the sale. Bidding takes place on **StorageTreasures.com**. Unless otherwise noted, all units contain household goods and items. For a more detailed listing, please visit **StorageTreasures.com**, 4405 Highway 71 East Del Valle, TX 78617:Jon Ray Rodriguez, Alfred Martus, Anton Rolin, Kenneth Kuntz, Benjamin Taylor, Alexander Coy, Itzi Gonzales, Chabrina Hawthorne, Gloria Rios, 9507 Manchaca Road Austin, TX 78748: steven Cantrell, John flores, 227 Park 35 Cove N Buda, Tx 78610: Hannah Ochoa, Cinta Espinoza, San Juan Reyes, Danna feria, 9023 HWY 71, Austin, Tx 78735, David Pauley, David Pauley, 3000 Highway 290 E Dripping springs, Tx 78620: Sidney Dunmore, 21012 State highway 71 W, Spicewood Tx 78669: Carmen May, 4105 2nd St. Taylor, Tx 76574, Wykeitha Marshall, David Morrow, 8956 Research Blvd Austin, Tx 78758: Dameon Jackson, Mayra Funes, Claire Leeds, Robert Fraizer, Folios Geivelis, 7650 West Highway 29 Georgetown, Tx 78628: Christopher Garcia, Christopher Garcia, Katherine Zela, 11520 Hero Way West Leander, Tx 78641: Michael Cooper, Linda Bonnet, Malice Olayitan, Lone Star roofing & Gutters, Lone star roofing & gutters, Kelsie Holievena, 16450 North FM 620 Round Rock, Tx 78681: Jerry Schaffer, LaQuinta Santos, Kate Gilles.



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Black people revolutionized what we know today as EMTs. Rep. Summer Lee introduces bill to honor their history

By Gerren Keith Gaynor | theGrio



Freedom House Ambulance Service staff members outside Presbyterian University Hospital in Pittsburgh on their first day in 1968.(Photo Credit: Virginia "Ginny" Caligiuri, via Heinz History Center)

(theGrio) - While the life-saving work of Emergency Medical Technicians, or EMTs, is seen as vital in communities across the country, few Americans likely know it was Black Americans who revolutionized the profession.

A new bill introduced by U.S. Rep. Summer Lee, D-Pa., seeks to shed light on the little-known history of the Freedom House Ambulance Service, America's first EMT service and the innovative Black leaders who made it happen.

"Black communities were not being served when there was an emergency...there was no one to take care of them, to get them to the hospital. There was no pre-hospital care. People were dying," Lee told theGrio of the Pittsburgh community in the 1960s.

Lee's bill seeks to award the now defunct Freedom House with a Congressional Gold Medal to be displayed at the National Museum of African

American History and Culture.

In 1965, the Freedom House Ambulance Service became the first emergency medical service in the United States to be staffed by paramedics with medical training beyond basic first aid, according to the bill's text. It was originally known as Freedom House Enterprises, which was founded to provide economic stimulation in Pittsburgh, specifically those in the predominantly Black Hill District, where a majority of the residents fell well below the poverty line. The goal of Freedom House Enterprises was to create job training and employment opportunities for residents and to provide training and employment opportunities for those deemed "unemployable" by the city welfare offices.

In 1965, Philip Hallen, who was president of the Maurice Falk Medical Fund and a former ambulance driver, and chairman of the OEO Health Committee, had the idea of creating a transformative model for emergency medical care that combined social justice with medical innovation. Hallen, joined by a group of individuals in medicine, began training medics for what would eventually become a revolutionary service for the Pittsburgh community, and later the entire nation.

"These were not doctors. They were not medical professionals. These are people, particularly men, who were underemployed who were in this job corps kind of program to get them employed," said Lee. "They became experts through this training, and then they were able to train other people, and it was able to multiply from there."

She added, "It was the investment in the people first that really was the foundation of the EMS service."

Ultimately, the Freedom House Ambulance Service was defunded in 1975 amid political opposition and racial tension.

"They would be disbanded because of how well they ran. The white communities felt like they were now missing out on something and they took the program," said Lee.

Despite its disbanding, the Freedom House's training model, clinical data, and innovations directly influenced the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's EMS standards and the national adoption of advanced life-support ambulance systems.

Congresswoman Lee, who recently delivered a fiery progressive response to President Trump's State of the Union address, said the ultimate dismantling of the Freedom House is eerily similar to how President Trump has "attacked" Black history and DEI. She told theGrio, "All that is a reason why this should come back to the forefront."

"That there is a rich history here at Pittsburgh, that innovation came from here. So many firsts came from here. And that is something that Black Pittsburgh and all of Pittsburgh should be just immensely proud of," said the Pittsburgh native.

Lee said of the modern-day attempts to rollback progress for Black Americans, "We have to push back at every single level, and it cannot just be marginalized people who are pushing back with us."

"If Trump can get away with doing this to our community and everyone else turns a blind eye, that's the beginning, that's authoritarianism grows. So we need more people to push back at every single level of this," she added. "If you care anything about the country, you have to recognize that that is an attack on you too."

Democrats Say Affordability Is Their Top Priority, But Can They Prove It?

By Thomas Wyatt | EIC, The Villager

(VILLAGER) - House Democrats gathered for a three day retreat this week with a message they hope will carry them back into the majority: affordability. The article you're viewing makes clear that party leaders repeatedly returned to the same theme, framing rising costs as the central concern shaping the political landscape and the daily lives of their constituents. But while the retreat signals a recognition of the problem, it also exposes the distance between Democratic rhetoric and Democratic policymaking. If affordability is truly the party's top priority, then the party must confront the ways its own decisions, delays, and divisions have contributed to the economic strain families feel today.

Affordability is not a branding exercise. It is a lived condition. It is the difference between a family staying housed or being priced out of their neighborhood. It is the difference between a parent remaining in the workforce or staying home because childcare costs more than their paycheck. It is the difference between a senior filling a prescription or stretching pills to make them last. When Democrats speak about affordability, they are speaking about the most intimate and destabilizing pressures in American life. But acknowledging those pressures is not enough. The party must show it understands how its own policymaking has fallen short.

Housing is the clearest example. The country faces a severe shortage of homes, yet Congress has repeatedly failed to advance the zoning incentives, tax credit expansions, and federal financing tools that would meaningfully increase supply. These failures are not the result of Republican obstruction alone. Democratic lawmakers have disagreed among themselves about how aggressively to push local governments, how much to invest in construction, and how to balance affordability with environmental and community concerns. The result is a national housing crisis that continues to deepen while the party that claims to champion working families struggles to pass the most basic structural reforms.

Childcare is another area where the gap between Democratic promises and Democratic outcomes is painfully wide. For years, the party has championed universal pre K, expanded childcare subsidies, and paid family leave. Yet these proposals have repeatedly stalled, often because moderate Democrats balked at the cost or scope of the programs. Meanwhile, families face monthly childcare bills that rival rent or mortgage payments. The retreat's focus on affordability is an acknowledgment of this reality, but acknowledgment does



not lower a single bill. Only legislation does.

Prescription drug costs tell a similar story. Democrats made historic progress by granting Medicare limited authority to negotiate drug prices, but the authority remains narrow. Millions of Americans still face unaffordable out of pocket costs because lawmakers narrowed the scope of reform under pressure from pharmaceutical interests. The retreat's emphasis on affordability suggests Democrats know this is not enough. But knowing is not governing. And governing requires confronting the political forces — including donors and industry allies — that have shaped the party's approach to drug pricing for decades.

Energy and utility bills are another source of strain that Democrats have not fully addressed. The retreat linked affordability to energy policy, a recognition that monthly utility bills are a major burden for households across the country. Yet federal investments in home efficiency upgrades, weatherization, and bill relief programs remain inconsistent and underfunded. Democrats have championed long term clean energy investments, but they have not always paired those investments with immediate cost of living relief. Voters feel the difference every month when the utility bill arrives.

Even food prices — one of the most visible and emotionally charged indicators of economic pressure — reflect policy gaps. Consolidation in the food sector has given large corporations outsized pricing power, yet antitrust enforcement has moved slowly. Democrats have called for stronger oversight, but legislative follow through has been uneven. Families continue to face elevated grocery prices while policymakers debate the mechanics of enforcement.

These are not abstract policy failures. They are the daily realities of millions of Americans. And if Democrats want voters to believe affordability is their top priority, they must be honest about why costs remain high — and that honesty must include their own role. They must acknowledge the housing bills that never moved, the childcare reforms that stalled, the drug pricing authority that was narrowed, the energy programs that were underfunded, and the antitrust efforts that never fully materialized. Accountability is not self criticism for its own sake. It is the foundation of trust. And trust is the currency Democrats need most as they attempt to rebuild their economic credibility.

Affordability is the rare issue that crosses every demographic and geographic line. It affects renters in cities, homeowners in suburbs, and working families in rural communities. It affects seniors on fixed incomes and young parents trying to build stability. It affects every district Democrats must win to retake the House. But voters will not reward rhetoric. They will reward results. And results require a disciplined, comprehensive affordability agenda that expands housing supply, invests in childcare and family care, strengthens drug price negotiation authority, reduces utility bills through efficiency and relief programs, and confronts corporate price setting through stronger antitrust enforcement.

The retreat shows Democrats understand the political stakes. But understanding is not enough. Affordability must become the organizing principle of their legislative agenda, not just their campaign message. The party's future — and the economic stability of millions of families — depends on whether they can turn this recognition into action.

The Violence Was Real. The Panic Was Engineered. Texas Is Still Vulnerable.

By Villager staff

(VILLAGER) - The killing of Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes — El Mencho, long considered one of Mexico's most powerful cartel figures — set off a wave of violence across roughly twenty Mexican states, with roadblocks, explosions, and armed clashes reported in multiple regions. At the same time, a second crisis unfolded online: a flood of AI generated images, fabricated government alerts, and false claims of cartel takeovers spread across social media, creating a sense of national collapse that outpaced any official attempt to correct the record. Mexican authorities described the digital panic as "badly intentioned news" designed to generate terror, and the MSN report makes clear that the disinformation was as destabilizing as the violence itself.

For Texans, this moment is not a distant foreign crisis. It is a reminder of how deeply our safety, our economy, and our political climate are tied to what happens just across the Rio Grande. The border may be a line on a map, but the flow of information — and misinformation — does not stop at a checkpoint. Texans saw the same AI generated images and the same false warnings that circulated in Mexico. In border communities from El Paso to Brownsville, families were left trying to sort truth from fiction in real time, often while communicat-



A member of the Mexican Prosecutor's Office stands guard near a bus after it was set on fire in Zapopan, Jalisco state, Mexico. Photo: Ulises Ruiz/AFP via Getty Images

ing with relatives in Mexico who were experiencing their own version of the panic. When disinformation hits a population already conditioned to expect crisis, fear becomes policy before facts can catch up.

The violence that followed El Mencho's death also carries immediate consequences for Texas. Trade slows when ports of entry tighten security, and those delays ripple through Texas businesses that depend on cross border commerce. Tourism and family travel drop, hurting local economies that rely on movement between the two countries. Law enforcement agencies in Texas brace for potential spillover, stretching budgets that are already thin. And as cartel factions reposition themselves, migrant routes shift into more dangerous terrain, increasing humanitarian strain on cities and counties that have been left to manage federal responsibilities without adequate support.

The power vacuum inside the Jalisco New Generation Cartel only heightens these pressures. Analysts warn that internal fragmentation could spark new turf wars, and history shows that when cartels fight for territory, violence moves closer to the border. Texans will feel the effects whether or not the gunfire crosses into our state. Communities along the Rio Grande will face renewed pressure, trafficking routes may shift, and state leaders will once again be tempted to respond with political theater rather than coordinated strategy. Texas cannot afford to treat Mexico's instability as someone else's

problem. Our economies, our communities, and our information ecosystems are intertwined.

What should worry Texans most is not only the violence but the speed and sophistication of the disinformation that followed it. The MSN report describes AI generated images of burning cities, fake videos of shootouts, and fabricated government warnings that spread so quickly they overwhelmed the public's ability to distinguish fact from fiction. Texas has already seen its own versions of this: manipulated border footage, false claims of cartel incursions in towns that never experienced them, and viral videos designed to inflame political tensions rather than inform the public. If Mexico's experience shows anything, it is that disinformation is now a weapon — one capable of destabilizing communities without firing a shot.

Texas needs leadership grounded in reality, not fear. Strengthening local journalism, especially in border counties, is essential to countering the vacuum that misinformation exploits. Cross border cooperation must replace the militarized posturing that dominates political headlines but does little to improve safety. Public agencies need the capacity to respond quickly and transparently when false information spreads. And above all, Texans deserve leaders who refuse to exploit panic for political gain. The unrest in Mexico is real. The panic that followed was engineered. The question for Texas is whether we will learn from Mexico's crisis or repeat it.