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RAPPIN' Thomas Wyatt

Knowledge Is Power

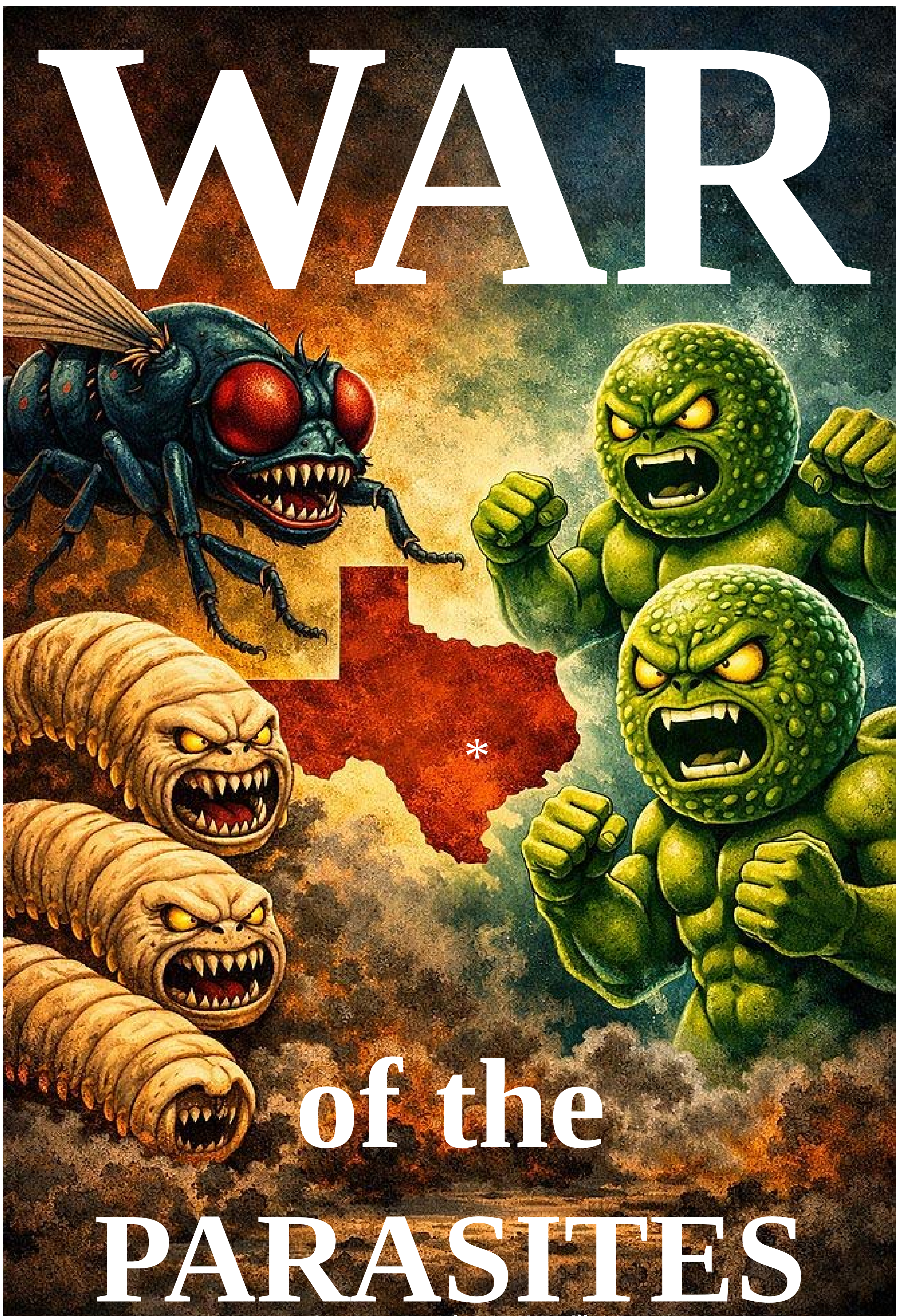
Austin's designation as one of America's most educated metro areas reflects a deep, long running investment in learning across the region — from K 12 schools to world class universities — and underscores the city's growing reputation as a national talent hub. WalletHub's 2026 analysis of the 150 largest U.S. metropolitan areas ranked **Austin–Round Rock–Georgetown No. 9 overall**, placing it ahead of every other Texas metro and solidly within the country's top tier.

The study evaluated metros using 11 indicators tied to **educational attainment** and **education quality**, weighting attainment at 80% of the total score. Austin earned a **No. 10 national rank for attainment**, driven by high shares of adults with bachelor's and graduate degrees. It also secured a **No. 4 rank for education quality**, reflecting strong public-school systems, reputable universities, robust summer learning opportunities, and narrower gender and racial attainment gaps compared with many peer metros.

Austin's overall score — **76.46 out of 100** — places it far ahead of Dallas (No. 67), Houston (No. 88), and San Antonio (No. 100), making it the **most educated metro in Texas** by a wide margin. Analysts note that cities with highly educated workforces tend to see higher earnings, stronger tax bases, and more competitive local economies. Austin's ranking aligns with its long standing reputation as a university anchored innovation hub, home to the University of Texas at Austin, **Huston-Tillotson University**, and a rapidly expanding tech sector.

Nationally, Austin sits among metros like Ann Arbor, Durham Chapel Hill, Madison, and San Jose — all anchored by major research universities. WalletHub's findings reinforce that Austin's educational strength is not incidental but structural, rooted in decades of public investment and a regional culture that prizes learning, upward mobility, and opportunity.

Move Over New World Screwworm, Make Room for Cyclospora Cayetanensis



By Thomas Wyatt | EIC, The Villager

(AUSTIN, TX) - Austin is confronting a **nationwide rise in cyclosporiasis**, a foodborne intestinal illness caused by the microscopic parasite *Cyclospora cayetanensis*. While not typically fatal, the infection can leave people sick for days or even weeks, and Texas is among the 17 states reporting cases this season. Federal and state health officials say the surge fits a familiar pattern: cyclosporiasis cases climb every year between **May and August**, but 2026's numbers are already higher than usual.

As of **June 16, 2026**, the CDC has logged **145 U.S. cases**, all acquired domestically — meaning none of the patients reported international travel in the two weeks before falling ill. Seventeen states have reported infections, and **20 people have been hospitalized**, though **no deaths** have occurred. Investigators have not identified a single contaminated food source linking all cases; instead, multiple clusters are under investigation across the country.

Texas remains one of the hardest hit states. By early July, the Texas Department of State Health Services reported **48 confirmed cases** meeting CDC outbreak criteria, all occurring after May 1 and with no travel history. Five Texans have been hospitalized. Officials warn the true number is likely higher because many people recover without seeking medical care or testing.

Cyclosporiasis spreads when people consume food or water contaminated with the parasite's oocysts. Past U.S. outbreaks have been linked to fresh produce — including cilantro, basil, raspberries, parsley, broccoli, snow peas, and packaged salad mixes — though no specific food has been tied to the current rise. Symptoms typically appear about a week after exposure and include **prolonged watery diarrhea**, stomach cramps, bloating, nausea, fatigue, weight loss, and sometimes low grade fever.

Public health officials emphasize prevention: wash produce thoroughly, even if labeled "pre washed," practice good kitchen hygiene, and seek medical care for diarrhea lasting more than a few days. While unpleasant, cyclosporiasis is treatable with antibiotics, and early diagnosis helps prevent complications.

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A Week of Reckoning at City Hall: Governance Reform, Social Service Cuts, and a New Era of Oversight

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) - Austin City Council entered July with a full slate of decisions that reach far beyond routine summer business. What unfolded this week was a portrait of a city government confronting structural questions—how it is run, how it spends, and how it measures its own performance—at a moment when community needs remain high and public trust remains fragile.

At the center of the week's agenda was the revival of a long stalled City Charter overhaul. The Audit & Finance Committee signaled readiness to move a sweeping amendment package toward a July 22 Council vote, potentially sending the reforms to voters in November. The proposals would raise recall thresholds, tighten disclosure rules for recall campaigns, and set new petition requirements for citizen initiatives and referendums. They would also shift the power to hire and fire the city attorney from the city manager to the Council—an institutional change that would recalibrate the balance between Austin's elected and administrative leadership.

The charter process itself has been fraught. A 2024 attempt to place amendments on the ballot collapsed after a court found the city had violated the Texas Open Meetings Act. The renewed effort reflects both a desire to correct course and a recognition that Austin's governance structure has not been meaningfully updated in more than a decade. For residents who rely on transparent, accountable decision making—particularly in communities historically excluded from civic power—the stakes are significant.

Budget pressures added a second layer of urgency. City officials outlined a plan to cut $16.8 million from social service contracts over two years to help close a projected $26 million deficit. The reductions fall heavily on transportation assistance, basic needs programs, legal services, family supports, workforce development, and HIV services. Community planning programs would be eliminated entirely. While behavioral health, homelessness services, and clinical care remain largely protected, the cuts raise questions about how vulnerable residents will navigate daily life in a city where affordability challenges continue to deepen.

For East Austin neighborhoods—where transportation gaps, legal barriers, and economic instability often intersect—the proposed reductions land with particular weight. The city's safety net ecosystem has long relied on a patchwork of nonprofit providers, many of which operate on thin margins. A 30 plus percent cut can mean fewer caseworkers, fewer rides, fewer advocates, and fewer pathways out of crisis.

The third major action of the week pointed toward a new era of oversight. City staff recommended Public Works LLC to conduct Austin's first comprehensive efficiency audit, part of a three year recurring cycle approved earlier this year. The firm was selected from 25 applicants for its cross departmental methodology, though its past forfeiture of the right to transact business in Texas—since resolved—has drawn scrutiny from local watchdog groups. The audit is intended to identify early, visible improvements in city operations, offering residents a clearer view of how public dollars are used and where bottlenecks persist.

Taken together, the week's developments reveal a city government attempting to recalibrate itself on multiple fronts. Governance reform, budget austerity, and operational accountability are converging at a moment when Austin's rapid growth continues to strain public systems and widen disparities. For communities across East Austin, the decisions made this summer will shape not only how City Hall functions but how effectively it responds to the needs of residents who depend on it most.

Flying under the radar: Top 20 aircraft owners delinquent on taxes

From the Office of Travis County Tax Assessor-Collector Celia Israel

(AUSTIN, TX) – Twenty aircraft owners owe Travis County almost $2 million in late property taxes after failing to respond to collection attempts. These individuals and businesses in Travis County can afford to own, house and operate private planes, but they are unable or unwilling to pay the taxes that come with ownership.

The list of top twenty delinquent aircraft owners is available on the tax office website. This information will be updated if payments are collected, payment plans are negotiated, or new lawsuits are filed by the Travis County Attorney.

The Travis County Tax Office collects both business personal property and real property taxes, which are due before February 1st following the tax year to avoid delinquency.

"While budgets are being trimmed, schools are closing, teachers are facing layoffs and most taxpayers are making sacrifices to meet their obligations, these wealthy few ignore their responsibilities as taxpayers," said Tax Assessor-Collector Celia Israel. "If they own a plane and house that plane in Texas, it is reasonable to expect they can pay their fair share of taxes due."


Celia Israel

The Travis County Tax Office collects for the county and an additional 170 government entities to fund emergency services, public schools, courts, law enforcement, parks, road maintenance and other city and county operations. When projected property tax revenue falls short, programs can be cut, or property taxes raised to make up the difference.

The Tax Office has collected over 98% of the property taxes due to the county, neighboring cities, and school districts for the 2025 tax year.

Austin Community College Extends Tuition Freeze, Approves Pay Raises Amid Revenue Strain

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) - Austin Community College **(ACC)** will keep tuition flat for the 13th consecutive year while offering modest pay raises to employees, even as the institution faces its most challenging revenue picture in more than a decade. Trustees approved a **balanced $583 million budget** for fiscal year 2027 that includes a **2% salary increase** for all employees and a **one time $1,700 payment** for full time staff, according to college official.

The decision comes despite shrinking state funding and an unexpected drop in property tax revenue — two of ACC's three primary revenue streams. Chancellor Russell Lowery Hart said the college lost **$6 million in state revenue** under new funding formulas and saw property tax collections fall for the first time in 17 years. Employee salaries now exceed property tax revenue for the first time since 2014.

Lowery Hart said offering raises in this climate reflects ACC's commitment to its workforce. "For us to propose any kind of raise when other schools in the state are proposing cuts speaks to our commitment to our employees," he told trustees this week.

To balance the budget, ACC eliminated vacant positions, reduced hourly labor funding, and restructured departments, Deputy CFO Carlos Martinez said. The college also paused its annual contribution to cash reserves, which totaled $4 million last year, to avoid relying on savings for ongoing operations.

Meanwhile, ACC's **free tuition pilot program** continues to expand in its third year, allowing local high school graduates to attend tuition free for up to four years. The college budgets **$27 million annually** for the initiative, which officials say has boosted enrollment, retention, and student success — helping offset revenue gaps created elsewhere.

Trustees acknowledged employees' calls for a 4% raise but said current revenue projections made a higher increase untenable. Still, leaders emphasized that both affordability and workforce stability remain central to ACC's mission.

HHSC Announces Upgraded WIC Cards for Families

From the Texas Health and Human Services Commission

(AUSTIN, TX) – The Texas Health and Human Services Commission launched upgraded EBT cards for clients of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, popularly known as WIC, to make it easier for families to manage their benefits.

The new WIC card integrates with the upgraded myWIC app, allowing clients to track benefits and purchases in real time. With the new card, WIC benefits can be added remotely. Clients will also be able to freeze and unfreeze their benefits in the myWIC app for enhanced security.


Stephanie Muth

"We want Texas families to feel supported every time they use WIC," HHS Executive Commissioner Stephanie Muth said. "These upgrades make it easier for families to see their benefits, plan their shopping and feel confident they are getting the nutritious foods they need."

The cards were distributed to clients at their scheduled appointments and can be used beginning July 1. Clients must create a PIN for their new cards in the myWIC app or by calling the Texas WIC Card Management Line at 833-966-1382.

Texas WIC clients receive fruits and vegetables, milk, eggs, cheese and other healthy foods to help meet their family's nutritional needs. WIC also offers free classes on breastfeeding and healthy eating, along with one-on-one nutrition counseling.

Women can apply for WIC as soon as they learn they are pregnant. Anyone with children under the age of 5 can apply for WIC, including dads, foster parents, guardians or grandparents.

The HHSC WIC program serves more than 760,000 women, infants and children each month. For more information or to apply for benefits, visit **TexasWIC.org** or call 800-942-3678.

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Austin Opens Applications for $23 Million in Arts and Music Grants Amid Rising Pressure on Creative Sector

By Thomas Wyatt | EIC, The Villager

(AUSTIN, TX) - Austin's creative community received a significant boost this week as the city officially opened applications for **$23 million in arts and music grants**, a major infusion of public support at a time when local artists, venues, and cultural organizations continue to navigate rising costs, shrinking federal support, and an increasingly competitive funding landscape. The announcement came Tuesday from the Austin Arts, Culture, Music and Entertainment (ACME) office, which oversees the city's cultural investment programs.

The grants are funded through Austin's hotel occupancy tax (HOT), a revenue stream that has grown alongside the city's booming tourism industry. The grants represent a reinvestment of visitor dollars into the artists, musicians, heritage stewards, and cultural organizations who help make Austin a destination.

Austinites can apply for awards ranging from **$5,000 to $250,000**, depending on the program. Funding begins in January, with awards structured as one or two year commitments.

The $23 million will be distributed through four major programs, each designed to support a different segment of Austin's cultural ecosystem:

· **Live Music Fund — $6 million** for musicians, venues, and promoters. This fund arrives as the city's music sector continues to face affordability challenges, venue closures, and shifting audience patterns. Austin's music leaders have increasingly argued that business partnerships and diversified revenue streams are essential for survival, a shift from earlier eras when "selling out" was a cultural taboo.

· **Elevate — $11 million** for artists, cultural organizations, and art producing groups. This is the largest share of the funding and is expected to support everything from visual arts and theater to dance, literature, and multimedia projects.

· **Heritage Preservation — $3 million** for groups preserving historic spaces and promoting tourism. Preservation advocates have warned that Austin's rapid development threatens culturally significant sites, particularly in historically Black and Latino neighborhoods.

· **Thrive — $3 million** for nonprofit organizations that reflect Austin's culture. This program aims to stabilize organizations that anchor the city's cultural identity, especially those serving marginalized communities.

The new funding arrives during a turbulent period for Austin's arts ecosystem. In recent years, local arts groups have downsized or canceled programming after losing tens of thousands of dollars in federal grants that once supported youth arts programs, festivals, and community events.

City funding has also been inconsistent. Arts leaders have repeatedly warned that municipal support can be "fickle," urging Austinites and local businesses to step up if they want creative work to remain a viable full time career.

Even with increased city allocations, demand far outpaces supply. In the last Live Music Fund cycle, only **137 out of more than 1,000 applicants** received grants.

The grants can support a wide range of activities, including: creative production, public programming, operational and administrative needs, cultural events, media and digital arts projects, dance and movement based work, literary arts, and more

This flexibility is intended to help organizations stabilize operations, expand programming, and adapt to changing audience expectations.

To ensure broad access, ACME is offering workshops, open office hours, and one on one meetings with staff. Information videos are also available in English and Spanish.

The **deadline to apply is Aug. 18 at 6:59 p.m.**

Austin's creative identity has long been central to its national reputation, but the pressures of growth, affordability, and shifting funding priorities have placed unprecedented strain on the artists and organizations who sustain that identity. The city's $23 million investment represents both a lifeline and a test: whether public funding, even at this scale, can meaningfully stabilize a sector facing structural challenges.

For many artists, musicians, and cultural organizations, the next six weeks will determine whether they can secure the resources needed to continue shaping Austin's cultural landscape in 2027 and beyond.

Texas Stock Exchange: A New Financial Power Center Takes Shape

by Villager Staff

(DALLAS, TX) - The launch of the Texas Stock Exchange marks one of the most consequential shifts in U.S. market infrastructure in decades. After years of planning, the Securities and Exchange Commission formally approved TXSE as a national securities exchange on September 30, 2025, clearing the way for trading and listings to begin in 2026.

Although Texas leaders have framed the exchange as a bold challenge to Wall Street, experts say its deeper significance lies in how it reshapes competition, regulation, and the geography of American finance.

A Direct Challenge to the NYSE–Nasdaq Duopoly

Market analysts widely agree that TXSE represents the most serious challenge to the New York Stock Exchange and Nasdaq in a generation. The University of Chicago Business Law Review notes that TXSE's approval is "arguably the most formidable challenge" to the entrenched duopoly, raising expectations among both Texas business advocates and scholars who favor more competition in the national market system.

The exchange's ambitions are unusually large: TXSE aims to be a *fully integrated* national exchange built from scratch, not a niche trading venue. Its listing rules closely mirror Nasdaq's, signaling that TXSE intends to compete head to head for mid and large cap listings rather than positioning itself as a lenient alternative.

Experts say this is significant because most new exchanges in recent decades have focused on trading technology—not listings. TXSE is trying to do both.

Backed by Wall Street's Biggest Institutions

Despite its regional branding, TXSE is not a provincial project. It is backed by some of the largest institutional players in global finance, including BlackRock, Citadel Securities, Charles Schwab, Bank of America, Goldman Sachs, and J.P. Morgan.

This backing signals that major market participants see strategic value in increasing competition among exchanges. Analysts say more venues give broker dealers and liquidity providers leverage in negotiations over:

· market data fees
· connectivity costs
· rulemaking
· trading infrastructure

In other words, TXSE's emergence is part of a broader institutional push to diversify market infrastructure—not just a Texas branding exercise.

Texas' Bid to Become a National Financial Hub

Experts also emphasize the geographic implications. Dallas has quietly become a major financial operations center, attracting corporate headquarters, trading firms, and back office infrastructure. TXSE's presence reinforces that trend.

Financial ecosystems are self reinforcing: exchanges attract legal, technological, and asset management talent. Analysts say TXSE could accelerate Dallas' evolution into a full scale financial hub, especially as NYSE and Nasdaq have already responded by opening Texas based markets and offices.

This competition reflects Texas' long running campaign to position itself as a rival to New York and Delaware for corporate governance and financial leadership.

A Platform Tailored to Energy and Industry

Texas remains the center of the U.S. energy economy, and experts believe TXSE could become a natural home for midstream, exploration, production, and transition focused energy companies. The exchange's investors include Kelcy Warren of Energy Transfer, who owns more than 30% of the parent company.

TXSE's listing criteria are intentionally strict—so strict that the exchange says roughly 35% of currently listed U.S. public companies would not qualify. Analysts interpret this as an attempt to attract high quality issuers and reverse the long term decline in U.S. public companies, which has fallen from over 8,000 in the 1990s to around 4,400 today.

Texas lawmakers have also passed incentives, such as Senate Bill 1057, offering favorable governance treatment for companies listed on Texas exchanges. Experts say this could attract both Texas based and out of state firms seeking regulatory flexibility.

Political and Ideological Dimensions

Scholars note that TXSE carries ideological weight. Supporters hope the exchange will offer refuge to companies frustrated by what they view as progressive corporate governance norms, ESG disclosure rules, and federal regulatory pressure.

The Texas Policy Research explainer highlights that state leaders—including Governor Greg Abbott and former Governor Rick Perry—have framed TXSE as a symbol of Texas independence and a platform aligned with the state's dominant industries and values.

Experts caution, however, that despite political rhetoric, TXSE's actual listing rules are not materially more lenient than Nasdaq's. In fact, some governance requirements appear nearly identical.

What Experts Say About TXSE's Future

Across financial, academic, and regulatory commentary, several themes emerge:

· **TXSE is a serious structural competitor**, not a symbolic regional exchange.
· **Its biggest impact will be long term**, as listings and liquidity build gradually.
· **Institutional backing gives it credibility**, but attracting primary listings will be the true test.
· **Texas' growing financial ecosystem makes success plausible**, especially for energy and industrial firms.
· **Regulatory and ideological expectations may exceed reality**, given TXSE's mainstream governance rules.
· **The exchange could reshape market infrastructure**, giving large institutions more leverage over fees and data.

In short, experts see TXSE as a meaningful, well funded challenge to the existing market order—one that could shift both financial geography and regulatory debates over the next decade.

This story reflects expert analysis and public commentary, not investment advice. For decisions involving securities or listings, consult a qualified financial professional.

A Tale of Two War Chests: What Talarico's $30M vs. Paxton's $9M Reveals About Texas Politics in 2026

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) — The financial landscape of Texas politics shifted sharply this cycle, and nowhere is the contrast more striking than in the fundraising gulf between Democratic Senate candidate James Talarico and Republican Attorney General Ken Paxton. Reports show Talarico entering the midyear stretch with **$30 million raised**, a staggering sum for any Texas Democrat, while Paxton — long one of the state's most prolific fundraisers — reported **$9 million** over the same period. The numbers do not predict outcomes, but they do illuminate the changing dynamics of political power, donor enthusiasm, and national attention on Texas.

For Talarico, the $30 million figure represents a continuation of the grassroots momentum that first drew national eyes earlier in the year. Analysts note that the breadth of his donor base — spanning small dollar contributions from across Texas and out of state interest groups — signals a level of engagement Democrats have historically struggled to generate in a state with twenty media markets and some of the highest campaign costs in the country. Fundraising at this scale allows a campaign to saturate television, digital, and field operations simultaneously, a luxury few statewide challengers have enjoyed in recent cycles.

Paxton's $9 million, while far smaller, reflects a different kind of political strength. His donor network has long been anchored by loyal Republican activists, conservative organizations, and high dollar contributors who have supported him through years of legal battles and political turbulence. Even with ongoing controversies, Paxton's ability to raise millions underscores the durability of his base and the continued influence he holds within the GOP. Political observers point out that his fundraising often spikes around moments of national conservative attention, suggesting a donor pool motivated by ideological alignment rather than broad grassroots mobilization.

The disparity between $30 million and $9 million is not simply a numerical comparison; it highlights two distinct fundraising ecosystems. Talarico's haul reflects national Democratic investment in Texas as a potential battleground, with donors signaling that the state's long standing political assumptions may be shifting. Paxton's total reflects the stability of Republican infrastructure — a network that remains powerful even when outraised. Both figures demonstrate how Texas has become a magnet for national political money, with donors treating the state as a proving ground for broader ideological fights.

What these numbers ultimately mean for November remains uncertain. Fundraising alone does not determine electoral outcomes, and Texas voters have historically weighed identity, ideology, and incumbency more heavily than financial advantage. But the financial contrast is undeniable: one candidate entering the cycle with unprecedented Democratic resources, the other maintaining a resilient Republican donor base despite being outpaced. Together, the $30 million and $9 million totals offer a snapshot of a state in transition — politically, demographically, and financially — as both parties prepare for one of the most closely watched contests in the country.

Texas's Energy Economy Braces for Volatility as U.S.–Iran Tensions Escalate

By Villager staff

(VILLAGER) - The renewed U.S. airstrikes on Iran — and the missile alerts rippling across Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and multiple Iranian cities — carry immediate implications for Texas, whose economy is deeply tied to global oil stability. The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most important energy chokepoint, and even the *threat* of disruption sends tremors through markets that Texas producers, refiners, and consumers feel almost instantly.

Why Texas is uniquely exposed

Texas is not just an oil producing state; it is the **largest energy exporter in the United States**, with Houston, Corpus Christi, and Port Arthur serving as major hubs for crude and LNG shipments. When Middle East tensions spike, three things happen that directly affect Texas:

· **Oil prices rise** — not because supply has stopped, but because traders price in risk. Even limited strikes can push Brent and WTI upward, raising revenue for Texas producers but increasing costs for Texas drivers and businesses.

· **Shipping and insurance costs jump**, especially for tankers operating near conflict zones. That affects Texas exporters who rely on predictable freight rates to move crude and LNG to Europe and Asia.

· **Investor confidence wavers**, slowing capital investment in Texas energy projects, particularly LNG terminals and pipeline expansions.

These dynamics were already noted by analysts warning that even "limited attacks can raise oil prices, increase shipping and insurance costs, and undermine investor confidence," a pattern that historically hits Gulf Coast economies first.

Ripple effects across the Texas economy

Higher oil prices can temporarily benefit upstream producers in the Permian Basin, Eagle Ford, and the Gulf of Mexico. But the broader Texas economy — especially Central Texas — often absorbs the downside:

· **Refineries face higher input costs**, which can translate into more expensive gasoline and diesel across the state.

· **Manufacturers and logistics companies** see fuel surcharges rise, affecting everything from construction materials to food distribution.

· **Consumers in Austin and other metro areas** feel the squeeze through higher transportation and utility costs, especially during peak summer demand.

For East Austin residents already navigating affordability pressures, even modest increases in energy prices can compound existing strains — from rising electric bills to higher costs for goods transported into the region.

A geopolitical crisis with local consequences

The page you're viewing describes a rapidly widening conflict: U.S. strikes, Iranian threats of "massive" retaliation, explosions reported across multiple Iranian cities, and air raid sirens in Gulf states. Each of these developments increases uncertainty in global energy markets. Texas, as the backbone of America's energy infrastructure, sits at the intersection of that uncertainty.

The crisis may be unfolding thousands of miles away, but its economic aftershocks run straight through Houston's refineries, Midland's oilfields, Corpus Christi's export terminals — and ultimately, the household budgets of Texans from El Paso to East Austin.

Texas's Surrogacy Crackdown and the Families Caught in the Middle

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) - Texas lawmakers are preparing for a tense hearing at the Capitol on a proposal aimed at blocking foreign nationals from hiring Texas surrogates, a move that has already stirred anxiety among reproductive rights advocates, immigration justice groups, and medical professionals. The push comes from a new plank in the Texas GOP platform calling for a ban on commercial surrogacy for foreign nationals, and Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick has assigned the issue as an interim charge for the Senate Health and Human Services Committee. That means lawmakers are studying the topic now, gathering testimony and positioning themselves for potential legislation next session, but no law has been passed.

This debate is not abstract. It reaches directly into the lives of families who already navigate limited access to reproductive care, mixed status households, and the economic pressures of a city where affordability is a daily struggle. Surrogacy in Texas has long served families from around the world whose home countries restrict or ban assisted reproduction. Many of those families have deep ties to Austin's immigrant communities, and any attempt to shut them out would introduce new uncertainty into an already fragile landscape. At the same time, Texas women who serve as surrogates — often working class mothers supplementing wages in a high cost city — could see a vital source of income disrupted if lawmakers move toward restrictions.

Clinicians and attorneys warn that sudden limits could destabilize reproductive services statewide, creating ripple effects that would be felt first in neighborhoods where access to care is already uneven. Families who rely on local clinics, or who are already contending with long wait times and insurance barriers, could find themselves navigating even more complicated rules. Mixed status families, including households where one partner is a U.S. citizen and the other is not, may face legal ambiguity about whether they can pursue surrogacy at all. And in a political climate where debates over immigration and belonging are already charged, the proposal risks reinforcing narratives that certain families are less welcome in Texas.

The hearing is not a vote; it is a fact finding session where agencies, attorneys, and medical professionals will testify. But the direction of the conversation matters. What lawmakers choose to emphasize — whether they frame the issue as a matter of border security, reproductive ethics, or political signaling — will shape the bill that emerges next session. Still, the stakes are simple and deeply personal: who gets to build a family in Texas, who gets to participate in the surrogacy economy, and whether the state's reproductive care infrastructure becomes more accessible or more restricted.

As the Capitol prepares for testimony, the voices of communities most affected by reproductive care inequities will be essential in shaping what comes next.

Man Shot and Killed by ICE in Houston

by Villager staff

(HOUSTON, TX) - A Houston family is calling for an independent investigation after 51 year old **Lorenzo Salgado Araujo**, a longtime Houston construction worker and Mexican national, was **fatally shot by an ICE officer** during an enforcement operation on Tuesday. Salgado, who had **no criminal convictions** and was in the process of securing legal status, was driving coworkers to a job site when ICE agents in **unmarked vehicles** attempted to stop him.

Federal officials claim Salgado ignored commands and **attempted to ram an agent**, prompting the officer to fire in self defense, though they have **released no video or images** supporting that account. His family says he may have feared the unmarked vehicles were attempting to steal his work tools, which he relied on to support his family and send his children to college.

Three other men in the van were detained, but ICE has not released their names or provided information to their families, who say they have had minimal contact since the shooting.

Civil rights groups and local leaders, including U.S. Rep. Sylvia Garcia, are demanding transparency and an **independent probe**, noting that ICE's initial accounts in past shootings have sometimes been contradicted by later video evidence. Hundreds of residents marched through Houston's historic Magnolia Park neighborhood Wednesday night, chanting **"ICE out of Houston!"** and holding a vigil near the site of the shooting.

Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum condemned the killing and said the government is preparing **legal measures**, citing a pattern of deaths of Mexican nationals in U.S. immigration custody.

Salgado's sons say their father was close to obtaining legal status and had carefully prepared for any encounter with immigration authorities. They describe him as a hardworking family man who spent decades building homes across Houston and creating jobs for others pursuing the American dream.

PUBLIC NOTICES

AUSTIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE (ACC) DISTRICT is soliciting Requests for Proposals (RFPs) from qualified and interested firms for **Testing, Adjusting, and Balancing (TAB) Services for Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Systems, Indefinite Delivery, Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ).**

- **Request for Proposals (RFP) No. 992-26-280-00-M-JD-RFP**

All sealed proposals must be submitted to the Procure to Pay (P2P) Department by no later than **on Monday, July 27, 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/1226043**

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 July 14, 2026 at 9:00 a.m., CST via Zoom Virtual Meeting. See solicitation documents for details.

Notice: ACC Business Offices and campus locations will be closed in observance of Independence Day on Friday, July 3, 2026.

HEALTH ANNOUNCEMENT: LIMIT ULTRA PROCESSED FOODS TO REDUCE CHRONIC DISEASE RISK

By Villager staff

(VILLAGER) - A growing body of national health guidance warns that many of the ultra processed foods Americans consume every day carry significant long term health risks. The Department of Health and Human Services' 2025–2030 Dietary Guidelines emphasize prioritizing **high quality protein, healthy fats, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains** while **avoiding highly processed foods and refined carbohydrates**.

Ultra processed foods are defined as products containing ingredients **not found in a typical kitchen**, including chemical preservatives, artificial flavors, and sweeteners such as high fructose corn syrup. These foods often bear little resemblance to their original ingredients and have been linked to rising rates of chronic illness nationwide. As HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. notes, **"Ultra processed foods are driving our chronic disease epidemic."**

Key Health Risks Identified

Several common processed foods pose elevated risks:

· **High sugar snacks and beverages** such as Twinkies and soft drinks contain large amounts of added sugar with no fiber, contributing to blood sugar spikes, diabetes, heart disease, and certain cancers.

· **Processed meats** may contain saturated fats and cancer causing compounds that damage colon cells and increase tumor development risk.

· **Fast food items** have been found to contain glyphosate residues; an herbicide associated with gut health disruption and potential liver and nervous system damage.

· **Sugary cereals, pastries, and specialty coffee drinks** often deliver more than a day's recommended sugar intake in a single serving, raising risks for hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease.

· **Fried foods** like French fries and potato chips are calorie dense, inflammatory, and high in sodium, contributing to obesity, heart disease, and metabolic disorders.

What This Means for Community Health

The prevalence of ultra processed foods in American diets—especially among families facing cost barriers to fresh, whole foods—continues to fuel preventable chronic diseases. These conditions disproportionately affect low income households and communities of color, where access to affordable, nutritious options remains limited.

Public health officials encourage residents to:

· Choose whole or minimally processed foods when possible

· Reduce consumption of sugary drinks and packaged snacks

· Read nutrition labels carefully, especially for added sugars and preservatives

· Support local food programs that expand access to fresh produce

This announcement aims to help families make informed choices and reduce long term health risks associated with highly processed foods.

Fed Officials Split on Rate Path as Consumers Face Rising Costs and Higher Borrowing Risks

By Villager staff

(VILLAGER) - Federal Reserve policymakers were sharply divided last month over whether interest rates should stay where they are or rise again—an internal split that carries direct consequences for households already strained by elevated prices and expensive credit.

The Federal Open Market Committee kept its benchmark rate at **3.50% to 3.75%** for the fourth straight meeting, but officials disagreed on what comes next. Some argued that cooling inflation could justify holding steady or even cutting rates later this year. Others warned that persistent price pressures—driven by **AI related demand, Middle East conflict, and tariffs**—might require additional tightening.

Why Consumers Should Care About This Split

A divided Fed means **uncertainty**, and uncertainty itself has consequences:

· **Borrowing costs could rise again.** Several officials believe rates may need to move *above* the current range before year end. For consumers, that would mean higher credit card APRs, steeper mortgage rates, and more expensive auto loans.

· **High rates may stick around longer.** Even the "hold steady" camp expects rates to remain at or just below current levels through December—offering little relief for families hoping for cheaper credit.

· **Inflation isn't easing evenly.** The Fed's preferred core inflation measure accelerated to its fastest pace in more than two years in May, signaling that everyday costs—from services to essentials—are still rising faster than policymakers want.

· **Energy shocks add pressure.** Crude oil prices jumped again after President Donald Trump threatened renewed military action against Iran, a reminder that geopolitical volatility can quickly translate into higher gas and utility bills.

Consumers Already Feeling the Strain

The labor market is showing signs of cooling, with fewer jobs added in June and downward revisions to prior months. Slower hiring paired with stubborn inflation creates a squeeze: households face rising costs while wage growth softens.

Meanwhile, markets now assign a **30% chance of a rate hike** at the next meeting—up from 27% the day before—reflecting growing expectations that consumers may not get relief anytime soon.

What Comes Next

Fed officials emphasized that future decisions will depend on incoming data. But for consumers, the message is clear: **the fight against inflation isn't over, and the cost of borrowing may remain high—or climb higher—before the year ends.**

Judge Questions Whether Musk Got a "One Time Deal," Raising Alarms About Special Treatment

By Villager staff

(VILLAGER) - U.S. District Judge Sparkle Sooknanan did something federal judges rarely do when approving a government settlement: she openly wondered whether the nation's most powerful regulators bent the rules for Elon Musk. Her ruling — technically approving the SEC's deal — reads less like a judicial endorsement and more like a warning flare aimed at Washington, Wall Street, and anyone who still believes the system treats billionaires and ordinary investors the same.

From the outset, Sooknanan made clear she had "significant misgivings" about the settlement's "red flags". The SEC accused Musk of delaying disclosure of his Twitter stock purchases by 11 days, a maneuver regulators say saved him **$150 million** by allowing him to quietly accumulate shares before the public caught on. Yet the agency ultimately asked Musk to pay just **$1.5 million** — a penalty so small relative to the alleged gains that the judge questioned whether the enforcement process had been warped.

A Judge Who Refused to Pretend Everything Was Normal

Sooknanan's skepticism was not subtle. She questioned why the SEC abruptly dropped its demand for Musk to surrender ill gotten gains, noting that the agency's explanation — that it "had not historically sought disgorgement in similar cases" — might be technically true but still raised serious concerns about "the propriety of settling in the first place".

Then came the sharper blow: the judge openly wondered why the SEC chose to settle with a **trust in Musk's name**, a structure that allowed Musk to publicly claim he had been cleared of wrongdoing. She noted that SEC lawyers themselves appeared **surprised** when Musk's attorneys revealed settlement talks had been underway — suggesting the deal may have been negotiated outside normal channels, without the involvement of the agency's own litigators.

Musk

Her conclusion was blistering: the court is "left to wonder whether the SEC will afford other alleged securities law violators such solicitude. Or is this a one time deal designed for Mr. Musk…?".

A Billionaire's Influence Looms Over the Case

The judge's unease is not happening in a vacuum. Musk is a former adviser to President Donald Trump, and the settlement was announced shortly after the abrupt departure of the SEC's enforcement chief, who reportedly clashed with agency leadership over enforcement direction. The timing, the internal confusion, and the unusually lenient terms all combine into a picture the judge clearly found troubling.

A System That Works Differently for the Ultra Rich

The SEC insists the settlement was not the product of collusion and that the $1.5 million penalty was the largest of its type. But Sooknanan's ruling makes plain that the public should not take comfort in bureaucratic assurances. When a regulator drops key demands, negotiates through unusual channels, and produces a deal that allows the world's richest man to declare victory, the judiciary has a responsibility to ask whether justice was actually served.

Sooknanan did her part. She approved the settlement only because the law gives her limited authority — but she made sure her order documented every concern, every inconsistency, and every sign that Musk may have been treated differently than anyone else accused of a similar violation.

Her message is unmistakable: **if this was special treatment, the public deserves to know. And if it wasn't, the SEC has done a spectacularly poor job proving it.**