

# More than 40 found dead in truck

About 100 people believed to be migrants discovered in San Antonio; at least 16 taken to nearby hospitals

STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

SAN ANTONIO — A tractor-trailer found near Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio contained the bodies of 46 dead people, along with 16 others who have been taken to hospitals, officials in San Antonio said on Monday evening.

A law enforcement source told Hearst newspapers that nearly 100 people had been discovered in the back of the northbound trailer, pulled over on Quintana Road near Interstate 35. About half of

the immigrants may have died, the source said.

Early Monday night, San Antonio police had surrounded the truck and were waiting for federal agents with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

By 9 p.m., federal Homeland Security Investigations agents had arrived on the scene.

Elizabeth Allen, a spokeswoman for University Hospital, said the hospital had received two patients from the scene and did not expect to receive any more. The patients'

status was not immediately available.

Officers from the San Antonio Police Department were searching for the driver of the vehicle, who appeared to have abandoned it sometime before it was discovered in a remote area near to railroad trucks and auto salvage yards, the people said.

It was not immediately clear how the people had died, but San Antonio and other cities across Texas have been experiencing heat in June that is at or



Eric Gay/Associated Press

Police swarm the scene where dozens of people were found dead in a semitrailer Monday in a remote area in southwestern San Antonio.



Jon Shapley/Staff photographer

Saige Wittsell, 3, rinses off in a new shower facility Monday at Galveston Island State Park.

## Judge charged over arrest

By John Wayne Ferguson  
STAFF WRITER

Darrell William Jordan, a Harris County misdemeanor court judge, on Monday was arrested and charged with official oppression, according to court records.

Jordan is accused of using his office to unlawfully arrest and detain Wayne Dolcefino, a private media consultant and former TV journalist.

The charge stems from an incident on June 30, 2020, when Dolcefino was jailed in contempt of court by Jordan during a hearing in Harris County Court at Law No. 16.

Jordan accused Dolcefino of attempting to interrupt proceedings in the court by demanding to interview the judge. He jailed Dolcefino after giving him repeated warnings, according to court documents.

Dolcefino was found guilty and sentenced to three days in Harris County Jail, six months of probation and a \$500 fine.

Monday's indictment accuses Jordan of wrongfully holding Dolcefino in contempt or subjecting him to summary punishment and jail without a hearing.

In a 2020 video posted on the Dolcefino Consulting Facebook page after his arrest, Dolcefino revealed that he was wearing a hidden camera during the hearing.

The video shows Dolcefino attempting to ask Jordan about public corruption complaints and public records requests he made about multiple Houston and Harris County officials. In the video, Jordan, who was holding court hearings over Zoom, told Dolcefino that he couldn't ask questions, told him

*Judge continues on A8*

## Park reopens with upgrades

Galveston Island property's fix-up sought since Ike damage in 2008

By Emily Foxhall  
and John Wayne Ferguson  
STAFF WRITERS

GALVESTON — Fourteen years after Hurricane Ike's devastating storm surge significantly damaged Galveston Island State Park, the beachfront side of the property got a major re-do. It reopened Monday to the excitement of visitors and residents. A few campers and picnickers were out fishing and exploring the

spotless new facilities that afternoon.

"We just wanted to check it out," said Royce Winkler, from Temple, who came from a nearby beach house with four of his grandchildren. "It's fabulous."

The much-awaited moment was a reminder of how long a community's recovery can take after a hurricane hits — and of how vulnerable the barrier island still is.

Hurricane Ike walloped

Galveston Island in 2008. The Category 2 storm pushed in a surge as high as 20 feet on nearby Bolivar Peninsula to the east. Its force wiped out communities, with bodies found in the debris. The park, which is split between a bay and beachside on the west end of Galveston Island, was not spared.

The hurricane left buildings such as the headquarters torn open like a hospital gown, said Tom Linton, a for-

mer president of the Friends of Galveston Island State Park, a volunteer group that helps maintain and promote the state park. The damage was so severe that some predicted the park would be closed for up to seven years.

But groups of local volunteers mobilized to help clean up after the storm hit, and the state parks department received some federal and grant funding. Buildings were de-

*Reopening continues on A8*

## Commission leaves elections administrator role unfilled

Lack of quorum halts hiring process with a few weeks left before early voting starts

By Jen Rice  
STAFF WRITER

Harris County's top election position remains unfilled, after a Monday meeting of the county's election commission to select a candidate was canceled due to a lack of quorum.

Their final pick will face a narrowing time frame to prepare for his or her first test: Early voting for the November

election begins Oct. 24, less than three months after the new administrator's likely start date.

The tight schedule adds to an already daunting job in a sprawling county with more than 2.5 million voters, an adversarial political climate with frequent election lawsuits, and a startlingly high rejection rate of nearly one out of five mail ballots in this year's March pri-

maries under the state's new voting laws.

Only two of the five members of the commission were able to attend the Monday meeting in person, a day after County Judge Lina Hidalgo announced she had tested positive for COVID-19.

The commission has not yet set a new date for the rescheduled meeting.

With outgoing Harris County Elections Administrator Isabel Longoria's resignation going into effect Friday, Beth Stevens, chief director of voting

for the county, will become the interim administrator until the new hire begins, which Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo said is likely to be Aug. 1.

The new administrator's appointment will be voted on at a later meeting after the selected candidate meets a 30-day residency requirement to become a voter under the Texas Election Code.

The commission is expected to hold a closed-door executive session to interview two finalists for the position.

Both finalists have prior ex-

perience running elections and are located out of state, according to Hidalgo.

The new elections administrator will run his or her first Harris County election at a time when voters are learning how to use new machines, the county could see record voter turnout for a midterm election and new state laws have changed the rules regarding partisan poll watchers, Renée Cross, senior director of the Hobby School of Public Affairs at the University of Houston,

*Election continues on A8*

### CORONAVIRUS AT A GLANCE

**544,246,052**  
Confirmed cases worldwide

**87,077,810**  
Confirmed cases in U.S.

**7,062,949**  
Confirmed cases in Texas

**6,330,251**  
Deaths worldwide

**1,016,195**  
Deaths in U.S.

**87,064**  
Deaths in Texas

**2,223**  
Confirmed patients in Texas hospitals

**61.79%**  
Texas population 5+ fully vaccinated

Source: WHO, CDC, Texas DSHS, Johns Hopkins University

## REOPENING

From page A3

molished; other temporary or inadequate facilities remained. Officials managed to reopen much of the area by 2009, while larger-scale renovations were planned.

A vision for the overhaul of the park, which was the basis for the new renovations, was completed in 2011. The designs needed to be reviewed and more funding secured. Construction began in 2019. The beach side of the park remained shut for nearly three years, prolonged because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Workers built 95 new campsites, two new bathrooms and a new park headquarters, according to a news release from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. There are also new changing areas, a spot for horses and shade shelters for day use.

This time around, the facilities are farther back from the ocean to protect them better from flooding, wrote Stephanie Garcia, a spokeswoman for the parks department, in an email. The structures are built to withstand 150 mph winds, electric plugs are four feet above the ground, and roads are on average eight feet above sea level.

"It has been a long time coming, and I could not be more excited for public to once again experience the park at its fullest," said Kody Waters, interim superintendent of Galveston Island State Park, in a prepared statement.

Galveston's entire coastline, of course, remains vulnerable to storms such as Ike, and lead-



Photos by Jon Shapley/Staff photographer  
**Malcolm Thomas Sr. and his son, Malcolm Jr., 6, visit a new shelter Monday at Galveston Island State Park that was built as part of the three-year renovation project.**



**From front to rear, twins Carter and Easton Wittsell, 5, and Chloe Lawhon, 16, play in the surf Monday at the park.**

**How to make park reservations:** Reservations can be made online at <https://texasstateparks.reserveamerica.com/> or by calling 512-389-8900 on weekdays during business hours. Campsites can be reserved as early as five months ahead, and day passes 30 days ahead.

ers continue to argue over how best to protect it. A version of the so-called Ike Dike plan, envisioned after that storm, includes tall dune systems that would be built on the west end of the island.

It's being considered in Congress.

Before the renovations began, the Galveston park was one of the most-visited Texas state parks. Between 130,000 and 150,000 people visited the park each year, said Michael Woody, the chief tourism officer for the Galveston Island Park Board of Trustees. While the bay side of the park remained open during construction, officials said they expect the park's visitor numbers to begin to climb back up.

The parks department last week announced the impending opening of the beach side facilities. Pat and Bill Cutchens, a married couple from League City, saw the opening announced on Facebook and came down Monday.

They knew what they were going to do as soon as they got back home: Book overnight reservations.

"We've been waiting for this for a long time and we're impressed," Pat Cutchens said. "We're anxious to come camping."

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## ELECTION

From page A3

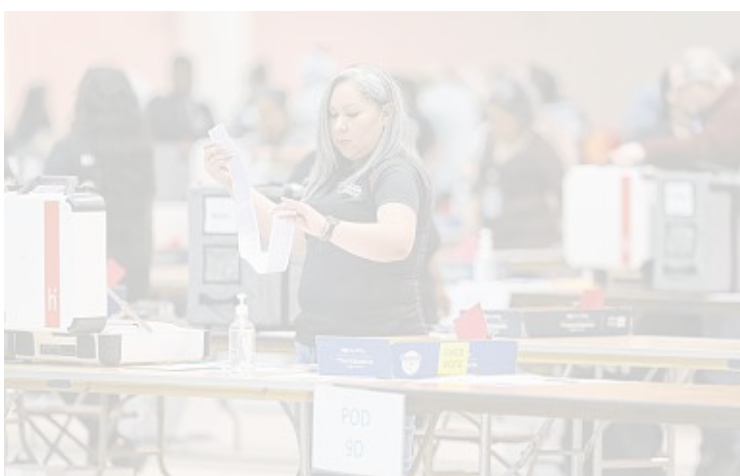
said. "This person had better be ready to work on little sleep and better have some thick skin. Partisans are going to be coming after this person. The Republican commissioners don't believe we should have this position and the only person who has held it had considerable difficulty. So, this person is going to be coming in under some pretty strained circumstances," Cross said.

While some Harris County voters have experience using the new machines from this year's primary election, the majority of voters in November will be using the machines for the first time, Cross said.

### A challenging season

"People anticipate there is going to be quite a bit of intimidation at the polls," Cross said of the new rules regarding poll watchers. "All of these variables are setting it up to be a challenging voting season. However, due to the polarization we see now, I think people are going to dig in and say 'I'm going to vote. I'm going to make sure my vote is counted.' Perhaps more this year than previous years."

Despite the list of challenges facing the new elections administrator, there is reason for optimism, according to Remi Garza, president of the Texas Association of Elections Administrators and the elections administrator in Cameron



Yi-Chin Lee/Staff photographer  
**Harris County staffers certify voting equipment as it arrives at NRG Arena last month.**

County.

"When you're dealing with the large population you're looking at in Harris County, there are a lot of details that need to be double checked, but there's still plenty of time to get them in place in August," Garza said.

Cameron County is in the early planning stages for November, according to Garza. That means local parties are nominating their presiding and alternate judges to oversee polling locations, and county officials are working with independent and write-in candidates.

"With an organization such as Harris County I would imagine there are plenty of individuals in place that are moving the things that need to be moved forward at this point in the election.

"You should start selecting your polling locations and your

early voting sites, determining the hours and then preparing to put that into operation in November," Garza said.

Elections administrators in Texas are preparing for an influx of new poll watchers, Garza said.

### New volunteers

"We're expecting to see a lot of new individuals volunteer to be poll watchers for candidates and campaigns," Garza said. "As long as they come in taking the necessary state training and they come in from the perspective of observing what is happening and not trying to influence what is happening at a polling place, I think everything should be fine."

The Harris County Election Commission is made up of five members: both local party chairs, the county clerk, the county judge and the county tax assessor-collector.

Before Commissioners Court created the appointed election administrator in October 2020, the county clerk and tax assessor-collector managed elections in Harris County.

"We are remaining vigilant during the search process for a new replacement. I have concerns about the short amount of time to prepare for the November election, but I am cautiously optimistic that we'll have a more experienced person in charge," said Cindy Siegel, chair of the Harris County Republican Party.

At the commission's most recent meeting on June 15, Rob Isezen, deputy chair of the Harris County Democratic Party's primary committee, presented a letter to members of the commission signed by around 100 members of the public, many of them current or former Democratic election workers, asking for Longoria to be reinstated as elections administrator.

One of the reasons they cited was the time frame left until the November election.

"Any new elections administrator would have the same challenges as Ms. Longoria, without the benefit of a year and a half of hands-on experience," the letter stated. "In short, they would be starting from scratch. November is rapidly approaching. The voters of Harris County do not have time for this."

This will not be the first time an administrator has overseen a major Harris County election on relatively short notice.

In June 2020, Chris Hollins took over as county clerk short-

ly before the November election, after outgoing clerk Diane Trautman resigned her position, citing health concerns during the pandemic.

"On my first day as County Clerk in 2020, we had just four months to figure out how to administer an election in pandemic conditions for the first time in Texas history," Hollins said in a statement. "That included acquiring the necessary protective equipment, recruiting the election workers we needed, and creating and training our team on new safety procedures."

### It was tight

Administering the 2020 election with a tight time frame during a pandemic took hard work, creativity and an experienced team that was already in place at the office, Hollins said, adding that the next person to run Harris County elections will have his or her own array of new challenges.

"Many core planning items (e.g., number and location of voting centers) should be well under way by August, but the new EA will need to ensure that solutions are in place for issues that have arisen in recent elections, as well as problems created by the recent voter suppression law," he said.

"These include record rejection rates for mail ballots, which we saw in March, and intentional disruption by partisan poll watchers, which will be something we face for the first time in November."

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## JUDGE

From page A3

to sit down and warned him to stop interrupting proceedings.

Court records indicate that the grand jury declined to hand up felony charges related to tampering with records and retaliation.

Jordan was arrested, formally charged and released on Monday evening, he said during a short phone interview with the Houston Chronicle. He directed other questions to his attorney.

Jordan in May was admonished by the State Commission on Judicial Conduct over a separate incident.

The commission found that Jordan threatened to charge at least one assistant district attorney with contempt of court for "failing to show him the proper respect" and in October 2018 summoned several prosecutors to his chambers to lecture them about the perceived disrespect

he was feeling.

During that meeting, Jordan referred to himself as the "king" of his court and the state's attorneys as "hang-'em-high prosecutors," the commission found.

After that incident, the District Attorney's Office accused Jordan of unprofessional actions and made a formal complaint to the commission. The commission ordered Jordan to undergo two hours of additional training with a mentor.

Dolcefino's Facebook page referred to the commission's orders as a joke and wrote that Jordan needed to "face justice." The Facebook page didn't refer to Jordan's arrest as of Monday.

The District Attorney's Office and Dolcefino did not immediately respond to a phone call on Monday evening.

Official oppression is a Class A misdemeanor. It carries a possible punishment of one year in county jail and fine of up to \$4,000.

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## TRUCK

From page A3

near record levels.

Human smuggling has had tragic consequences before in San Antonio.

In July 2017, authorities found 39 undocumented immigrants in a sweltering tractor trailer in the parking lot of a Walmart on the South Side. Eight were already dead, and two more died later at area hospitals.

A Kentucky trucker who transported the immigrants from Laredo to San Antonio later was sentenced to two concurrent life sentences without parole. He had pleaded guilty to two counts of conspiracy to transport undocumented immigrants for profit, resulting in death.

At the trucker's trial, witnesses testified that immigrants were told that, as soon as the tractor-trailer left Laredo, the cooling system would turn on. But it never did.



Billy Calzada/Staff photographer  
**Officials arrive on the scene Monday in San Antonio.**

As temperatures rose in the trailer, the desperate migrants tried to cut holes in the side with keys, a knife and their bare hands. "Someone tried to claw their way through. There was blood everywhere," a federal agent testified. "You could tell they just shredded their hands."

In June 2018, more than 50 immigrants were discovered in an air-conditioned tractor trailer parked in an alley in the sedate Leland Terrace subdivision on the North Side. The migrants ran from the truck in an attempt

to elude police officers, jumping over fences and climbing on the roofs of houses. More than 50 were apprehended.

State officials in Texas, already managing record levels of migrant crossings from Mexico, have been bracing for a new surge this spring and summer.

The Rio Grande Valley Sector Border Patrol last week said it had disrupted four human smuggling events that resulted in 50 arrests.

Big rigs emerged as a popular smuggling method in the early 1990s amid a surge in U.S. border enforcement in San Diego and El Paso, which were then the busiest corridors for illegal crossings.

Before that, people paid small fees to mom-and-pop operators to get them across a largely unguarded border. As crossing became exponentially more difficult after the 2001 terror attacks in the U.S., migrants were led through more dangerous terrain and paid thousands of dollars more.