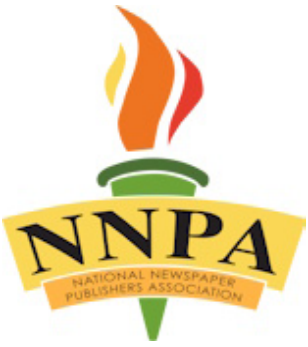




The Villager was founded by T. L. Wyatt in 1973, here, in East Austin, Texas.

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RAPPIN'
THOMAS WYATT

Lake America

So, apparently, the secret to affordable groceries and cheap gas isn't policy, production, or paychecks—it's renaming a lake. Yes, friends, Lake Ontario is now Lake America, and we're told this linguistic miracle will somehow put food on your table and knock a few bucks off the pump.

Because nothing says "economic relief" like a shiny new sign. Forget supply chains, inflation, or wage stagnation—just slap a flag on a body of water and watch the magic happen. Maybe next week we'll rename the Mississippi "Freedom River" and see if milk prices drop by half.

We're assured this patriotic makeover will "boost morale" and "restore pride." Wonderful. Pride tastes great with a side of ramen noodles and a gallon of unleaded at \$5.19. Perhaps the new Lake America will start exporting optimism by the barrel—since oil seems to be in short supply.

Of course, the press release promises "economic ripple effects." That's true enough: every ripple starts with a stone tossed into deep water. The question is, who's eating while the rest of us are treading?

So, raise your glass—of tap water, not imported wine—and toast the dawn of a new era. Lake America: where symbolism floats and substance sinks. If you squint hard enough, you might even see the reflection of affordable living shimmering on the surface.

Just don't dive in looking for dinner.

Hypothetical Examination of Texas Based on Arizona's SNAP Collapse

By Thomas Wyatt | EIC, The Villager



(AUSTIN, TX) — When Arizona's SNAP participation fell by nearly half in less than a year, advocates across the country called it a warning siren. The numbers were staggering: a 48% drop in enrollment between July 2025 and June 2026, representing more than 437,000 people pushed off the rolls. Food banks in Arizona now serve more people each month than the state's SNAP program itself — a reversal never seen before. Leaders there describe the situation as "the canary in the coal mine," a preview of what could unfold elsewhere if similar policy conditions take root.

Below is a **hypothetical, narrative-style projection** of how Texas could experience a parallel decline — not a prediction, but a scenario built from Arizona's documented trajectory.

When Texas Starts to Look Like Arizona

By late 2027, Texas officials begin noticing something unusual in the monthly SNAP reports. Participation is slipping — slowly at first, then in sharp, unmistakable drops. The same federal changes that reshaped Arizona's caseload have now fully settled into Texas's administrative systems, and the effects are becoming visible in grocery aisles from El Paso to Beaumont.

At first, the decline is brushed off as a data anomaly. But by spring, the trend is undeniable. Enrollment has fallen by 15%, then 20%, then 30%. Caseworkers report that families who previously qualified are suddenly being flagged for removal. Parents who have relied on SNAP for years find their benefits terminated over minor paperwork errors or new eligibility rules they never knew existed.

Food banks across Texas — already strained by rising demand — begin to see surges reminiscent of Arizona's experience. In East Austin, lines wrap around the block at community pantries. Volunteers say they are seeing new faces every week: seniors who lost benefits after missing a recertification appointment, single mothers whose income calculations changed under new federal formulas, disabled Texans caught in bureaucratic limbo.

By autumn, Texas reaches a tipping point. For the first time, more Texans are visiting food banks each month than receiving SNAP — mirroring the historic reversal Arizona experienced months earlier. The state's emergency food network, never designed to replace federal assistance, begins issu-

ing public pleas for donations and volunteers.

Advocates warn that Texas is now living Arizona's story in real time. They point to the same national trend: SNAP participation has fallen in every state except Alaska since the One Big Beautiful Bill Act took effect, with declines of at least 5% in 44 states and at least 10% in 23 states. Texas, with its large population and already uneven access to grocery stores, is especially vulnerable.

In neighborhoods where food access was fragile even before the policy shift, the consequences deepen. Children lose benefits at rates similar to those seen nationally, where more than a million kids have already been pushed off SNAP since July 2025. Teachers quietly stock classroom snack bins. Churches expand meal programs. Families stretch budgets until they snap.

By winter, Texas officials can no longer deny the scale of the crisis. The state has become the second "canary in the coal mine," following Arizona's path almost step for step. And just like Arizona's leaders warned, the scenario is frightening — not because it was unpredictable, but because it was entirely foreseeable.

Back To Reality

This hypothetical story is not a prediction. It is a policy mirror, showing how Arizona's documented collapse could play out in a state with similar vulnerabilities:

- Large rural regions with limited grocery access
- High numbers of working-poor families who rely on SNAP to stabilize budgets
- Administrative systems already strained by caseload volume
- Food banks operating near capacity even before federal changes

Arizona's experience demonstrates how quickly a state's safety net can unravel when eligibility rules tighten, administrative burdens increase, and families lose benefits faster than support systems can adapt.

Texas is not destined to repeat Arizona's trajectory — but the warning signs are clear, and the consequences of ignoring them would fall hardest on the communities already carrying the weight of policy experiments.

INSIDE

Jasmine Crockett focusing on down ballot candidates, not campaigning for Talarico.

See HOME, pg. 2

AISD making all the right moves to get kids to school.

See MODEL, pg. 3

Gov. Abbott picks fight with Trump's federal government over state funding

See MEDICAID, page 3.

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Texas Politics 2026: Governor’s Race Tightens, Senate Contest Remains a Dead Heat

By Villager staff

(TEXAS RACES) – Now that the primaries are over, Texas heads into the final stretch of the 2026 election cycle with two fiercely competitive statewide races: the gubernatorial contest between **Gov. Greg Abbott** and **Rep. Gina Hinojosa**, and the U.S. Senate race between **Attorney General Ken Paxton** and **Rep. James Talarico**. Recent polling shows both races narrowing, with Democrats gaining ground but Republicans still holding structural advantages.

Multiple late-August polls show Gov. Greg Abbott maintaining a lead over Democratic challenger Gina Hinojosa, though the gap has tightened compared to earlier in the year.

- UT Austin / Texas Politics Project (Aug. 25): Abbott 45%, Hinojosa 40%

- Texas Politics Project (late August): Abbott 45%, Hinojosa 40% — down from a 7-point lead two months prior

- RealClearPolitics average (June–Aug): Abbott 48.6%, Hinojosa 43.9%

- Pollsmax Aggregated Average (Aug. 24): Abbott 48.6%, Hinojosa 42.9%

- Slingshot Strategies (Aug. 24): Abbott 49%, Hinojosa 42%

The tightening margins reflect Hinojosa’s gains among independents and her focus on affordability and “kitchen table issues,” while Abbott continues to benefit from incumbency, name recognition, and a substantial campaign war chest.

The U.S. Senate race—one of the most closely watched contests in the country—remains

extremely tight. Recent polling shows James Talarico with a slight but consistent lead over Ken Paxton, though still within the margin of error.

- UT/Texas Politics Project (Aug. 25): Talarico 42%, Paxton 39%

- Previous UT Poll (June): Paxton 43%, Talarico 42%

The race is defined by unusually high levels of undecided voters and Paxton’s polarizing profile following his primary victory over Sen. John Cornyn. Talarico’s advantage among independents is notable, but Republicans remain confident that late-cycle consolidation could tighten the race further.

Across both contests, Texans cite inflation, affordability, and data-center expansion as top concerns:

- Inflation and rising prices dominate voter priorities, benefiting candidates who emphasize economic relief.

- Data centers have emerged as a surprising flashpoint, with 57% of Texans opposing new data-center construction in their communities.

Hinojosa and Talarico have both leaned into affordability messaging, while Abbott and Paxton emphasize stability, economic growth, and conservative governance.

Both races remain highly competitive, with undecided voters likely to determine the final outcome. As Election Day approaches, Texans can expect intensified campaigning, sharper contrasts, and continued national attention on the state’s shifting political landscape.

Crockett Staying Home, Not Campaigning for Talarico

By Villager staff

(TEXAS RACES) – U.S. Rep. (D-TX) **Jasmine Crockett** stepped off the small stage in Dallas with the same steady resolve she’d carried since the spring. Reporters clustered nearby, waiting for her to repeat what she had already told CNN, The Texas Tribune, and anyone else who asked: this election season, she was turning her attention away from the marquee Senate race and toward the overlooked contests that shaped everyday life in Texas.

She had congratulated James Talarico after he defeated her in the Democratic primary — that part was true, and she meant it. But campaigning for him? Sharing a stage, joining his statewide tour, lending her viral magnetism to his bid? No. She had made that clear. “I will be campaigning down ballot,” she had said, a line that ricocheted across headlines.

Monday night, she repeated it again, but with a softer edge. Texas was too big, she told the crowd, and its political future too fragile to hinge on a single race. She remembered 2018 — the excitement, the money, the hope — and how it still wasn’t enough. Down-ballot candidates needed oxygen. They needed introductions. They needed someone who could walk into a room and make voters feel seen.

Her new FIRE PAC had already begun endorsing county judge hopefuls and state House contenders, the people who would decide budgets, shape courts, and keep communities functioning. She planned to release a full slate soon: four



James Talarico and Jasmine Crockett

House candidates, three county judge nominees, all from places where turnout could tip the balance.

As she moved through the crowd, she felt the familiar tug — questions about Talarico, about whether she’d reconsider, about whether unity demanded a joint campaign stop. She answered the same way she always did: Texas needed more than one big race. It needed a bench, a pipeline, a reason for voters to show up even when the weather was bad or the headlines were bleak.

So, she kept walking, shaking hands with local candidates who didn’t have national profiles or viral clips. These were the races she believed could rebuild the party’s foundation. These were the people she intended to lift.

And as the night wound down, Jasmine Crockett felt certain: her work wasn’t smaller than a Senate campaign. It was deeper. It was local. It was hers.



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SCOTUS OPENLY EMBRACES THE DARK SIDE

By Villager staff



U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justices Samuel Alito (L) and Clarence Thomas. (Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

(US SUPREME COURT) - The Supreme Court’s latest shadow-docket maneuver is not merely another institutional embarrassment — it is a rupture, a self-inflicted wound that exposes just how thoroughly the Court has abandoned its constitutional role. What unfolded in the White House ballroom case is not a legal dispute so much as a quiet, invisible coup: a majority of justices choosing to hand the president powers that belong to Congress alone, and doing so with the smug efficiency of an unsigned order issued in the dark.

The facts are not in dispute. Donald Trump initiated a White House construction project without congressional authorization, despite Congress’s exclusive **power of the purse** — a foundational principle spelled out plainly in the Constitution. He claimed private donations would cover the cost, then failed to raise the money. Congress never approved the spending, never sanctioned the demolition, never blessed the project. Yet the Court, in its shadow-docket wisdom, referred to the ballroom as something “the federal government” started — a framing that erases Congress entirely and treats the president as the government’s sole branch.

This is not interpretation. It is capitulation.

By embracing the unitary-executive theory — the idea that all executive power resides in the president and Congress cannot limit it — the Court has now drifted into even more dangerous territory: allowing the president to exercise legislative power too. The decision effectively blesses spending that Congress did not authorize and shields that spending from judicial review. It is a blueprint for executive lawlessness.

The insult deepens with the Court’s contorted “standing” analysis. The National Trust for Historic Preservation challenged the project on clear legal grounds, yet the Court’s far-right bloc insisted that a preservationist’s interest in the White House’s historic integrity was not enough to sue. The dissent — Roberts and the three Democratic appointees — correctly noted that precedent recognizes aesthetic, cultural, and professional harm as legitimate injuries. But precedent no longer matters to a majority intent on insulating the president from accountability.

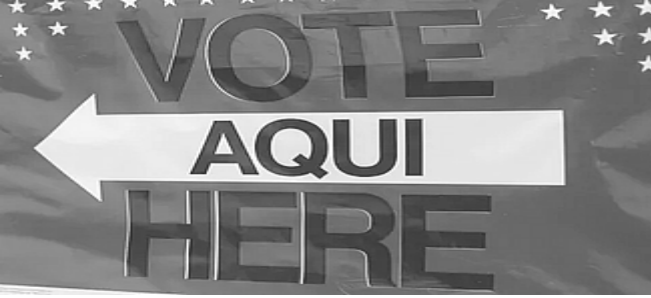
The result is a judiciary that has made congressional statutes unenforceable, executive overreach unchallengeable, and constitutional limits optional. This Court is not merely broken — it is actively breaking the republic.

Tarrant County Slashes 92 Voting Sites, Why Travis Co. Has No Such Plans

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) - Austin is not on track to cut polling places before the November elections, despite growing concern across Texas about reductions in voting access. The anxiety stems largely from decisions made in other parts of the state—most notably Tarrant County, where officials have approved deep cuts to Election Day locations. Those moves have sparked public protest, statewide scrutiny, and fears that similar reductions could surface elsewhere. But in Travis County, and specifically within the City of Austin, no such plans are underway.

Austin’s City Council has already passed its election ordinance for November 3, 2026, outlining the city’s standard procedures for coordinating with the Travis County Clerk. The ordinance affirms that Austin will use the county’s electronic voting system and specifies that full lists of early voting sites and Election Day polling places will be published as exhibits once finalized. Nothing in the ordinance signals consolidation or elimination of polling locations. Instead, it reflects the routine ad-



ministrative steps the city takes each election cycle.

The contrast with Tarrant County is stark. There, officials have approved a reduction of 92 Election Day sites compared with the 2022 midterms, citing low turnout at certain locations, staffing challenges, and the shift to countywide voting. The decision has drawn criticism from voting-rights advocates who argue that cuts of this scale risk disenfranchising communities already facing barriers to the ballot box. Those concerns have reverberated statewide, prompting questions about whether other counties might follow suit.

In Austin, however, Travis County has not proposed similar reductions. The county has histori-

cally maintained a robust network of polling places and has not been part of the recent controversies surrounding access. Local election administrators have emphasized continuity rather than contraction, and no public statements or filings indicate that polling sites are in danger of being cut ahead of November.

Still, the final list of polling places will not be official until Travis County publishes its updated exhibits, as required by the city’s ordinance. Election administrators routinely adjust locations based on availability, accessibility, and logistical needs, and those updates typically occur closer to Election Day. For now, though, all available information points to stability rather than retrenchment.

Austin voters, watching developments elsewhere in Texas, may understandably be wary. But at this stage, the city is not facing the same threat of widespread polling-place reductions seen in Tarrant County. The infrastructure for November remains intact, and the county’s longstanding commitment to broad access appears unchanged.

AISD Expands Bus Capacity to Support Updated Transportation Model

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) - Austin ISD is increasing the number of buses in operation as part of a broader effort to strengthen student transportation for the coming school year. The expansion accompanies recent adjustments to the district’s routing model, including the restoration of neighborhood stops for middle school students and the addition of new transportation hubs for high school routes. District officials describe these changes as a practical response to access concerns, operational strain, and sustained community feedback.

AISD’s transportation system has faced pressure from limited state reimbursement, rising operating costs, and an ongoing driver shortage. Families across the district, particularly in East Austin, have raised concerns about long walking distances and safety under the hub-only model. Restoring neighborhood stops for middle school students requires additional buses and drivers to cover more dispersed routes, and the district has said that recent budget savings make this expansion possible.

The current transportation updates reflect a shift

toward increased capacity. More buses are being deployed to support neighborhood stops, and the number of transportation hubs is increasing from 242 to 254 to improve access for high school routes. AISD has been conducting route testing and site evaluations to ensure new stops and hubs meet safety and accessibility standards, and updated route maps and schedules are being released through the district’s Bus Stop Finder system. Although AISD has not specified the exact number of buses added, the operational changes indicate a clear expansion of active fleet usage.

The transportation budget has fluctuated in recent years due to districtwide cost-saving measures. After reductions, AISD identified new savings—partly from campus closures—and redirected those funds to strengthen transportation services. The current adjustments reflect an effort to balance fiscal constraints with the need for reliable and equitable access to school.

Families can expect shorter walking distances for middle school students, more predictable pickup and drop-off times supported by increased bus availability, and continued hub service for high school students with



expanded hub locations. AISD will continue monitoring route performance and adjusting as needed, with safety, walkability, and traffic flow remaining central considerations.

The decision to expand bus capacity marks a notable shift from recent years of transportation reductions. The changes reflect operational needs, community input, and a broader recognition that reliable transportation is essential to attendance, equity, and student well-being. As the new school year approaches, AISD is preparing a more robust and accessible transportation network for students across the district.

Austin City Council’s week in review: Mobility, enforcement, and curbside strategy take center stage

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) - Austin’s only City Council activity this week came through the Mobility Committee, which convened Wednesday for a series of briefings that underscored the city’s ongoing effort to manage rapid growth, evolving transportation habits, and public-safety concerns. While no major policy votes were taken, the session offered a clear look at the issues shaping Austin’s near-term mobility agenda.

The committee opened by approving minutes from its May 14 meeting before turning to a detailed update from the Austin Police Department on the rise of electric mini-motorcycles—commonly referred to as e-motos—on city streets. APD outlined proposed changes to City Code and administrative rules intended to clarify enforcement authority and improve safety. The department also described new officer training protocols, revisions to general orders, and a forthcoming public-awareness campaign aimed at educating riders and residents. Officials noted that the city is exploring the creation of a des-

ignated recreation area where e-moto use could be permitted without disrupting traffic or endangering pedestrians.

Transportation staff followed with a briefing on Austin’s developing Curb Management Plan, a framework that will guide how the city allocates curb space for parking, loading, transit, micromobility, and other uses. As demand for limited right-of-way continues to intensify, staff emphasized the need for consistent standards and data-driven decision-making to balance competing interests and maintain safe, efficient corridors.

The committee also received a report summarizing recent actions by the Urban Transportation Commission, covering its June, July, and August meetings. Commissioners have spent the summer reviewing mobility priorities, weighing in on infrastructure projects, and evaluating policy recommendations that may come before Council later this year.

Rounding out the session, Austin Transporta-



tion and Public Works delivered its monthly regional mobility update, highlighting construction progress, operational adjustments, and service changes across the city’s transportation network. Committee members closed the meeting by identifying topics for future agendas.

The next full City Council meeting is scheduled for September 10, where members are expected to take up items related to workforce development, youth leadership programs, and partnerships with Austin ISD.

Abbott Presses Feds to Release \$10M in Medicaid Support for Struggling Hospitals

By Villager staff

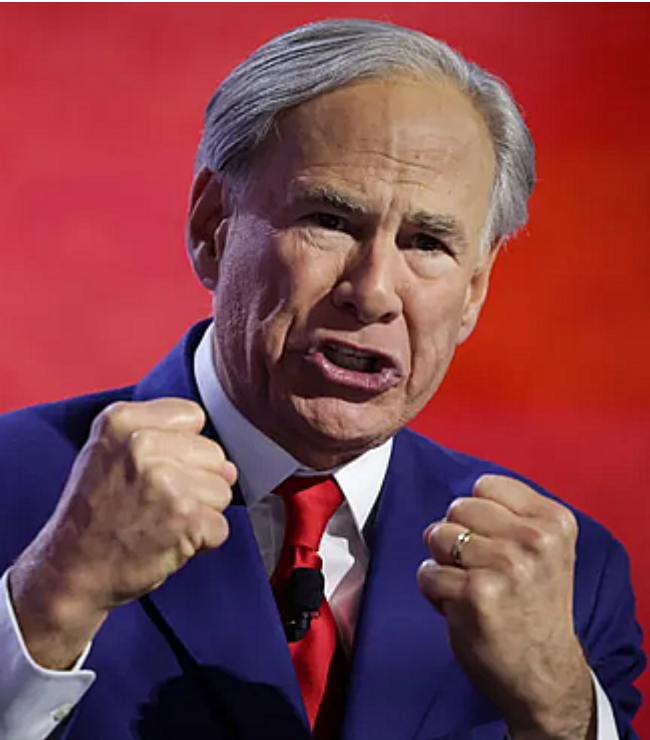
(AUSTIN, TX) - Gov. Greg Abbott is publicly defending Texas’ receipt of \$10 million in Medicaid-related funding, framing it as essential support for hospitals that serve low-income Texans. Abbott’s position comes amid an ongoing dispute with federal officials, who have questioned how Texas calculates local hospital taxes used to draw down federal matching dollars.

Abbott’s office argues the state’s financing system is fully compliant with federal law and that hospitals should receive the money they are owed. His spokesman emphasized that the funding helps facilities close the gap between Medicaid reimbursements and the actual cost of care — a gap

that, if left unfilled, threatens emergency services and safety-net operations across the state.

The governor has taken the unusual step of directly pressing federal authorities, calling the hold on funds an economic “gun to the head” and insisting that Texas hospitals cannot absorb prolonged losses without cutting critical services. Each day the funding is delayed costs hospitals an estimated \$27 million, according to the Texas Hospital Association.

Abbott’s defense marks one of his strongest public stances in support of Medicaid financing — a notable move in a state that has historically resisted Medicaid expansion and continues to have the highest uninsured rate in the nation.



Gov. Abbott (Photo by Alex Wong/Getty Images)



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