

Metro contract rebid raises questions

Process was restarted after chair’s husband expressed interest, although he didn’t win it

By Mike Morris and Octavia Johnson
STAFF WRITERS

Metro canceled and restarted a competitive bidding process last year after Chair Elizabeth Gonzalez Brock’s husband expressed interest in doing the work. Andy Brock did not win the second round of bidding for courier services and had first met

with Metro to discuss the topic in 2023, months before Mayor John Whitmire was elected and named Elizabeth Brock Metro chair. The solicitation was reissued not because of Brock, Metro spokesperson Meredith Johnson added, but to remove “unnecessary work” that Metro had erroneously included in the initial scope. But a flurry of internal emails

shows Metro executives and procurement staff closely tracked Andy Brock’s interactions with the transit agency last year, and that some officials were on edge about his involvement. After the initial round of bidding had closed, emails show, Metro leaders directed procurement officials to contact Brock, who “indicated his interest in the courier contract and didn’t know if it would be resolicited.” “If every bid that the organization did, any vendor was able to come along after the bid had closed and say, ‘I want in, re-do

it,’ that’d be an awful precedent,” said Mike Mucha, deputy executive director of the Government Finance Officers Association. “Procurement professionals need to be able to exercise independent judgement and authority free of potential conflicts of interest. Procurement functions best when it has the ability to make decisions free of influence from other parts of the organization.” Elizabeth Brock already faces questions over Metro’s embrace of a microtransit vendor she formerly led. That vendor, the non-

profit Evolve Houston, took on a multimillion-dollar role while avoiding competitive bidding and Metro’s typical approach to measuring performance — though its work for Metro may now be ending. Johnson, the Metro spokesperson, said Elizabeth Brock did not participate in any conversations about the courier procurements. She said the solicitation was reissued to remove a reference to charitable food deliveries, which she said Metro no longer does. *Metro continues on A6*

TEXANS 23, RAIDERS 21

PICKING UP THE WIN



Texans cornerback Damon Arnette, from left, and linebacker Henry To’oTo’o are all smiles as cornerback Derek Stingley Jr. runs back a pick six in the first quarter of the Texans’ win against the Las Vegas Raiders on Sunday at NRG Stadium. **Coverage in Sports, B1.**

ELIZABETH CONLEY/HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Abbott envisions Harris as ‘dark red’

Governor to spend \$25M in bid to defeat House Democrats

By Benjamin Wermund
STAFF WRITER

Gov. Greg Abbott is prepared to pour \$25 million into his effort to turn Harris County — a Democratic stronghold he lost by 10 percentage points in 2022 — “dark red” as he seeks a record fourth term in office, according to details of the plan shared with Hearst Newspapers. As part of that, the Republican governor is planning to target House Democrats there with messaging on crime, bail restrictions and property taxes, key planks of his reelection pitch. The governor recruited Republican candidates to run for every state House seat in the county, including some where the GOP has not had a candidate on the ballot in years. And he’s hired a consultant based in Houston, Jessica Colón, to help coordinate their efforts. “Governor Abbott is going on the offensive in Harris County, a key battleground for the state,” said Eduardo Leal, press secretary for the governor’s campaign. “Governor Abbott’s mission is clear: to keep Texas affordable, safe and prosperous.” It is a lofty goal for the governor, who has not won the county since his first gubernatorial run in 2014. And it comes as Republicans are expected to be largely playing defense amid a midterm backlash against President Donald Trump, who drew just 46% of the vote in Harris County last year. “You want to rally your base, but to say they’re going to make Harris County ‘dark red’ — I think that’s a very ambitious plan,” said Renee Cross, senior *Abbott continues on A6*

Talarico aims to carve out edge in South Texas

By John C. Moritz
STAFF WRITER

WESLACO — U.S. Senate hopeful James Talarico may be on the path to becoming a Presbyterian minister in his private life, but he used an appearance in

South Texas on Thursday to dispel any notion that he would be a choirboy in Congress. The seminarian and Democratic state representative used a form of the word “fight” more than a dozen times in a 16-minute speech onstage at a nightclub 10

miles from the Rio Grande, where he appeared with Tejano music legend and rising Democratic star Bobby Pulido. “If you’re ready to remake this broken political system in our own image, we’re ready to fight alongside you,” Talarico told

about 900 people inside the Mustang Lounge Night Club. “We’re going to fight for every vote, including right here in the Rio Grande Valley.” Talarico is battling U.S. Rep. Jasmine Crockett of Dallas to *Talarico continues on A5*

U.S. chases another tanker in Caribbean tied to Venezuela

By Aamer Madhani
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — The U.S. Coast Guard on Sunday was pursuing another sanctioned oil tanker in the Caribbean Sea as the Trump administration appeared to be intensifying its targeting of such vessels connected to the Venezuelan government. The pursuit of the tanker, which was confirmed by a U.S. official briefed on the operation, comes after the administration announced Saturday that it had seized a tanker for the second time in less than two weeks. The official, who was not authorized to comment publicly about the ongoing operation and

spoke on the condition of anonymity, said Sunday’s pursuit involved “a sanctioned dark fleet vessel that is part of Venezuela’s illegal sanctions evasion.” The official said the vessel was flying a false flag and was under a judicial seizure order. The Pentagon and the Homeland Security Department, which oversees the Coast Guard, deferred questions about the operation to the White House, which did not offer comment on the operation. Saturday’s predawn seizure of a Panama-flagged vessel called Centuria targeted what the White House described as a “falsely flagged vessel operating as part of the Venezuelan shadow

fleet to traffic stolen oil.” The Coast Guard, with assistance from the Navy, also seized a sanctioned tanker called Skipper on Dec. 10, another part of the shadow fleet of tankers that the United States says operates on the fringes of the law to move sanctioned cargo. It was not even flying a nation’s flag when it was seized. President Donald Trump, after that first seizure, said the U.S. would carry out a “blockade” of Venezuela. The actions come as Trump has ratcheted up his rhetoric against Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. This past week, Trump de- *Venezuela continues on A6*



Matias Delacroix/Associated Press

An oil tanker is docked Sunday in Puerto Cabello, Venezuela. The U.S. alleges that nation has a “shadow fleet to traffic stolen oil.”