



Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

2019 Entry Form

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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.)

The issue discussed is the amount of loopholes in the Texas Open Record and Open Meetings laws that allow police to hide virtually everything they do behind the refrain: "It's under investigation." The commentaries call on the public to support legislative efforts to bolster the state's Sunshine Laws while telling them how the loopholes have personally affected their own community newspaper.

We've received a lot of feedback that people here didn't know there was a problem. They had just assumed their news sources had gotten lazy or didn't bother to report all the details. They've become accustomed to using gossip on social media as facts when retelling a story. As a result, complaints about police-related stories that lack more detail than departments offer have fallen to almost zero.

OUR OPINION | LAMAR COUNTY

Thumbs up,
thumbs down

Don't let anyone tell you the Lamar County Human Resources Council doesn't know how to throw a party. The council's Mardi Gras fundraiser March 8 at the Love Civic Center was fun and exciting — the group raised more than \$80,000 to benefit residents who rely on programs like Meals on Wheels.

“... this year we sold out, added additional tables, and then sold out of those, too,” Executive Director Shelly Braziel said.

Member of the Lamar County Human Resources Council deserve a nod of appreciation for their work, and the community deserves a pat on the back for heeding the call for help.

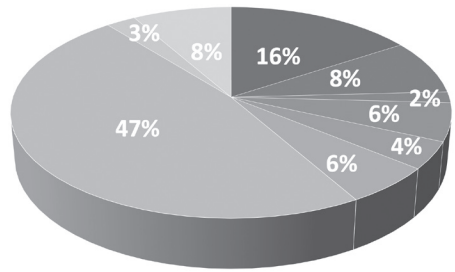
It's especially important we support the efforts of our community help organizations, as we also learned 45 percent of Lamar County households fall into poverty and ALICE classifications. ALICE stands for Asstet Limited, Income Constrained, Employed, and it means those are households making just more than the federal poverty line but less than what it takes to cover the basic cost of living in Lamar County. And Lamar County's percentage is 3 percent higher than the state's. Whether the answer lies in bringing down housing costs or increasing wages, we can do better.

In other news this week, Prairiland ISD's Board of Trustees approved a tax incentive package to bring a \$240 million project to 1,900 acres in southeastern Lamar County near Cunningham. GSE Twelve is expected to save \$12 million in taxes it would pay to the district's maintenance and operations tax, but the district will receive about \$3 million in hold harmless money, plus yearly payments of \$108,900 for 14 years, for a total of about \$4.3 million.

Whereas the money from the property taxes factors into the state's “Robin Hood” school funding formula, the \$4.3 million GSE Twelve will pay Prairiland ISD is the district's to keep. And after 10 years, the solar farm will go onto the tax rolls in full.

Lastly, longtime Clarksville athletic director Dewaski Davis resigned in the wake of the Clarksville boys basketball team having to withdraw from the UIL playoffs. It was a heartbreaking end to a stellar career that turned the school's athletic programs around, and now the school district must find someone to fill those shoes.

ONLINE POLL | RESULTS



How would you help local financially struggling families?

According to a recently released report by The United Way, 45 percent of the Lamar County's households had incomes below the federal poverty line and just slightly above it but below the area's basic cost of living. What would you fix to help financially struggling Lamar County families?

- 2 PERCENT: PROVIDE CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE.
- 3 PERCENT: OTHER
- 4 PERCENT: REDUCE HEALTH CARE COSTS.
- 6 PERCENT: REDUCE TAXES.
- 6 PERCENT: PROVIDE HOUSEHOLD BUDGETING ASSISTANCE.
- 8 PERCENT: REDUCE AREA RENTS.
- 8 PERCENT: I DON'T REALLY CARE.
- 16 PERCENT: RAISE THE MINIMUM WAGE.
- 47 PERCENT: ALL OF THE ABOVE

FACEBOOK FEEDBACK

ALLAN HUBBARD: “Housing costs are a bit high considering wages. It's hard for people to pay \$850-plus rent when they make \$10/hour or less. We need another large scale OJT industry like KC & Soup.”
EDDIE FADDIS: “Teach them how to manage their money.”
BLAINE LAWWILL: “Bring in more business that don't lay off every 6 months while tackling the drug supply.”
JOHN DARST: “Don't touch wages. Artificially inflating or deflating wages will have major cascaded impacts, including rising costs and lost jobs Affordable housing is key.”

SEE MONDAY'S EDITION FOR THE NEXT POLL

COMMENTARY | SUNSHINE WEEK

Don't let the sun set on Texas

Texas Sunshine Laws, or what's left of them, are soul-crushingly depressing. Is there any other way to describe it when a reporter asks a state trooper blocking a road as first responders work a scene how far the road is blocked and the trooper replies, “I can't tell you that” because of the pending investigation? Well, Mr. Shady Trooper, excuse us for wanting to tell the public which area to avoid so first responders can work in a safe environment.

Once the national standard bearer, Texas' Sunshine Laws have been crippled by lawmakers eager for shady deals and judges who believe you should be held accountable for your actions unless you happen to be an elected official and you happen to be conducting “the public's” business.

There's two parts to a state's Sunshine Laws, and both are important. The first is an Open Records Act — in Texas, it's the Public Information Act — that protects your right to inspect and copy records of all government bodies. The second is an Open Meetings Act that protects your right to oversee governmental decision-making. Lawmakers have weakened both so much they now essentially do the bare minimum — they allow you to attend a meeting open to the public just long enough for elected officials to go into closed session and allow you to ask for the minutes to that meeting that state the

board entered a closed session.

If it sounds hilariously ridiculous, that's because it is. Everything really is bigger in Texas, including the government's hypocrisy. Your state government presents a woefully feeble set of Sunshine Laws it tells you champions your right to know, then lawmakers and judges actively work to hobble it as much as possible. They've done that by creating 50 exceptions — 50! — that allow for the withholding of information or allow for government officials to discuss public business out of the public's eye.

Twice since I've joined The Paris News in July 2018 have we been asked to investigate a matter that in other states where I've worked could be investigated by a newspaper with the help of Sunshine Laws. Twice we've been hogtied in our efforts as the information fell under an exception to the Public Information Act.

Now, I will say not all exceptions are against the public good — a real estate purchase or contract negotiation could be jeopardized if a city council did not have the option to conduct discussions on those matters behind closed doors. But some are either vacuous or far too broad — like the Texas



KLARK BYRD
Managing Editor

Supreme Court-backed misuse of an exception to protect information that if released would give advantage to a competitor or bidder. It sounds like it would be on the up-and-up, but what it means is Keller residents weren't allowed to review the city's electricity contract with Gexa Energy and Houston residents were blocked from knowing how many permits were issued to Uber.

Holes poked in Sunshine Laws cast shade on us all. Texans should not abide this farce any longer.

Now I've had my say. You know where I stand, and I'm asking you to take a stand. Accessing information the state says we own should be an everyday transaction, not an adversarial run-around.

Take a moment to learn more by visiting the Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas (foift.org) and the Texas Sunshine Coalition (txsunshine.org). Support Senate Bill 1640 and House Bill 3402, both submitted this session by Sen. Kirk Watson, D-Austin, and Rep. Dade Phelan, R-Beaumont, to clarify the open meetings law to prevent “walking quorums,” where elected officials deliberate public business and reach a decision before meeting in public.

Please don't let the sun set on Texas.

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COMMENTARY | TEXAS ANALYSIS

House ponders asking voters to swap higher sales taxes for property tax cuts

In the rush of legislation filed before last week's deadline, you wouldn't be the only person who missed the measure proposing a 6.26 percent state sales tax rate. No reason you should have seen it or made note of it.

For one thing, it's a teensy tax increase, at least on paper — at least for now. The state's current sales tax rate is 6.25 percent, and local governments can add 2 cents on top of that rate. The increase to 6.26 percent is a placeholder in a proposed constitutional amendment — a place to put the real number when it's available.

That number is in the possession of House Public Education Committee Chair Dan Huberty, R-Houston, who is talking to legislators about raising the state sales tax by a penny, to 7.25 percent (the new tax rate he's waiting to propose), and pouring the money into public education. It wouldn't be for new spending, but it would increase state spending enough to significantly lower local property taxes — the driving political force behind the state's current legislative push for school finance reform.

A little change in your local property taxes, translated into statewide finance, takes a tremendous amount of money. But a 1-cent rate increase in sales taxes would produce a lot of money. The state collected \$31.94 billion from sales taxes in the 2018 fiscal year, according to the Texas comptroller of public accounts; at that level of taxable sales, a 1-cent increase in the rate would bring in an extra \$5.1 billion.

Local school districts, fueled by the local property taxes Texas voters hate so much, spent about \$14.7 billion more than the state on public education in fiscal year 2018, according to the comptroller. The \$5.1 billion from a 1-cent sales tax increase wouldn't be enough to level that out, but it would sure make a dent.

Citing the comptroller's numbers, one more time: The state currently covers 36 per-



ROSS RAMSEY
Texas Tribune



JOHN JORDAN/The Texas Tribune

House Public Education Committee Chair Dan Huberty is talking to legislators about raising the state sales tax by a penny, to 7.25 percent, and pouring the money into public education.

cent of the cost of public education, and the locals cover the other 64 percent; throwing \$5.1 billion into the state column and lowering the local spending by the same amount would bring those closer to balance: about 46 percent state and 54 percent local.

That's also enough — and here is where legislators might find the political payoff, if there is one — to finance a property tax cut that's visible to homeowners. Huberty's introductory House Bill 3 — commonly called the school finance bill — would cut property taxes by about \$100 for the owner of a home with a taxable value of \$250,000, according to the author and others.

He can do that with money that's already in the state's hands. His proposed tax swap would increase the size of the property tax cut and also provide money for public education in future years.

His proposed constitutional amendment would raise your sales taxes, but that same sample homeowner would get almost \$500 in property tax cuts — in addition to the \$100 in property tax cuts in the current school finance bill.

If the sales tax play is the one legislators choose, the issue will be in voters' control before the end of the year, in ballot language something like this: “The constitutional amendment to provide funding for the cost of maintaining and operating the public school system and to reduce school district ad valorem tax rates through an increase in the state sales and use tax rate.” That's Huberty's opening

in House Joint Resolution 3, which would make it to Texas voters' ballots if it's backed with a two-thirds vote in both legislative chambers. The Senate is working to pass its legislation forcing automatic voter referenda on local property tax revenue increases; the trigger is at 2.5 percent for now; speaking to the NE Tarrant Tea Party this week, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick predicted the final number will be between 2.5 percent and 4 percent.

Wherever that limit lands, however, it will not mean a tax cut — which means it's not the kind of property tax legislation voters are telling their politicians they want.

A tax cut is the thing, the prompt to action for this Legislature. Huberty and others are now saying, right out loud and in public, that school finance wouldn't be taking place this year if politicians and legislators were not so motivated by property taxpayers. Their line is that you can't get school finance reform without property tax reform.

And you don't really have property tax relief if all you do is limit how much more expensive government will become in the future. That's why conservative lawmakers are pressing for lower property taxes — even if it means they have to raise other taxes to get there.

Ross Ramsey is executive editor and co-founder of The Texas Tribune, where he writes regular columns on politics, government and public policy. He can be reached at rramsey@texastribune.org or 512-716-8611.



YOUR VOICE

The Paris News welcomes readers' letters, limited to two per month per writer. Text should be original and no longer than 250 words. All letters must contain a complete name, address and daytime telephone number. All letters are subject to editing, and The Paris News reserves the right to refuse publication. Letters may be mailed to P.O. Box 1978, Paris, Texas 75461 or emailed to editor@theparisnews.com.

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Editorials on topics relevant to the community are published every Wednesday and Sunday.

OUR OPINION | HOMELESSNESS

Consider joining PIT Count

Just because someone has a roof over their head doesn’t mean they’re not homeless. As it turns out, defining homelessness is a difficult task.

“Someone who is experiencing homelessness does not have a primary residence,” states the Homeless Connections website. “He or she may be staying in a shelter, living on the streets, occupying a motel room, ‘doubled up’ with friends and family, sleeping in a vehicle, or living in any other unstable or nonpermanent situation.”

Imagine then how Herculean the task must be to try to count a city’s homeless residents. Making sure volunteers who conduct the counting are trained well must be a top priority. And so it is for the Lamar County Homeless Coalition as the 2019 Point In Time Count approaches.

The PIT Count, scheduled for Jan. 24, is an annual counting of the nation’s homeless. It’s conducted at the local level by volunteers, and the Lamar County Homeless Coalition is preparing to train volunteers to get the job done.

The training is set for 10 a.m. Monday at the United Way Center, 2340 Lamar Ave., in Paris. To register, call United Way Executive Director and coalition member Jenny Wilson at 903-784-6642.

Please consider volunteering your time for this important survey. The PIT Count helps the coalition know which areas to target their services and whether local programs are helping to lift people out of or prevent them from falling into homelessness. The information gathered also could help local nonprofits seek or maintain funding for programs.

Coalition President Shelly Braziel said police will accompany volunteers not only for safety, but to help direct them to Lamar County’s homeless.

Braziel also said several services and organizations will come together for a social service fair to take place in conjunction with the PIT Count from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Jan. 24 at The Salvation Army gymnasium, 350 W. Kaufman St., in Paris.

Homelessness is hard to define and hard to count, but lending the Lamar County Homeless Coalition a hand is easy. Call and volunteer.

» Klark Byrd

ONLINE POLL | VOTE



DANIEL OCHOA DE OLZA/AP File Photo

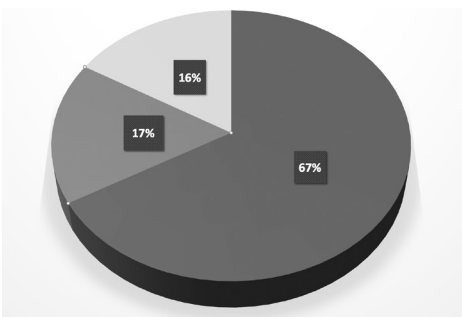
What should be done to end gov’t shutdown?

President Donald Trump and the U.S. Congress reached an impasse over a plan to fund the government that does not include \$5 billion for a southern border wall. Saturday marked two weeks the federal government has been partially shut down.

What do you think should be done to end the shutdown?



SCAN THIS CODE
WITH YOUR
SMARTPHONE
TO VOTE



Thoughts on Paris rescinding the hospital’s tax abatement

67 PERCENT: It was the right thing to do. The hospital promised to not close the south campus in the original agreement. They voided the agreement when it closed.

17 PERCENT: The city should have reworked the agreement with the hospital before voiding the old agreement.

16 PERCENT: The hospital is one of the biggest employers in Lamar County. The city should give Paris Regional Medical Center more leeway.

COMMENTARY | PUBLIC INFORMATION

Texans deserve access to info

In the early morning hours of Feb. 2, 2018, a Clayton (Georgia) Police Department officer’s pursuit of a driver who sped off after the officer signaled him to stop ended when the driver crashed into some trees. As the officer approached, the driver came out from the car’s back window and leapt at the officer with knife in hand. He missed, but quickly got up and began chasing the officer while wildly swinging the knife.

“Stop or I’ll shoot you!” the officer yelled.

“I don’t give a ...” the man shouted as he swung the knife twice more before the officer fired three rounds that brought the man down.

Twelve hours. That’s how long it took for the Clayton Police Department to release the officer’s dash camera footage pursuant to an open records request. Additionally, the officer’s name was released along with a statement from the police chief.

Seventy-seven days. That’s how long it’s been since a Paris police officer fatally shot Edward Paul Zumski in the parking lot of Kings Inn. Here, the police chief also released a statement that named Zumski as the deceased and provided some detail as to why an officer shot him to death. But here the officer has not been identified and the public should expect to never see any related video footage of the shooting.

According to the Paris Police Department statement, officers responded to a reported stabbing at Kings Inn and found a

person bleeding in the parking lot. Their investigation led them to suspect Zumski in the stabbing, and when officers confronted him, he pointed a firearm at them, we’re told. That act prompted the use of deadly force, police said.

We also were told the officer who fatally wounded Zumski was placed on administrative leave while the Texas Rangers investigated. In the 77 days since, the only other information released to the public was that the officer on administrative leave returned to duty. When? The department didn’t say. We only know it was after a period of administrative leave.

We sought more information, but were told none was available because of the ongoing investigation.

Do you want to hear something laughable? That was the same response one of our reporters received a few days ago when he asked an officer at the scene of a vehicle crash how many vehicles were involved.

Let’s be clear: I’m not accusing the Paris Police Department of doing something it shouldn’t. In both the Clayton and Paris officer-involved shootings, the police departments released as much information as they are required to by law. It just so happens Georgia’s Open Records Laws protect the pub-



KLARK BYRD
Managing Editor

lic’s right to access government information better than Texas’. In fact, in just about every ranking from 2002 to current I could find online, Texas Open Records Laws were ranked among the worst in the nation — No. 49 of 50 in one ranking and grades of D and F in others.

The last time I visited this subject, I said there were about 43 exceptions local and state governmental agencies could use to keep certain records off limits. But the latest “Guide to Texas Open Records and Open Meetings Law” from the Texas Bar Foundation and the Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas says “certain records are off limits under about 50 exceptions.” Investigative details are one of those exceptions.

Some are understandable, such as to protect Social Security numbers, health records and names of sexual assault victims. But the number of cars involved in a crash? Seriously?

Information not available to newspapers is information not available to you. You cannot fully participate in our democracy without public access to government information and the government cannot be held accountable by a public kept in the dark.

Join me in writing our state representatives to create and support laws that restore Texans’ right to government information.

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COMMENTARY | TEXAS ANALYSIS

School finance reform will take new money

Two of the most expensive ways to make Texas voters happy just happen to be the top priorities of the state leaders and legislators assembling this week in Austin.



ROSS RAMSEY
Texas Tribune

The state’s school finance system is out of balance when it comes to raising money for education, and out of date when it comes to distributing the money it raises. It’s expensive to re-balance — even when overall spending remains the same — because it pits one set of taxpayers who’ll be paying more against others who’ll be paying less.

And lowering property taxes — a closely related but different financial puzzle — is both expensive and elusive. Most modern attempts to cut property taxes have cost the state a lot of money and left most property owners wondering why the advertised savings never appeared.

Texas’ school finance solution might not be about spending more money, though that was one of the recommendations in a new report from the Texas Commission on Public School Finance, formed to recommend a top-to-bottom rewrite of the state system for funding public education. If there’s already enough money in the system, then the solution may be redistributing it more equitably.

That redistribution, however, is expensive. The state has to raise money on its own if it wants to replace what is currently being raised from cranky property taxpayers. And the state has to figure out who will be the winners and the losers if spending formulas are adjusted, as those “adjustments” mean spending more money on one set of students and less on others.

Even so, the plans advanced so far for public school finance in Texas, as ambitious as some of them are, remain cautiously vague when it comes to sources of new money.

In its final report, that commission said it wanted to: balance local and state funding for public schools; to rework “outdated or otherwise inef-



BOB DAEMMRICH/The Texas Tribune

State Sen. Larry Taylor, R-Friendswood, left, chairman of the Senate Education Committee, and Rep. Dan Huberty, R-Houston, right, chairman of the House Public Education committee, talk with Rep. Harold Dutton, D-Houston, facing, and Rep. Diego Bernal, D-San Antonio on May 27, 2017.

ficient allotments, weights and programs;” to increase equity in schools “with significantly greater investment in low-income and other historically underperforming student groups;” to reduce the growth of property taxes and reliance on the so-called “Robin Hood” system that moves money from wealthier districts to poorer ones; to encourage adoption of “data-informed best practices” and to immediately spend more money to do it; and to increase per-pupil funding in the future based on the results of those practices.

Even if not one more dime is spent on public education in Texas, leveling the fundraising load would force the state to raise more money. The last rebalancing, in 2006, put the state and local shares of public school spending at about 45 percent each, with the other 10 percent coming from the federal government. Now, the numbers are 55.5 percent local and 35 percent state, with the rest coming from the feds. Roughly speaking, it would cost more than \$11 billion to balance that, an amount that would require the state to find that much money somewhere — kind of an early Halloween for some set of taxpayers — in order to lower school taxes for property owners.

It is a financial problem, but it’s also a political one. That local money is raised from property taxes. Texas has the sixth-highest property taxes in the country, according to the Tax Foundation, a

Washington, D.C.-based think tank that tracks state and federal tax issues. Property owners vote. Voters are screaming at the state’s politicians to ease the load. One reason state leaders want to cut property taxes is to make those people happy. But it’s a lot to ask: Those same elected servants fear how their masters — you — might react if they increase other taxes to offset cuts in property taxes.

The formula changes are problematic in another way. It costs more to educate some students than others, and state funding for school districts is adjusted to take those differences into account. Changing those outdated adjustment formulas without new money inevitably means spending more on some students and less on others. That will ripple through each school district in a different way — and those ripples will be noted in advance by lawmakers trying to figure out what the changes will do to their schools at home.

It’s as tricky as the property tax part: expensive to tinker with, and fraught with political risks for politicians who are trying — whether you believe it or not — to produce a great public school education for Texans for as little money as possible.

Ross Ramsey is executive editor and co-founder of The Texas Tribune, where he writes regular columns on politics, government and public policy. He can be reached at rramsey@texastribune.org or 512-716-8611.



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OUR OPINION | LEADERSHIP

Bush leaves legacy of service

Few would say George Herbert Walker Bush was a captivating leader. Rather than rile supporters into a frothing mob, the 41st president spoke with calm demeanor and asked for Americans to give in to their duty to serve one another.

Bush's old-school upbringing influenced every aspect of his life. So polite was he even his political adversaries acknowledged his manners.

Bush, who died Friday at the age of 94, was many things during his long life. He was a World War II hero who came home to become a Texas oilman before returning to public service as a congressman, a U.S. ambassador, director of the CIA, vice president and president.

In the White House, Bush called for a "kinder, gentler" nation, and he pressed his fellow Americans to find good causes to support, then volunteer their time to them.

Although not a native son, Bush called Texas home for 70 years after moving from the Northeast to work in the oil fields. His political life began in Houston in 1964, and though he lost that year, his career in politics ascended from his 1966 election to the House.

By his side was wife Barbara Bush, who passed away April 17. With a marriage spanning more than seven decades, the Bushes go down in U.S. history as the longest-married presidential couple. Together, they showed the nation a way forward with service to others. Bush's work in the White House — which includes improving the Clean Air Act and the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act — is a testament to that ethic.

The nation grieves the loss of George H.W. Bush with the Bush family. From a man who truly loved his country comes this advice: "There is no higher honor than to serve free men and women, no greater privilege than to labor in government beneath the Great Seal of the United States and the American flag." Rest in peace, President Bush.

» Klark Byrd

HISTORY | FROM OUR FILES

25 YEARS AGO

Judge reprimands probation department

Publicity about a reprimand of the Sixth Judicial District Adult Probation Department "does no one any good," chief Dan Bono said. In October, employees cited examples they say contribute to a hostile work environment.

COMMENTARY | SUNSHINE LAWS

Time to fight for your rights

Texas Sunshine Laws are bumming me out.

Sunshine Laws protect the public's right to access information generated by the government and the right to witness proceedings of government agencies, boards and committees. There's usually two parts, a public information act and an open meetings act.

Texas, like every other state in which I've practiced journalism, has both acts. Unfortunately, Texas' Sunshine Laws do little to no good.

Sources in my research tell me that wasn't always the case. In fact, I've learned Texas' protection of the public's right to know was once the envy of the nation. Over time, though, state lawmakers whittled away at those protections and now, with no less than 43 exemptions allowing the government to refuse disclosure of information, Texas is the darkest state I've ever called home.

This isn't just a problem for journalists. It's not like we have any special privileges simply because of our occupation. Journalists have no more rights than the general public, although we are sometimes granted additional access, say at the scene of a car collision or fire, by on-site officials who would rather deal with one person than rubberneckers by the carload. Every exemption to Sunshine Laws chips away at the public's ability to govern itself.

Paul Watler, past president

of the Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas, in a Nov. 20 blog post gave the following examples:

More than two years after five officers were fatally gunned down during a peaceful march in downtown Dallas, the police department continues to refuse media requests for release of video and audio from its investigation.

After a 17-year-old boy took the lives of nine students and a teacher at a high school near Houston this year, local school district officials declined a public information request for a safety audit conducted before the incident, even though there is no apparent prospect of any prosecution related to the safety audit.

Christopher Collins of the Texas Observer on Wednesday recalled how three years ago Enrique Iglesias left the Rio Grande Valley "holding a proverbial sack full of taxpayer cash." In a decision supported by Attorney General Ken Paxton, McAllen officials still refuse to tell residents how much Iglesias was paid.

"The Iglesias debacle was preceded by a 2015 Texas Supreme Court ruling — Boeing Co. v. Paxton — finding that records could be kept secret if their release would



KLARK BYRD
Managing Editor

put the government or businesses at a competitive disadvantage," Collins wrote. "The decision blew a gaping hole in the Texas Public Information Act... It's since been cited more than 1,850 times to withhold all kinds of records: power plant deals, school cafeteria contracts, even the identities of Austin city manager candidates."

The state Legislature is soon to convene and some lawmakers want to restore the public's access to government information. State Rep. Terry Canales, whose district includes McAllen, has submitted House Bill 81 to protect the public's right to review payment information for taxpayer-funded entertainment events. Any bolstering of the state's Sunshine Laws is welcome by me.

James Madison, the nation's fourth president, once wrote "a popular government without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy, or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives."

It's high time Texans' access to information was restored. Lend a hand in that effort by telling state lawmakers to back bills that will get the job done.

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PARTY VIEWS | MASS SHOOTINGS

Regulations will help ensure a safer, still armed nation

It was Aug. 1, 1966, and I had left the UT campus maybe 30 minutes before Charles Whitman unleashed the era of mass shootings in America. Whitman used a hunting rifle. Just imagine how much more damage he could have done with an assault rifle with a bump stock, both of which are now legal.

America has the highest rate of gun ownership and the highest rate of mass shootings in the world.

Much of Texas and America is rural where guns are necessary and common. Contrary to GOP propaganda, the Democratic Party isn't coming for your guns. What we do want are common sense regulations to protect us from abuse of Second Amendment rights, including the following:

- Require all gun purchasers to pass a thorough background check that includes all criminal, civil and psychological databases with enough of a waiting period to both complete the check and to allow a "cooling off" period for distraught buyers.



GARY O'CONNOR
Democrat Party Chairman

- Curtail availability of rapid-fire, magazine-fed, military-style assault weapons with high-capacity clips.
- Prohibit the manufacture, sale or possession of bump stocks, binary trigger systems and trigger cranks that increase the rate of fire.
- Outlaw the personal possession and use of body armor and armor-piercing bullets.
- Repeal legislation granting civil liability immunity to manufacturers and sellers of firearms.
- Enforce criminal penalties for individuals who negligently fail to control access to firearms by minors.
- Enact legislation empowering law enforcement to confiscate weapons from domestic abusers, sex predators and terrorists.

These are among steps we can take to increase our security and reduce gun deaths while still allowing responsible gun ownership. Other countries have successfully implemented regulations that have reduced mass shootings, and we must follow suit for the safety and security of all our citizens, including the more than two-thirds who don't own guns.

Gary O'Connor is chairman of the Lamar County Democratic Party. He can be reached at goconnor1983@yahoo.com.

Society must readjust itself to quell mass shootings

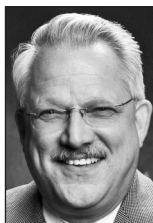
Fifty-two years ago, in 1966, a sniper in the clock tower at Texas University randomly killed 17 people and ushered in the modern era of senseless mass murder shootings.

Since that time, 1,135 people have been killed in similar acts. These tragic events motivate many to call for more gun control laws or even banning or confiscating guns.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported 321,838 deaths due to drunk driving in just 26 years. Annually that's more than 500 times the number of deaths due to mass shootings.

It also reported 3,450 traffic deaths due to texting drivers in 2016 alone. These deaths received far less media attention than mass shooting, perhaps because the perpetrators didn't intentionally kill their victims, or they just occurred far too often.

No one is calling for banning automobiles, cellphones or alcohol because everyone understands it's not these objects, but



CHRIS DUX
Republican Party Chairman

the actions of individuals that caused the deaths.

More gun laws are not the answer to quelling mass shootings.

The root cause of mass shootings must be identified and addressed if this problem is ever to be eliminated.

Soft targets like schools, churches and entertainment venues must be hardened through better controlled access and on site trained security protection.

Since the '60s there has been a steady decline in recognizing the importance of traditional family units as the cornerstone of society. Respect for human life is waning as evidenced by the acceptance of abortion and increasing disregard for the homeless and mentally ill.

Many no longer attend church. Society seems to have turned away from God's will and toward the will of individual self satisfaction.

The root cause of mass shootings might be the moral decay of society. The solution might then be calibration of the moral compass, by turning back to God.

Chris Dux is chairman of the Lamar County Republican Party. He can be emailed at chris@usdux.com.



YOUR VOICE

The Paris News welcomes readers' letters, limited to two per month per writer. Text should be original and no longer than 250 words. All letters must contain a complete name, address and daytime telephone number. All letters are subject to editing, and The Paris News reserves the right to refuse publication. Letters may be mailed to P.O. Box 1978, Paris, Texas 75461 or emailed to editor@theparisnews.com.

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