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'Dishonoring' sacred site?



A border wall is seen April 29 where part of the rock was blasted for construction at the base of Mount Cristo Rey as viewed from the Mexican side of the border. PHOTOS BY OMAR ORNELAS/EL PASO TIMES

El Pasoans express concern with border wall at Mount Cristo Rey

Jeff Abbott
El Paso Times
USA TODAY NETWORK - TEXAS

SUNLAND PARK, New Mexico — The sun had barely begun to rise above the Franklin Mountains as people began arriving in the parking lot at the base of Mount Cristo Rey for their morning hike.

By mid-morning, families, hiking clubs, and individuals were streaming up the trail towards the 29-foot-tall limestone monument of Jesus with arms stretched out on the cross that looks out over the Borderland.

From the top hikers can see two countries, the United States and Mexico, and the U.S. states of New Mexico and Texas, and the Mexican state of Chihuahua.

Sadie Salinas, 38, was one of those who had arrived for the sunrise to hike up the mountain on Saturday, May 30. She had never been up the mountain, but she heard the history of the site and thought of the tens of thousands of pilgrims who had made the hike prior to her as she walked up towards the cross.

Yet in spite of knowing the history, Salinas said she was unaware of how close the mountain sits to the border and the Trump administration's plan to extend the border wall along Mount Cristo Rey's southern base.

"I didn't know that there was no wall on this side of the mountain, and that there wasn't even a fence," Salinas said as she looked down towards the border. "It is really interesting to see how at this point we're all really connected."

"It is kind of sad to think that this being such a sacred thing that they could cut into it and start blasting it ... I understand the need to protect, but maybe there is a better way to do that other than dishonoring this mountain."

Since 1939, hikers, bikers and Catholic pilgrims have made the ascent up the mountain — a sacred site to the faithful on both sides of the border.

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Mount Cristo Rey in Sunland Park is seen on Good Friday, April 15, 2022, photographed with a drone. Members of the community hiked up the mountain as part of the annual pilgrimage for Christians and Catholics in the borderland.

EPISD cuts 94 jobs

District declares financial exigency at contentious meeting

Kristian Jaime
El Paso Times
USA TODAY NETWORK - TEXAS

Following a contentious four-hour meeting of the El Paso Independent School District Board of Trustees, 94 jobs were cut after the district declared financial exigency.

The vote, held during a special session on Thursday, June 4, at the EPISD headquarters located at 1014 N. Stanton St., confirmed austerity measures many expected. The 5-1 vote had only District 7 Trustee Daniel Call voting nay. District 6 Trustee Valerie Beals was not present.

What started as cordial became impassioned as Call requested MoakCasey, an Austin-based public school consulting firm the district hired to conduct an audit this month, to review the three options in financial exigency presented to the board by Deputy Superintendent David Bates.

"The decisions that had to be made were required to get us to a better financial position," EPISD Superintendent Brian Lusk said. "The actions the board took this evening were aimed at getting our district to the right size with a cut to the total number of salaries to 8% to 9%. We've got to work hard to make sure we stick to a balanced budget."

Lusk noted that teachers who were laid off would have the right of first refusal should new positions become available.

Call's motion to postpone the vote by 24 hours for the firm to review which option was most feasible failed. Trustees, along with Lusk, backed the one with the deepest cuts.

Lusk said the loss of some teaching positions will not impact current student-to-teacher ratios.

What did EPISD approve in the financial exigency vote?

Under the plan, the district projected \$526,227,322 in revenue, \$530,558,889 in expenditures, a \$4,331,567 deficit, and a fund balance of \$56,024,745.

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Valerie Ortega, a teacher who was told she would be downsized, spoke during public comment concerning possible fallout of financial exigency during a special session on June 4 at EPISD headquarters.

KRISTIAN JAIME/EL PASO TIMES

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