

# Neighborhoods to foot officer raises

Contracts to provide additional patrols will go up to help pay higher salaries, county says

By Matt deGrood and John Lomax V  
STAFF WRITERS

Neighborhoods and homeowners associations that pay for additional Harris County deputy constables to patrol their streets could see the cost of those contracts increase by around 24% to help foot the bill for county law enforcement pay raises, according to the county's

budget office. Although Daniel Ramos, the county's budget director, suggested raising contract prices by roughly 8% per year across the next five years, Texas' Local Government Code requires counties collect the full cost of services it provides through initiatives like Harris County's contract deputy program. After the recent "pay parity" measure that brought county law en-

forcement up to the salaries offered by the Houston Police Department, residents will be required to pay at least 70% of the new salaries plus expenses, Ramos said. Commissioner Lesley Briones specified that, while the county must recoup all of its costs associated with contract patrols, that doesn't mean people and organizations with contracts will have to pay for 100% of their deputies' salaries. They instead will be responsible for covering the full cost of the time a deputy spends patrolling their

contract area, which can be anywhere from 70% to 100% of their time on the clock. "So, because we are paying — we have decided, at least three of us — to increase our law-enforcement officer salaries, the community will be paying our law-enforcement officers more, as we are," Briones said at Thursday's meeting. Representatives for at least one homeowners association spoke at Thursday's meeting in favor of increasing the cost of the contracts, saying it was good to pay law enforcement

even if it meant higher costs. But it's not clear how widespread that opinion will be among those with constable contracts. Calls to one association went unreturned as of Friday afternoon. Precinct 8 Constable Phil Sandlin said many of the contracts for the coming fiscal year have already been signed, and that renegotiating them would be a difficult process. "Contracts have all gone out already — there may be one or two left at our agency that

*Patrols continues on A8*

# Floods spawn a revival of false claims online



Sam Owens/San Antonio Express-News

Volunteers work to secure a cross on July 10 near Camp Mystic in Hunt. False stories after the July 4 flood circulated readily.

Weather disasters known to spur misinformation on government, more

By Rebekah F. Ward  
STAFF WRITER

When the Guadalupe River flooded from torrential rains on the Fourth of July, it unleashed a wave of lies and misinformation on social media that eroded trust among many Texans trying to understand the disaster. For the founder of a geoengineering startup called Rainmaker, the effects of the misinformation were acute. In the days after the floods, Augustus Doricko told reporters he received upward of 100 death threats from people who mistakenly claimed



Michel Fortier/San Antonio Express-News

HTR RV park employees look over an area where homes were swept away by the flooding Guadalupe River.

that he had used a technology called "cloud seeding" to cause the deluge. "I can handle death threats, needless and unfounded though they are," Doricko said on social media July 10. "Threatening to doxx or harm my family is atrocious." Doricko and his startup had attracted the scrutiny of online sleuths who harbored a conspiracy that often reemerges in the wake of storms: that governments and companies are secretly manipulating the weather to deadly effect.

*Floods continues on A3*

# Official's texts on Islam stir questions

Funeral chair sent Islamophobic links amid mosque probe

By Dug Begley and Sarah Smith  
STAFF WRITERS

Just as the Texas Funeral Service Commission was trying to push its agenda forward in the final days of the legislative session, the commission's board chair texted its executive director a series of misleading claims about Islam. Shortly after 11 p.m. on May 20, funeral board chair Kristin Tips sent two messages to then-executive director Scott Bingaman. The first was an image comparing the theology of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It made several false claims about how the Quran — Islam's holy book — treats women and nonbelievers. The second was a 15-minute YouTube video by a popular Israeli-American travel vlogger about the risks Islam poses to American society. The video relies on clips of interviews unrelated to the East Plano Islamic Center's development, but focuses a lot of attention on the development. EPIC had already come under the scrutiny of Texas regulators — including the funeral commission Tips and Bingaman oversaw. The text exchange, obtained by the Houston Chronicle through a public records request, is one of a handful between April 30 and May 20 in which Tips sent Bingaman links — often without comment — to right-wing media or commentary related to fears of Islam threatening or eliminating freedoms in Texas. At the time, Tips and Bingaman were acting on Gov. Greg Abbott's orders to investigate the Plano Islamic center's operations, and the transport and preparation of bodies for burial. Tips and Bingaman, who was

*Texts continues on A8*

# Texas, Calif. redistricting battles all wrong, Schwarzenegger says

When it comes to the escalating redistricting arms race between Texas and California, Arnold Schwarzenegger says we're getting it all wrong. "It's not a battle between Democrats and Republicans," the former Republican governor of California told me over Zoom Friday. "This is a battle between the politicians and the people. I go with the people." Sitting under a sun-lit umbrella on his Los Angeles patio, Schwarzenegger, now 78,



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puffed on a fat cigar and recalled a question he got more than 20 years ago after failing as governor of California to

pass a fair system of drawing political maps that politicians couldn't rig. "A journalist asked me 'well, don't you get the message that you've tried three times and the people voted it down?' " Schwarzenegger said he responded with an anecdote from his power-lifting era: There were times in Germany and Austria when he tried to bench press 500 pounds and he couldn't do it, even after 10

*Falkenberg continues on A6*



Frederic J. Brown/AFP via Getty Images

Former California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger says the state should not lose its independent redistricting commission.