



**Carmage Walls**  
**Commentary Prize**

**2018 Entry Form**

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**What is the subject/title of the entry?** Understanding Harvey

**Date(s) of publication?** Sept. 3, 13, 29; Oct. 29; Dec. 24; April 15

**Is your newspaper under 50,000 circulation or above 50,000 circulation?** Under 50,000

**Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.)**

In conservative South Texas, our family-owned newspaper prides itself on its close connections to our community. Our roots run deep in Victoria and the surrounding community, and our family cherishes the independent Texas spirit that flowed through the Victoria Advocate when it was founded in 1846 and still today.

This past year, however, has been unlike any other in my years as publisher. Hurricane Harvey punished our region like no other storm since Carla in 1961.

Into this difficult situation, our editorial board turned to editor Chris Cobler and our newsroom to first help our community rally together and then help it learn important lessons from the storm. This evolved into an ongoing special series of news articles and editorials called "Understanding Harvey." The entire package may be seen in an online package here: <https://victoriaadvocate.atavist.com/understanding-harvey>

Initially, of course, our Viewpoints page approach was to unit the community and

recognize the heroes of the emergency relief efforts. Chris' personal column, "After Harvey, remember to breathe," reminded our readers that their hometown newspaper is their Advocate, that we are their friends and neighbors, and that we suffer and rejoice alongside them.

Reader George Schwarz responded to this column: "This is a beautifully written piece that not only conveys the emotion of kinship with other journalists writing about tragedies and potential tragedies, but it also conveys the emotion of reporting and writing under pressure."

After our reporting revealed serious flaws in the local, state and federal response to Hurricane Harvey, our editorial board opinions shifted. The other five pieces in the entry reflect the campaign the newspaper undertook to help Victoria and the region become better prepared for the next storm that inevitably will strike. Because almost six decades had passed since the previous major hurricane, we clearly had let our guard down.

This series of news articles and editorials are particularly important because many local elected officials tended to want to ignore the issues the storm revealed. Chris' editorials pushed the community and our elected officials to take closer looks at our disaster group's lack of preparedness; our city's need for backup generators to keep our water system running; our insufficient sheltering and evacuation plans; the community's housing crisis; the need to inform and engage the public in the public's emergency preparedness plan; the folly and frustration of FEMA's fields of empty trailers; and other issues.

This is the tough love only a community newspaper and a top-notch editor can give.

Thank you for the opportunity to recognize Chris and the work of the Victoria Advocate.

Sincerely,  
Dan Easton  
Publisher  
**Victoria Advocate**

EDITORIAL BOARD

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Editorial page coordinator: Kathleen Grones. 361-574-1222. karones@vicad.com

VIEWPOINTS

FROM US

What can we do better next time?

■ Topic: Lessons from Harvey ■ Our View: We must start asking tough questions

Crossroads residents are demonstrating a determination and grit that only people living in a hurricane-ravaged area can. Many have persevered the past week with no power; some with no reliable shelter; limited water and food rations. Along with our anxieties, Harvey's impact will not drift away any time soon. God forbid, but storms swelling up in the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea can swirl any time into another deadly threat. With these concerns all-too-fresh in our minds, it would be wise to start asking now some tough questions of ourselves and of our leaders. One of the first questions is about weather forecasting models. Nationally, officials have touted improved hurricane models, but no one predicted the severity of Hurricane Harvey in time. Early forecasts described the storm first as a tropical depres-

sion or storm. Within about 24 hours, Harvey mushroomed into a Category 1, 2, 3 and, finally, a 4. The rapid escalation led Victoria officials to issue a mandatory evacuation order at 5:24 p.m. Thursday – about a day's warning for everyone to prepare and leave their homes. By then, most residents had made the incorrect decision to stay and ride out the storm. Should the order have been issued earlier? Did Crossroads officials properly prepare residents for a Category 4 storm? Why did weather forecasting models fail to provide an accurate prediction of Harvey's strength? Questions sprang up after the storm, too. One of the first wounds of Harvey was our above-ground power lines that could not withstand hurricane-force winds in the neighborhood of 100 mph. Burying power lines throughout Victoria has been a recurring debate – with money at the center of that discussion. Many

have argued the cost would be too expensive, but now we have to ask again whether its benefits are worth the investment. Across the country, in places much less prone to hurricanes, power lines are commonly buried. Underground lines may not be a guarantee of power at the back end of a storm, but the shorter amount of time to restore power may be its biggest advantage. And we also must weigh the public safety factor and huge property loss caused by numerous structure fires related to downed power lines. In terms of essential city of Victoria services, we need to look at why our water system failed because of the power outage. There may be no easy answers to this question, but it's one our city officials must consider carefully. Part of the solution is looking at best practices put in place by other comparable cities prone to natural disasters. How do they ensure a redundancy of power source to their water

system? If the water system goes out, how do they most rapidly restore the service? Down the highway is the coastal town of Port Lavaca, which lifted its boil water notice late Thursday. The town, which also took a direct hit from Harvey, already has water safe to drink. The Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority owns and operates a water plant on State Highway 316 South and sells the water to Port Lavaca, which distributes it to residents. In advance of Harvey making landfall, the city filled its two, above-ground storage towers, carrying a total of 1 million gallons of water, before the GBRA shut down the plant hours before landfall Aug. 25. GBRA shut down the plant not because it worried about the storm surge but because it was worried about the high winds damaging the plant. The city didn't use generators to deliver the water it had in its towers to residents. It just needed gravity. Of course, Port Lavaca's popu-

lation is about one-fifth of Victoria's so the comparison might not be apt. It is only one data point. These questions should be asked in every Crossroads community, not just Victoria. In poor Bloomington, only 5 percent of the homes had electricity Friday while wealthier Port O'Connor on the coast had almost all of its power restored. Both towns are served by the same utility company. These questions are not meant to criticize those who have worked tirelessly during the past week to serve our communities. All of our first responders, utility workers and officials did outstanding work. Most of all, our residents are safe. Incredibly, no one in the Crossroads died. But whenever a natural disaster occurs, it behooves all of us to ask: What can we do better next time? This opinion reflects the views of the Victoria Advocate's editorial board.

NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS

Please send your photos of neighbors helping neighbors after Hurricane Harvey to [deliverydesk@vicad.com](mailto:deliverydesk@vicad.com). Please include names and where the photo was taken. We want to help our community come together.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Residents in Bloomington were really appreciating the donated pizzas from Double Dave's in Victoria after the town was hit hard by Hurricane Harvey.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO  
Double Dave's Pizza in Victoria donated a bunch of pizzas to the residents of Bloomington to help them get through difficult circumstances after the town was hit hard by Hurricane Harvey.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Troy Mack, left, of Missouri City, and Robert Henning are assisting with cleaning up yards and removing downed trees in Seadrift after Hurricane Harvey hit the area hard.

A WORD FROM VISD

Well-being of staff, students, families, community members top concern

Each and every day in the VISD, we are faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as difficult situations. We identify these opportunities as defining moments. The insight gained from embracing these moments provides us with the knowledge and expertise to make the right decisions and to positively move forward as a school district. As Superintendent of Schools for the Victoria ISD, I want to assure you that the safety of our students and the safety of our staff is, and always will be, our No. 1 priority. While we work each day to provide educational excellence for "Every Child, Every Classroom, Every Day," our primary responsibility must be to create a safe environment and uphold our responsibility to follow proper procedures at all times. As of late last week, there are still hundreds of schools and 181



ROBERT JAKLICH

school districts that remain closed due to Hurricane Harvey and the devastating destruction brought forth by this catastrophic event. In the Victoria ISD, many of our buildings and campuses have sustained significant damage from the storm. But, it wasn't until our staff was able to go inside the facilities that we discovered the true extent of the storm's destruction. Throughout the entire district, our buildings and campuses received substantial loss, inside and out, to a much greater degree than what was initially assessed. However, this is when an amazing transformation began. With the tremendous commitment and dedication of our VISD maintenance staff, other VISD personnel and community volunteers, we were able to

tackle this significant challenge and provide the opportunity of returning back to school much sooner than expected. We are also so proud and inspired by the exceptional fortitude displayed by these individuals during these most trying times. While there is still much work to be done, it is remarkable to reflect where we were just seven days ago and how far we have come since that time. We would like to extend our sincere appreciation to Rick McBrayer and his staff at the Office of Emergency Management, County Judge Ben Zeller and Mayor Paul Polasek, Charmelle Garrett and the city of Victoria, Sheriff's Office, Fire Chief Taner Drake and the Victoria Fire Department for their outstanding efforts and collaboration in assisting the Victoria In-

dependent School District through the challenges brought forth with the recent damage and flooding concerns of Hurricane Harvey. On Tuesday, we will resume our normal scheduled work-week, and all VISD employees will report for duty at their regular scheduled times. Due to the power just returning to some of our campuses, as well as technology, phone, water resources and additional maintenance repairs still needed to be performed, we will not be "school ready" for students until Sept. 11. We also want you to know that the well-being of our staff, our students, families and community members is our No. 1 concern, and we would never jeopardize their safety. We are working in partnership with our insurance agents, contractors and building inspectors to make certain the environment is safe and structurally sound and

we would never ask anyone to enter a classroom or facility if it was not safe to do so. In the VISD, this year's focus is "Better Together," and nothing is more evident in the aftermath of this storm as we rebuild our community and prepare for our students and staff to return to school. Chad Witmeyer once stated: "Hope never dies where faith is strong, and faith grows strong in the presence of hope." On behalf of our Board of Trustees and the entire VISD, thank you for your "faith" in our school district and for your faith in our community. We are and remain "VISD PROUD" and "VISD STRONG." Robert Jaklich is the superintendent for the Victoria Independent School District. Contact him at 361-788-9202 or through the VISD website, [visd.com](http://visd.com).



FIRST AMENDMENT

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

– First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

WORDS

And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole.

Acts 4:7-9

"If a dog will not come to you after having looked you in the face, you should go home and examine your conscience." Thomas Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924) American politician and academic; 28th President of the United States from 1913 to 1921

POEM

Kairos

This is the critical time,  
Not the same old, same old.  
We are called upon by God  
To manifest a heart, not cold,  
Not lukewarm to be vomited out,  
But fiery, like molten gold.  
Sr. Frances Cabrini Janvier,  
Victoria

WE WANT YOUR LETTERS

Our letter lengths are 150 words for thank-yous, 200 words for election-related letters and 350 words for all others. We ask that letter writers submit one letter per 30-day period. Letters may be delivered at the Victoria Advocate, 311 E. Constitution St.; mailed to P.O. Box 1518, Victoria 77902; faxed to 361-574-1220; or emailed to [letters@vicad.com](mailto:letters@vicad.com).

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FROM US

Our local businesses need us right now

■ Topic: Local economy ■ Our View: Support needed for small businesses post-Harvey

Before Hurricane Harvey, we were focused on how to entice more businesses to come to Victoria.

But right now we need to do everything we can to keep our local businesses here in business.

Randy Vivian, president of the Victoria Chamber of Commerce, is optimistic about our city's ability to rebuild after Harvey.

A quick drive down Navarro Street shows most of our businesses have reopened.

"We could've got hit a lot worse than we did, and I think because of that our businesses will be able to bounce back," Vivian said.

Still, any business that loses two weeks of revenue is going to be hurt, he said.

Business owners have likely already cleaned up damage to their properties, but the test will be figuring out how to stay afloat after taking a financial hit.

We reported that the hurricane caused about \$1 million in merchandise and structural damages to Lacks, leaving the store with no inventory or usable space.

Lacks CEO estimated it would take 60 days to reopen, if not longer.

Let's not forget that business owners may be dealing with damage to their own homes, and their employees are likely dealing with their own losses.

Almost 40 percent of small businesses never reopen their doors following a disaster because just a few inches of water can cause tens of thousands of

dollars in damage, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Chew on that for a minute. Can you imagine what our local economy would look like if many cut their losses and opted never to reopen?

So how do we move on from here?

Well, we absolutely must support our local businesses.

We need to return to our normal shopping habits and avoid spending dollars on services that will take those dollars right out of town. Every dollar we spend should go to the local businesses who are here and create jobs and provide us the comforts and necessities needed to get back to normalcy.

But another thing we should do is practice having a little bit

of patience and compassion over the next few weeks and months.

Just as our minds have been filled with dealing with recent hurdles, our cashiers and servers and contractors are probably just as frazzled. I mean these are our neighbors, and we must look around and recognize that much of our community is in the same boat or worse off.

Many restaurants took a financial loss when they opened their doors to us to serve a hot meal during the water boil notice. It wasn't easy complying with the requirements, and while it was probably frustrating, they did it while putting aside their own personal issues – because we needed them.

Our local businesses have long supported our children's sports teams and helped provide dona-

tions for fundraisers.

Now that they need us, we have to be here for them, or in a few years when we look around the city, it will look much different than it does today.

Consider also that FEMA only offers small businesses loans after a disaster, so whatever wasn't covered by insurance will be left to these businesses to cover.

We as customers have to continue to frequent our local businesses because this will help us all as we recover from Harvey.

We are strong, and we, as a community, can come together to strengthen our economy.

*This opinion reflects the views of the Victoria Advocate's editorial board.*

FROM US

After Hurricane Harvey: Remember to breathe

The staff of the Newtown (Conn.) Bee sent this care package to the Victoria Advocate newsroom.

The cover of the card from Newtown, Conn., said simply, "Breathe."

At first, we thought the card inside the box of goodies was one more example of the generous outpouring of support from U.S. newsrooms after Hurricane Harvey smacked the Texas coast. But this card punched me in the gut.

Inside, the handwritten message read, in part, "At the Newtown Bee, we have weathered storms of nature and those manmade. We were recipients in those difficult days of care packages and random acts of kindness that buoyed our spirits as we worked to deliver the news."

In disbelief at first, I gradually realized this card came from the hometown newspaper of the Sandy Hook massacre, which left dead 27 people, including 20 children, on Dec. 14, 2012. The woman who took the iconic photo of that horrible day, Shannon Hicks, was among those signing the card.

I walked out of the newsroom into my office to process what I was reading. Tears started to fill my eyes. Just then, reporter Gabriella Canales, at 24 almost the same age as my journalist daughter, walked in to tell me about a hurricane recovery story she was doing. Gabby had stayed with the 17 of us who rode out the Category 4 hurricane inside our 75-year-old downtown building or stationed in neighboring counties. Like our other journalists, Gabby was fearless and tireless, working around the clock and sleeping on the floor, never stopping even after the building lost power and running water.

Blinking back the tears, I told Gabby something I hoped made sense, but I don't recall now. After she left my office, I started to cry harder, escaping downstairs and out the back dock of our distribution



CHRIS COBLER

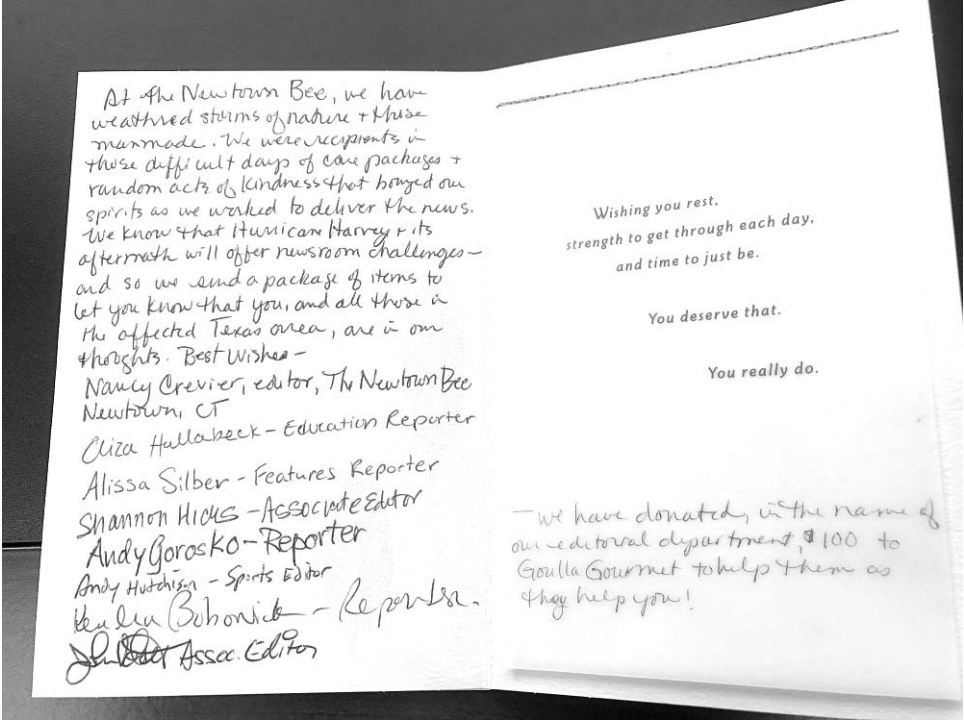
area. I walked to nowhere amid the piles of fallen tree limbs and around the tilting power poles. Emotions bottled up for

more than a week poured forth. In those predawn hours as Harvey slammed Victoria after devastating Rockport, Refugio and other towns in its path, I had feared for all of our journalists who had volunteered to stay. Had I put them in harm's way? Were our teams stationed with the sheriff's offices in Calhoun, Goliad and Jackson counties OK? Would our old building, whose leaky roof was repaired only two years before, withstand winds that howled unlike any noise I had ever heard before?

Along our second-floor newsroom's east wall, a metal door that led to the roof banged wildly, as if the devil himself demanded entry. Strange sounds groaned from the same outside wall. Somehow, exhausted journalists slept on the floor nearby. We had produced a digital-replica version of the Victoria Advocate in the late-night hours after Harvey had made landfall at 10 p.m. Friday. Afterward, we didn't know what else to do as the storm raged into the night, except try to rest for whatever lay ahead.

About 6 a.m., the power went out. Marina Riker, our reporter at Victoria's Emergency Operations Center, immediately relayed the lights went out there at the same time. That meant Harvey had beaten the city's downtown underground power grid, which the newspaper shared with the EOC. What would fall next?

Within minutes, though, Advocate operations manager Charles Kulow and his assistant, Brian Higdon, had our backup generators running. They provided enough power to light a small corner of the newsroom and up to four laptops. We kept reporting and posting updates, but my memory of what we



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Beautiful words from Newtown. The only response I can muster, "Humbled."

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Pictured are some of the Victoria Advocate newsroom staff after a dinner provided by another generous newsroom. Many stayed to report in the Crossroads while others reported on our evacuees in Austin and San Antonio, or came back in the immediate days after the mandatory evacuation to add to our coverage.



shared is a blur.

The journalists around me never showed any fear, so how could I? We just kept doing our job of informing our community to the best of our ability. The winds started subsiding later in the morning, but I fearfully held back eager photojournalist Nick Galindo in our newsroom, even as our journalists in the field, reporters Kathryn Cargo, Jon Wilcox and Jessica Priest and photojournalists Ana Ramirez and Olivia Vanni, went out on their own with first responders between 7 and 8 a.m.

Inside our newspaper – which had morphed into

various campsites of sleeping bags, cats, dogs and even a bunny – we posted updates to our website as fast as we could. With only laptops, we weren't sure we could do more than that. Only 12 hours later, as if by magic, the darkness lifted; AEP had restored our power. Suddenly, we knew we could produce another e-edition with our desktop computers available to us again. We worked feverishly on it until about 1:30 the next morning. With no hope of printing or delivering our newspaper, we were free to work on the edition until we dropped.

We kept going Sunday until we dropped again, finishing the next e-edition about 1:30 a.m. again. Copy desk chief J.R. Ortega, his baseball cap snugly on backwards, never faltered and somehow led a small contingent in watching the 80-minute season finale of "Game of Thrones" after we finished putting the paper to bed. I had watched the entire series to that point, but I collapsed back onto my air mattress without any energy left to care what terror the Night King might bring.

For many days after Harvey, we reported and edited at a sprinter's pace. As

power started being restored around Victoria and the Crossroads, we realized we had to adjust to become long-distance runners. This story wasn't going away any time soon. Many in our community had suffered far more than us. One lineman, who had come from Tennessee to help restore power, had died.

Inexplicably, his was the only death caused by Harvey in the Crossroads. More than 70 died elsewhere, primarily in Houston. We told stories of people huddled in their homes as Harvey ripped off roofs, walls and windows. My office window, so thin I can hear conversations on the sidewalk below, was untouched, even though it couldn't be boarded up safely because of a nearby overhead power line. A stained-glass cross given to me by faith reporter Jennifer Preyss still hangs, unbroken, on the window. I thought of all this and more as I walked around the homes of downtown Victoria, trying to recover from the emotional wallop delivered by the card from Newtown. I couldn't imagine a pain worse than losing all those children to a madman. Humbled, I thought of the Bee journalists and all the others before me who had suffered far more in pursuit of the truth.

Slowly, I started to breathe again. Eventually, I found myself inside The Box, an ATM turned beautifully into a coffee bar. Even though we still had to boil the water at that point, owner John Valdivia had reopened the tiny sanctuary. As I waited for my iced hazelnut latte, I felt a whack on my back. I turned to find a smiling woman, who said simply, "Mosquito."

We laughed, and I thanked her for hitting me. Her jolt turned my last tears into laughter.

*Chris Cobler is editor of the Victoria Advocate. He may be emailed at ccobler@vicad.com.*

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YOUR POEM

Still Point

Loneliness causes a reaching out to others. Binges fill me with excess. Noise drowns out a small voice. Illusions whirl me around. Where is that something deeper? There is a still point where my spirit meets God.

Sr. Frances Cabrini  
Janvier, Victoria

WORDS

But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.

Acts 4:15-16

"The politician in my country seeks votes, affection and respect, in that order. With few notable exceptions, they are simply men who want to be loved." Edward R. Murrow (1908-65) American broadcast journalist

WE WANT YOUR LETTERS

We want your letters because we value your opinion on issues in the community and region. We have a few requirements and will help you meet these if needed.

We will need your name, home address and daytime telephone or cellphone number so we may contact you to verify that you want your opinion published.

If you do not hear from us within a couple of days of submitting your letter, call us to make sure we received your letter. Sometimes our email filter will not allow a letter through.

Our letter lengths are 150 words for thank-yous, 200 words for election-related letters and 350 words for all others. We ask that letter writers submit one letter per 30-day period. Letters may be delivered at the Victoria Advocate, 311 E. Constitution St.; mailed to P.O. Box 1518, Victoria 77902; faxed to 361-574-1220; or emailed to letters@vicad.com.

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FROM US

# Harvey reveals gaping holes in preparedness

■ **Topic:** Texas approach ignores most vulnerable ■ **Our View:** Florida offers lessons on hurricane shelters, evacuation

No one was prepared for Hurricane Harvey. The storm developed faster and more intensely than any forecaster or emergency official ever anticipated. It hit the Texas mid-coast with a ferocity not seen since Carla almost six decades ago. While acknowledging this surprise, we must learn critical lessons now and act upon them soon before we become complacent again. Even though hurricanes are unpredictable, we can better prepare before the next major storm arrives. This discussion begins with surviving the storm. Starting with individual preparation and extending to the local, state and federal levels, we need to look at what other steps we can take to be safer. Individually, people need to re-evaluate their homes to be sure they are as safe as they

can be from wind and flood dangers. Along with stocking an emergency kit, people need to review their personal shelter and evacuation plans before every hurricane season. Local, state and federal officials can do much more, too. Any disaster plan needs to start by considering the most vulnerable in the community – the poor, the disabled, the elderly and the frail. What will happen to them when a mandatory evacuation order is given only 24 hours before a storm? Where will they go, and how will we get them there? By this measure, Victoria, the Crossroads and Texas failed miserably. The most vulnerable were left to mainly fend for themselves. Only through the grace of God did the Crossroads not suffer more casualties. If the forecast had held true and Harvey had unleashed more than 40 inches

of rain on the Victoria area, dozens of people would have died. Instead, those deaths occurred in Houston, where many people also lacked any safe haven. For a better model of how to prepare for a hurricane, Texans should look to Florida, where officials decided after Hurricane Andrew devastated the state in 1992 that they had to rethink how they prepare for major storms. Since then, other states, including Virginia and North Carolina, also have taken steps to strengthen their building codes, bury power lines and revamp their evacuation and sheltering plans. “You need to start your plan thinking about the family who has the hardest time getting out of here,” said Dawn Brantley, sheltering coordinator for Virginia’s Department of Emergency Management. In Florida before Hurricane

Irma, state officials issued early and frequent warnings urging residents to either evacuate or go to designated shelters nearby. If people couldn’t do either, they were urged to call 211 to arrange public transportation. Although Irma gave Florida more time to brace for impact, the state also has spent the past two decades getting ready. A critical difference in Florida’s plan is the investment in local and regional shelters. Floridians realize it is unrealistic to evacuate almost 21 million people in a few days before a hurricane. They decided they had to identify and invest in public buildings such as schools, community centers and churches that could be used as temporary safe havens for riding out a storm. They even have shelters located along evacuation routes in case people have trouble on the road out. Before we are staring into the

face of another natural disaster, Texans need to set aside our spirit of independence. Proper planning saves lives. The lessons of Harvey should prompt a shift in thinking at every level from the individual to the federal government. A collective effort can harden our ability to withstand and recover more quickly from a storm. This is a wise investment that can be done prudently and save money and lives in the long run. The next major hurricane may come next week – or it may not hit for another 60 years. If we’re lucky, it will be the latter. But we can’t count on luck. We can’t become complacent. We must act on the lessons learned from Harvey and invest in making our communities safer and more resilient.

*This opinion reflects the views of the Victoria Advocate’s editorial board.*

GUEST COLUMN

## Good fences make good Americans

As hurricane Harvey wound through our area a month ago, structures that bore significant damage were fences. Most yards lay candidly open for public viewing. Some yards had pools, some had gardens, some kitchens, and yes, some even showed signs of disuse and neglect. People say good fences make good neighbors; this applies both literally and metaphorically in our communities. Our diversity numbers among our most important core American values, and our metaphorical fences make sustaining it possible. The birth announcement of our nation proclaimed that each individual possesses the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Nothing underpins our identity as Americans more than determining for ourselves the definition of happiness and how we choose to pursue it. For most of American history, individuals possessed this sense of self-determination and pursued their paths with relentless vigor. Even today, we tell children that they can become whatever they put their minds to because, as Americans, they have freedom, liberty and opportunity unrivaled in the modern world. However, Americans could not enjoy this sense of self-determination without the fences of our society. These fences include civility, dignity and integrity. Yet our system of independent freedoms and the individual pursuit of happiness also stands upon a more ancient foundation than these modern values, one reflected in almost every major faith and philosophy. To treat others as we wish to be treated – this comprises the foundation of American individualism. This concept serves as the greatest fence in our society because it clearly separates the lives and choices of individuals and protects our individual ability to determine our own course. From the first colonists to till American soil, to modern Americans searching for an identity and place in the fabric of our culture, the idea of respecting each individual’s ability and right to determine their destiny for themselves echoes the very substance of the American Spirit. American individuality lays the foundation for



GREG KNOWLTON

the American Dream. To stymie this self-determination and personal liberty based on misplaced notions of religion, nationalism, patriotism or political ideology fundamentally erodes the freedoms upon which American success and liberty stand so squarely founded. In violating this sense of self-determination, individuals violate the most fundamental of American practices. To tell someone how to use their liberties and how to define their own happiness runs counter to the ideals and rights enshrined in our most fundamental documents. This includes not only how we live our lives, but also how we use our freedoms. People should never exercise their rights, such as speech, petition, assembly, press and the vote, because of cultural expectation or social coercion; rather, they should invoke these rights because of a sincerely held belief in a particular cause. Political, social and civic leaders who attempt to impose their own sense of right and wrong concerning the use of these rights undermine rather than support the American values of independent thinking and expression. At times throughout our history, this betrayal of American values has come shrouded in patriotism. The American values we share are those enshrined in the Constitution and other founding documents. Any effort to add or subtract to or from this list of core ideals diminishes the very traditions and values that built America. If we as Americans let the gales of our political landscape tear down the fences that maintain our individual rights and self-determination, we destroy the very infrastructure that ensured American prosperity. Without these fences we can neither be good neighbors nor good Americans.

*Greg Knowlton teaches social studies in the Victoria area and lives in Victoria. He is from Ganado and graduated with a degree in history from Sam Houston State University. He may be emailed at greg.t.knowlton@gmail.com.*

NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS



Please send your photos of neighbors helping neighbors after Hurricane Harvey to delivery-desk@vicad.com. Please include names and where the photo was taken. We want to help our community come together.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY K. MACK  
Kristi Mack, of Missouri City, organized a U-Haul truck full of supplies that were delivered to Seadrift recently to help those who were greatly affected by Hurricane Harvey.

FROM YOU

### Office of the president deserves our respect

**Editor, the Advocate:**  
It doesn’t matter if you are a

Democrat, Republican, Independent or whatever. Whether you like or dislike our president now in office, you should always respect and honor “The Office of the President of the

United States.” This is what makes America great – and the envy of the rest of the world.  
**Bobby Williams,** Edna

### What purpose do mass protests really serve?

**Editor, the Advocate:**  
“Methinks thou doth protest too much.” This paraphrased quote from Shakespeare’s “Hamlet” does speak to the current situations in our nation. Mass protest seems to be the common response to ideas or situations “we” don’t like. The range may be all the way from ethnicity concerns to the national anthem to businesses we simply don’t like, or to individuals with whom we don’t agree. I’m wondering what is accomplished by mass protest other than violence – either physical or rhetorical. As a nation we seem to be so angry about so many things, we are not able to even think with

reason or clarity. Take the flag/anthem protests, for instance. It seems that so many have jumped on that band wagon without even trying to think through what the original cause for one person was. One person objected to injustices showed to a group of people and selected what he thought was a likely target for protest. What does not seem to be recognized is that the flag and anthem of our nation do not represent any one individual or any one group or organization; in fact, they do not represent people at all. What our flag and national anthem represent is the high ideal, values and standards of our nation, not individuals or groups or organizations. Our flag and national anthem stand for the principles of justice and equality and hope and freedom – for all people.

They do not represent individuals, and when we dishonor or disrespect either, we are dishonoring and disrespecting those principles upon which this nation was founded. In our ill-advised and ill-informed protest, we are denigrating the very principles we say we stand for and agree with. To me, protesting the flag and national anthem for the reasons given is an oxymoron, a contradictory expression between words and actions. Why can’t we find a more effective way to suggest and implement change than mass protest, which doesn’t seem to accomplish much of anything more than sound and fury – a lot of heat that dissipates after a while with no real substance?

**Carl E. Westbrook,** Victoria

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– First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

WORDS

*They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him.*  
Psalm 72:9-11

“Where mercy, love, and pity dwell, there God is dwelling too.”  
**William Blake (1757-1827)**  
English poet, painter and printmaker

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your letter. Sometimes our email filter will not allow a letter through. Our letter lengths are **150 words for thank-yous, 200 words for election-related letters and 350 words for all others.** We ask that letter writers submit **one letter per 30-day period.** Letters may be delivered at the **Victoria Advocate, 311 E. Constitution St.; mailed to P.O. Box 1518, Victoria 77902; faxed to 361-574-1220; or emailed to letters@vicad.com.**

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FROM US

Housing crisis demands attention, action

Topic: Renters hardest hit by Harvey Our View: Leaders must step forward

Hurricane Harvey devastated the most vulnerable in our community. Those living paycheck to paycheck and renting apartments, trailers or houses have been staggered. They are struggling to find new affordable places to live and to keep food on the table. Only a mile away from City Hall, one family has even been living in a tent outside their ravaged home for two months. Yet, the housing crisis is somehow out of sight and out of mind for many Victoria city and county elected officials. Neither the City Council nor County Commission has taken any action about this crisis. A notable exception is Commissioner Danny Garcia, whose precinct includes particularly hard-hit Bloomington. Immediately after the hurricane hit Aug. 25, Garcia has been leading relief efforts, organizing volunteers and meeting with state and federal officials who might be able to help. Another elected official worthy of note is City Council member Jeff Bauknight, who showed he

wants to be sure Victoria learns important lessons from its Harvey response. A few other elected officials have done a little of some of this, but the overwhelming response from them has ranged from silence to denial. Mayor Paul Polasek said during the Texas Tribune's Oct. 17 discussion with Harvey mayors that city staff had done only "windshield surveys" of the damage and had no idea how many residents were displaced. After researching the question for a week, he announced FEMA had placed the number of destroyed homes in Victoria County at only 22. However, he contradicted himself in his own announcement by adding that the number of uninhabitable apartments could climb into the hundreds. Do apartments not count as homes? Later that same day, he went on TV to declare the destruction in Victoria to be "minimal." In other meetings, he has said the city isn't responsible for providing housing and government isn't the solution to every problem. What he seems to fail to

grasp is a support for limited government doesn't mean elected leaders can't actively work to recognize the scope of a problem and do their best to address it. The starting point for finding a solution is to recognize the problem. The numbers underscoring the housing crisis are undeniable: More than 19,000 people in Victoria have registered for FEMA help. More than 6,800 households qualified to live in hotels paid for by FEMA. Habitat for Humanity of the Golden Crescent's informal survey of apartment complexes found 462 units were uninhabitable after Harvey. Habitat couldn't reach 12 other complexes, meaning the number of displaced renters could reach into the thousands assuming most units housed more than one person and at least some percentage of the 12 complexes sustained damage, too. More than 31,000 people – or a third of the county's population – qualified for Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits. To qualify, people had to demonstrate

some financial loss from the hurricane. The number of homeless students in the Victoria school district is three times the normal amount. Mennonite Disaster Service volunteers are working to repair 150 homes across Bloomington and Placedo, some of which were almost unlivable before Harvey. The latter point is important to understand because Victoria had an affordable housing shortage before Harvey hit. The hurricane turned this shortage into a crisis. In the past, Realtor Nancy Garner, who manages many Victoria rental properties, told people that the word catastrophe was overused, "but we truly know what that means now." If the private sector can understand the depth of the problem, then surely our elected officials can, too. They also can take their lead from the private sector and from our nonprofits, which are working creatively together toward filling the huge need. For example, Garner's compa-

ny, Woolson Real Estate, worked with Gulf Bend Center, the Crossroads Mental Health Authority, to open a wing of its Wellness Center to the public Oct. 1. This is an excellent example of a creative public-private partnership to find homes for those in need. Victoria's leaders need to step forward and search for more solutions, whether that's bringing in FEMA trailers, speeding up construction of Habitat for Humanity houses, converting a closed nursing home into transitional housing, or opening churches for those in need. These solutions likely don't require local tax dollars. Private, state and federal money can be tapped into. What they do require? Local leaders who will recognize the problems and rally people around solving them. This starts with elected officials representing all of their constituents.

This opinion reflects the views of the Victoria Advocate's editorial board.

A WORD FROM VISD

Opportunities abound for a quality education

Each and every day, our employees work extremely hard to accomplish the mission of our school district, "Achieving Excellence for All." In our quest for excellence in education, we must continue to redefine strategies that will enable us to reach new heights while maintaining our focus on "Every Child, Every Classroom, Every Day." With nine days remaining until the Nov. 7 bond election, there has been some discussion regarding the academic performance of the Victoria ISD. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you some of our "VISD Proud" achievements. We are proud to be named as a Texas Education Agency "District of Innovation," and we are currently designing our educational strategies to align and support improved instruction, evaluate student performance and improve professional development opportunities. Throughout this entire process, our conversations continuously involve quality – a quality learning environment, quality instruction and quality opportunities for all students and staff. We are proud of the work that we have accomplished in the restructuring of our instructional day. During the fifth year of this restructuring process, the current seven-period day bell schedule has allowed for more consistency in our high schools, the opportunity to build stronger student-staff relationships and close the achievement gap in learning. A wonderful example of stronger stu-



ROBERT JAKLICH

dent-staff relationships can be found in our current attendance rate, which is more than 96 percent – the highest attendance rate the district has experienced. Both Victoria East and Victoria West high schools have earned "Distinction Designations," and in the last three years we have experienced tremendous growth in the special recognition of Distinction Designations. This year we are proud to state that we have 10 Distinction Designation campuses that earned a total of 21 Distinction Designations. Our third high school, Liberty Academy, exceeded the state standards in all measured indexes. Currently, through VISD's collaborative efforts with Victoria College, our Liberty Academy Early College Center offers students the opportunity to earn an associate degree while completing their high school diploma requirements. College courses are paid for through this program, allowing students to take full advantage of the dual credit options available in VISD. This past year, 23 out of 30 seniors graduated from college with an Associate's Degree before they received their high school diploma. And seven of these 23 students received two associate degrees. We have successfully implemented the House Bill 5 (HB5) graduation requirements and are proud to state that the

VISD is offering all five HB5 endorsement plans to our students. Our counselors and administrative staff have done a phenomenal job developing information strategies for our eighth- and 12th-grade students and parents in providing a uniform process to share information through individual and group meetings. We also continue to offer extended hours in our high school homework centers and provide free transportation home and a free meal to our students. We provide free SAT and ACT prep courses and free PSAT exams for our sophomores and juniors, including an "AP Potential" component that is afforded to each student and parent. We are proud to offer 23 AP courses that are designed to provide our students with a curriculum that is at the depth and complexity level of college courses and have significantly increased the number of students enrolled in AP courses. We also provide our students the opportunity to take their AP exams at no cost. By reducing this financial burden for our students, we have experienced an extensive increase in the number of AP exams our students are undertaking. We have also increased the number of high school and middle school students enrolled in Pre-AP classes as well. We are proud to offer 56 dual credit courses allowing students to graduate from our traditional high schools with numerous college hours. Both Victoria East and Victoria West high schools have full-time Career

and College Coaches on campus to provide support services with scholarships, financial aid, college applications, dual credit registration, university visits and college exams. Another example of our commitment to develop our students to reach their maximum potential can be found in our high school Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, which prepare our students for career and college readiness endeavors. We currently offer 65 CTE course opportunities, including nine practicum courses with internships. We also offer 17 local industry partnerships, four post-secondary partnerships and have more than 200 students enrolled and employed in our Career Preparation programs. Furthermore, this past year we celebrated over 250 students receiving CTE licenses and/or certifications. Eleanor Roosevelt once stated, "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." As you can see, in regards to the VISD, our future is exceptionally bright. We are extremely appreciative to our amazing teachers, administrators, VISD staff, Board of Trustees and community members for supporting our students in their efforts to dream big and for providing the resources to make those dreams come true. We are "VISD Proud."

Robert Jaklich is the superintendent for the Victoria Independent School District. Contact him at 361-788-9202 or through the VISD website, visd.com.



FROM OTHERS



John F. Kennedy

FROM YOU

Voting for school bond helps all

Editor, the Advocate: We are very fortunate in Victoria to have a focused, diligent VISD School Board. They work tirelessly for many, many hours a week (for no pay) to make our public school system the best it can be. Further, our superintendent Dr. Robert Jaklich is a world-class educator and leader, resulting in our schools becoming what we aspire for our children. The school board and Dr. Jaklich have spent two years looking at the needs of our public schools and have presented a well thought out, cost-efficient bond proposal to be voted on Nov. 7. This will touch virtually all of our schools, transform neighborhoods and modernize our technology so that our schools can accept grants for technological learning opportunities. By bringing old buildings up to standard, we will decrease maintenance costs. These cost savings will go to operations and be put toward teacher pay and stu-

dents. All questions and information is available on the VISD website; you will be impressed. For those of you without children or grandchildren in VISD, this will be a source of community pride. A new stadium will be built for little more than the cost to bring it up to code. This allows us to be a regional center for band, track and other meets. We will gain more parking for the Fine Arts Center. And for most people over 65, you will pay no additional taxes. The rest of us will only have a small increase due to the smart thinking of our leaders. Please vote for our kids, teachers and community, and vote for the bond proposal on Nov. 7. Better yet, vote for it today. Early voting is on from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Oct. 23 to Nov. 3. We can feel pride that we are a caring community that comes together to make a difference.

Robert H. Loeb, Victoria

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– First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

YOUR POEM

Move

Move; sleep somewhere else.  
Hurricane damage in your room.  
Too much moisture.  
Buzzing machines.  
Noise invades my space.  
Sr. Frances Cabrini Janvier, Victoria

WORDS

Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door; and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost; and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.  
Acts 5:9-10

"For to tempt and to be tempted are things very nearly allied – whenever feeling has anything to do in the matter, no sooner is it excited than we have already gone vastly farther than we are aware of." Catherine the Great (1729-96) Born Princess Sophie of Anhalt-Zerbst; Empress of Russia (1762-96), the country's longest-ruling female leader

WE WANT YOUR LETTERS

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FROM OTHERS

Scrutiny helps government work better

■ Topic: Emergency response plan ■ Our View: Public review critical to make sure community prepared

After Hurricane Harvey devastated parts of Victoria, people naturally had questions about how well prepared the community was. To answer that question, the public needs to know what the plan was. But when the Victoria Advocate asked for a copy of the city and county's emergency response plan, officials said it was secret. They pointed to a 2013 Texas Attorney General opinion that said emergency plans could be kept secret to protect homeland security. Never mind that almost all of the voluminous document would in no way help terrorists. Fortunately, wiser heads prevailed after the Victoria Advocate reported Dec. 10 on this secrecy. In that story, national experts explained why an open-government policy is considered the best prac-

tice. After all, the public needs to be involved in planning for disasters. "Regular people should be involved in the planning process," said Lee Clarke, a Rutgers University professor. "When officials keep plans secret, they're not doing anyone any favors – even themselves." Last week, Victoria County Judge Ben Zeller said he and Victoria Mayor Paul Polasek had reconsidered and would make the plan available as soon as the emergency response coordinator has a chance to review the document and redact any sensitive information. Zeller said he expected the plan would be available for public review sometime in February. That's good news for those who believe government works the best in the open. That's what Abraham Lincoln believed when he

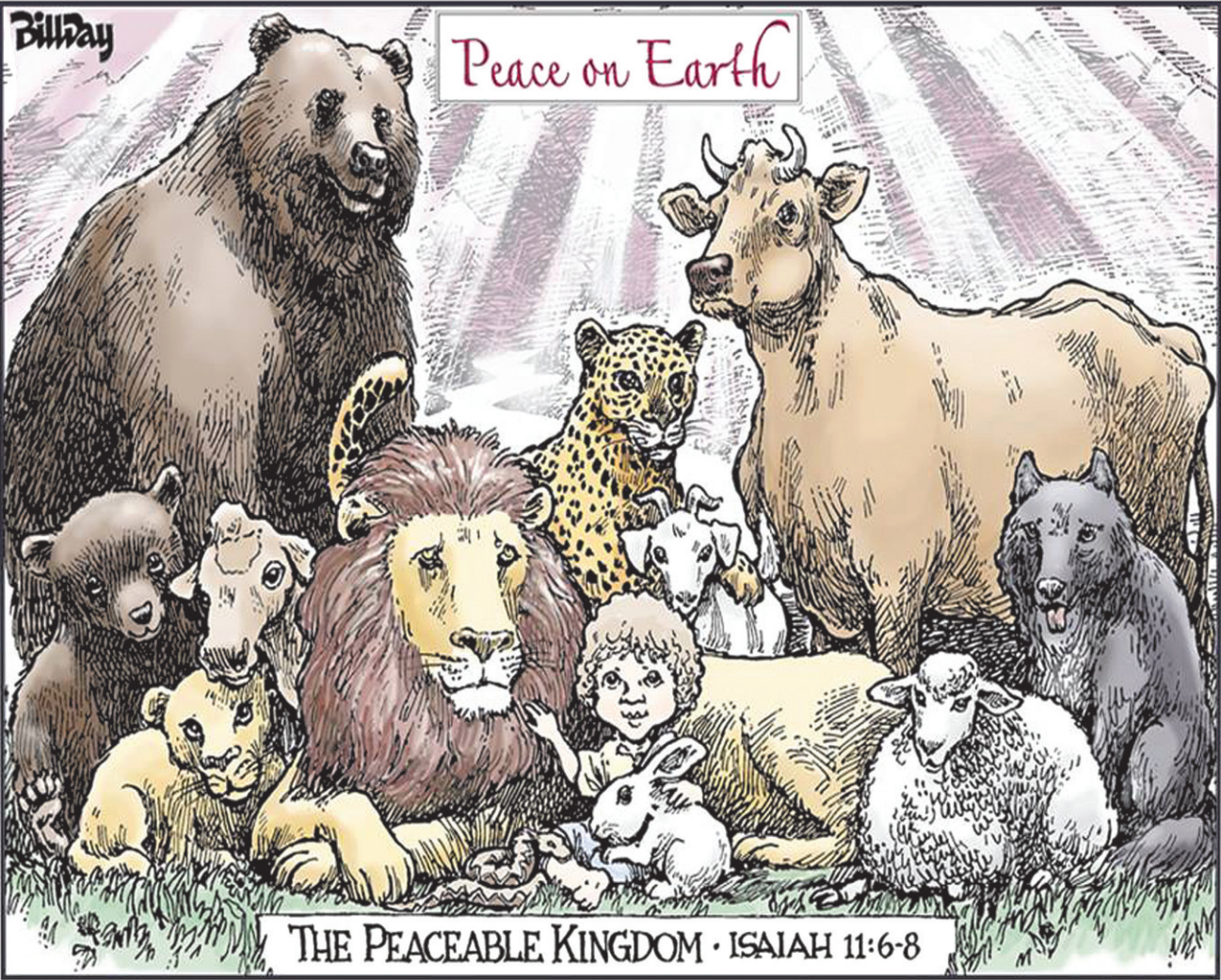
spoke of "government of the people, by the people and for the people." That's what legislators had in mind when they crafted the Texas Public Information Act after the 1973 Sharpstown stock fraud scandal involving state officials. The state act presumes that information is public and that "government is the servant and not the master of the people." In this instance – and too many others – public officials offer three standard excuses in favor of secrecy: ■ No one in the public has ever asked before for the information. ■ The information is too technical for the public to understand. ■ The information will reveal secrets that will help the bad guys. Of course, this is all easily answered by those who embrace open government: ■ The public should be invited and encouraged to be part of the pro-

cess of crafting an emergency response plan. That is what DeWitt County officials are doing now. ■ The public is smarter than public officials often give them credit for. Scrutiny will make any important public document better, not worse. ■ Any truly sensitive information can be redacted, as is happening now. Victoria City Councilman Jeff Bauknight asked for his own copy after questioning how the city and county reacted during and after Harvey made landfall. He realized then that most public officials had little to no information about the plan. Clarke, who authored "Worst Cases: Terror and Catastrophe in the Popular Imagination," said effective disaster planning should be accessible and developed with the help of the public and elected

officials. "I'm not saying that everybody needs to know where the nuclear codes are – that's not what we're talking about," Clarke said. "We're talking about if the water system is vulnerable, how come?" The public should ask such questions when Victoria's emergency plan becomes available sometime in February. The same public process should play out in other Crossroads counties, such as Jackson, which already has its plan posted online, and DeWitt. Calhoun also readily shared its plan with the Advocate and the public. After all, a public emergency plan will work only if the public is prepared. That's just common sense – and good government.

*This opinion reflects the views of the Victoria Advocate's editorial board.*

FROM OTHERS



FROM YOU

Unexpected act of kindness at Academy very much appreciated

Editor, the Advocate: I was shopping in Academy the evening of Dec. 20 when I happened to let a young man go in front of me to check out since my basket was full and he only had three items. We struck up a short conversation about an item he was purchasing – a Yeti cup. I was getting one as well, and he was telling me they were really good for keeping coffee hot all day while at work. The young man reminded me of my own son, Zaim. He was tall, brown hair, brown eyes, wearing a black T-shirt with Football OSU, etc. (I didn't get that great description of the shirt), jeans, boots and a cap. I could tell he was a very well-mannered young man. After me asking if he wanted to go in line in front of me, he said, "Are you sure? I'm in no hurry." OK, so here's the thing. After this nice young man checks out, I'm not really paying close attention. Then he turns back toward me and wishes me a Merry Christmas and puts an Academy gift card into my hand! There are good young men out there in this world! And I want his parents to know they did an excellent job raising their son. I wish I knew his name so that I could thank him again. This act of kindness was so unexpected and very much appreciated. I have let many people go in front of me before in checkout lines without even receiving a thank you! We are raising our children with respect, kindness, manners, and to pass it on. May God bless this young man and his family and friends, and may they all have a very Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year!

Connie M. Warner, Victoria

A WORD FROM VISD

Let us each reflect on what is most important

January 2018 has been proclaimed as School Board Recognition month, and this year's theme is "Helping Kids Soar to Success." Please join me in thanking our Board of Trustees for their commitment to our students, staff, schools and community. Of the 1,000-plus school districts across the State of Texas, and the 7,200 Board Members currently serving, there are no other school boards that deserve this recognition and celebration more than our very own Victoria ISD Board of Trustees. They are an amazing group of individuals who voluntarily take



ROBERT JAKLICH

up the enormous responsibility of governing our schools, and we are extremely proud of them. We are also extremely grateful for the leadership that is provided by our Board of Trustees. Our Board Members serve as a guiding force to an exemplary education and provide extensive opportunities for student success. They spend countless hours without compensation to establish school policies that reflect our community's belief in pub-

lic education. They also work closely with staff to set goals that project the vision of our future. Each board member makes personal sacrifices and spends hundreds of hours addressing the needs of our school district. They face complex, demanding challenges that require significant amounts of time and attention. They also serve as the voice of our community, always placing our students' needs first and foremost. Recognizing our Board of Trustees for their commitment and sacrifices takes a combined effort from us all. We invite everyone to join us at our regular scheduled Board

meeting on Thursday, Jan. 18, as we acknowledge these education advocates for their remarkable service to our school district. Great leadership always begins with a willing heart, a positive attitude and a desire to make a difference. We extend our sincere appreciation to our Board of Trustees for bringing these traits to the Victoria ISD and for providing each of us the opportunity to pursue our dreams. As we experience the holiday season, let us take a moment to reflect on our lives and the things that are most important to us. Imagine life as a game in which you are re-

quired to keep five balls juggling in the air. Let's name these five balls: Work, Family, Health, Friends and Spirit. You soon realize that work is a rubber ball. If you drop it, it will bounce right back up. However, the other four balls – Family, Health, Friends and Spirit – are made of glass. If you drop one of these balls, they will become irrevocably scuffed, nicked, damaged or even shattered. They may never recover or be the same again. During this holiday season, let us take time to slow down and understand how this truly pertains to us. Let us take

this time to revisit our family, our health, our friends, our spirit and our many blessings. Let us not take for granted the things that are closest to our heart because these are the things that make life meaningful. On behalf of our Board of Trustees and the entire Victoria ISD, we wish you and your family a joyful, heartwarming and restful holiday season. Robert Jaklich is the superintendent for the Victoria Independent School District. Contact him at 361-788-9202 or through the VISD website, visd.com.

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YOUR POEM

Vocation

A silent call,  
A nudge of grace,  
A yearning,  
A deep-seated urge  
To do God's will.

Sr. Frances Cabrini  
Janvier, Victoria

WORDS

Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

Acts 6:3-4

"We can easily manage if we will only take, each day, the burden appointed to it. But the load will be too heavy for us if we carry yesterday's burden over again today, and then add the burden of the morrow before we are required to bear it." John Newton (1725-1807) Anglican clergyman in England; author of "Amazing Grace"

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FROM US

Unused FEMA trailers symbolize what's wrong

■ Topic: Harvey recovery efforts ■ Our View: State, federal governments bungle recovery efforts

When thousands of trailers and mobile homes sit unused in the heart of a region decimated by Hurricane Harvey, something is terribly wrong with this picture. Sadly, the 2,600 trailers and mobile homes sitting on a Beeville runway are just the latest example of the federal and state government's bungling of Hurricane Harvey recovery efforts. Housing advocates in the Crossroads will tell anyone who will listen that the need for adequate housing had reached crisis proportions before Harvey hit Aug. 25. The hurricane magnified that need by a factor of 10. Yet, the Federal Emergency Management Agency lets homes sit unused while telling those in need that they don't qualify for housing assistance. If so few qualify, why does FEMA have all these trailers stockpiled?

FEMA describes Beeville as a regional staging area for some unspecified future need, but that answer fails to satisfy anyone on the left or right of the political spectrum. At a cost of about \$40,000 each, 2,600 trailers represent a total of \$104 million. For those who argue the trailers need to be in the hands of those in need, this is a huge waste. For those who argue the government shouldn't provide housing, this is an even bigger waste.

Compounding the waste is the knowledge the federal government auctioned off disaster-response trailers at fire-sale prices just before Harvey hit, according to an Associated Press investigation. More than 100 2017-model FEMA trailers were sold during the two days before the Category 4 hurricane landed in the Gulf Coast for less than \$5,000 apiece.

Experts in the mobile home business say such trailers should have a lifespan of 15-20 years and could be used for multiple disasters during that time.



ANGELA PIAZZA/APIAZZA@VICAD.COM

Almost 2,600 FEMA RVs and mobile homes are stored at the former Chase Field in Beeville. The staging area serves the southern region of the United States.

Almost eight months after the hurricane, it's painfully clear federal and state governments are not up to the challenge. That's mind-boggling given how many disasters have hit the United States in the past few decades, but Crossroads people on the frontline agree: The government didn't start planning for the hurricane until after it happened.

About a month after Harvey, Gov. Greg Abbott announced a new approach to recovery efforts that would let local officials lead the way. That never materialized in the Crossroads, as the Texas General Land Office's local conduit, the Golden Crescent Regional Planning Commission, reported frustration with receiving any information or money.

Last week, the GLO announced its plan

to distribute \$5 billion in federal block grants for disaster relief. Houston has fought for more local control of the money and apparently will get a considerable amount in the form of grant money to the city and Harris County.

The Victoria region is in line to get \$110 million, but the only local control is some of that money will be routed through the overwhelmed regional planning commission.

Although state and federal officials haven't asked, the Victoria Advocate's Editorial Board did, talking with those involved locally in helping those in need. On the front line in Victoria is the Long-Term Recovery Group. Although the group also was unprepared for Harvey, its members have worked tirelessly and compassion-

HOW TO GET, GIVE HELP  
NEED HELP?

Dial 211 or call First United Methodist Church at 361-578-2701 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.

TO JOIN

Contact Mark Longoria at mlongoria@myffc.com to learn how to become a member of the Victoria County Long Term Recovery Group.

TO DONATE

Contact the United Way's Dolly Stokes at 361-578-3561 or send donations to P.O. Box 35402, Victoria TX 77902.

CRISIS COUNSELING

Call Texans Recovering Together by the Education Service Center, Region 3, at 361-573-0731.

ately to help since and to stretch the little money they have received as far as it can go.

The group recently received a grant to allow it to form a 501©3 and to employ a full-time director and part-time bookkeeper. With this structure and based on the work it already has done, the recovery group is the best option for handling GLO and other recovery money. Its members are committed to the effort and not distracted with running other programs, as is the case with Golden Crescent Regional Planning Commission.

For a community located in the heart of hurricane country, a strong and active long-term recovery group is a must. It's too late to undo the damage inflicted on Harvey victims for the past eight months, but there still is time to do better.

Gov. Abbott proclaimed Harvey recovery efforts would become a model for the country, and indeed they have: a model of what not to do.

*This opinion reflects the views of the Victoria Advocate's editorial board.*

FROM OTHERS



EVERYDAY HERO

To nominate your Everyday Hero, submit the person's full name, address and phone number, along with photo and reason for nomination as an Advocate Everyday Hero, in 150 words or less. Submit the information by email to letters@vicad.com, mail to P.O. Box 1518, Victoria 77902, or bring it by the Victoria Advocate at 311 E. Constitution St. Include your name, address and phone number so we may contact you to verify your information.

CONTACT YOUR LAWMAKERS

TEXAS GOVERNOR

■ Gov. Greg Abbott: State Capitol Bldg., 1100 Congress, Room 2S.1, Austin, TX 78701, office: 512-463-2000 or 800-843-5789, fax: 512-463-1849

TEXAS U.S. SENATORS

■ U.S. Sen. John Cornyn: 517 Hart Senate Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510, office: 202-224-2934, fax: 202-228-2856

■ U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz: B40B Dirksen Senate Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510, office: 202-224-5922

TEXAS U.S. REPRESENTATIVES

■ U.S. Rep. Blake Farenthold: 2110 Rayburn House Office

Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20515, office: 202-225-7742, fax: 202-226-1134

■ U.S. Rep. Filemon Vela: 437 Cannon House Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20515, office: 202-225-9901

TEXAS SENATORS

■ State Sen. Lois Kolkhorst: Victoria Office: 5606 N. Navarro St., Suite 300X, Victoria, TX 77904; Office: 361-573-7300; Austin: 512-463-0118, Austin fax: 512-475-3736

VICTORIA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT

■ County Judge Ben Zeller: 101 N. Bridge St. Victoria 77901, 361-575-4558 (general number for the commissioners court)

GUEST COLUMN

Youth Leadership Conference helps us build young leaders

The Victoria Business and Education Coalition continues a 15-year tradition with its 2018 YOUTH LEADership Conference from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day June 4-7 at the Victoria College Student Center. This fun, action-packed and innovative learning experience teaches incoming seventh-graders leadership skills that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives.

The participants are divided into teams, each with two team leaders who have been through the program before.

Team leaders are there to provide guidance, help and model great leadership skills to their team members. The relationships formed in these teams and the skills learned are the heart and soul of the YOUTH LEADership Conference.

Conference activities

are centered around four themes for the week. Each theme contributes to imparting leadership skills and experience to the conferees.

Day One: Goals and Dreams

Every leader possesses goals and dreams, and this first day helps the students connect with both by learning how to set goals and pursue dreams. This is done by working together to climb a rock wall with safety harnesses, determination and the help of their team leaders and fellow conferees.

Each team member writes their own dreams and goals, then frames it to sit on their night stand to remind them of their mission. And finally, in one of the funniest ongoing activities of the conference, each team makes up a team cheer to inspire and entertain everyone else, with the goal of winning the

spirit stick.

Day Two: Servant Leadership

Day two activities build on day one by taking the conferees on location to a local nonprofit to perform community service while learning that great leaders always give back to their communities.

This theme is reinforced through a service project performed on site, and the conferees are immediately appreciated for their hard work. The day winds up in enjoying water slides and other games that help the conferees get to know each other better, form bonds of friendship and just have fun.

Day Three: The "I Can" Attitude

Pursuing goals and dreams and practicing servant leadership need a motor to make them successful, which brings us to the "I Can" attitude. If our students leave the



ALLEN T. COFFEY

This is why the entire day focuses on learning how to lose an "I-can't-do" attitude and gain an "I-can-do" attitude.

This theme is tackled by learning to work through obstacles and difficulties by learning from the examples and accomplishments of others. To help the conferees understand better the need for discipline and understanding in becoming an "I can do" person, Hank Hough and his Incredible Dogs will be here to demonstrate discipline, control and obedience in action.

Day Four: Manners Matter

conference knowing all about leadership and soft skills but are convinced they can't ever do those things, we have failed.

On the last day of the conference, students learn the importance of making a great first impression and the role of manners in doing so. Students will learn how to properly introduce themselves with a firm handshake, eye contact and a sincere greeting.

In addition, a special catered lunch will be served and used as the backdrop to teach proper table manners and behavior at the table and how this can influence how employers, clients or customers see them as either professionals who are a pleasure to work with or messy and unprofessional.

There will also be instruction on how to tie neckties and other essentials of proper dress.

This last day also affords the opportunity to celebrate the students' leadership accomplishments and new friendships made. This is capped off with an

awards ceremony attended by conferees and their parents and followed by a reception with cake for everyone.

For more information about VBEC and the YOUTH LEADership Conference, head over to our websitevbectx.org and select the YOUTH LEADership Conference tab, call 361-572-8283 or come by our office at 3404 N. Ben Wilson between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays.

*Allen T. Coffey, AmeriCorps VISTA public relations specialist, Victoria Business and Education Coalition, is a native of Victoria and a retired minister. He holds a B.A. from the University of Houston-Victoria and an M.Div. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He may be contacted at 361-572-8232.*

FIRST AMENDMENT

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

- First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

YOUR POEM

Our Messiness

God works in and through our messiness. "Clean up your room," Mom says. The teenager discovers a Valentine Made in his youth and forgotten. "Here, Mom," he says and kisses her. Sr. Frances Cabrini Janvier, Victoria

WORDS

And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. Acts 8:6-7

"When we look back, the only things we cherish are those which in some way met our original want; the desire which formed in us in early youth, undirected, and of its own accord."

Willia Cather (1873-1947) American writer who achieved recognition for her novels of frontier life on the Great Plains, including O Pioneers!, The Song of the Lark, and My Ántonia

WE WANT YOUR LETTERS

To submit a letter to the editor, include your name, home address and daytime telephone or cellphone number so we may contact you to verify you want your opinion published.

Our letter lengths are 200 words for thank-yous, 250 words for election-related letters and 400 words for all others. We ask letter writers submit one letter per 30-day period. Letters may be delivered at the Victoria Advocate, 311 E. Constitution St.; mailed to P.O. Box 1518, Victoria, TX 77902; faxed to 361-574-1220; or emailed to letters@vicad.com.