

County
may lose
Harvey
funding

Money has become point of contention as project delays pile up

By John Lomax V
STAFF WRITER

Harris County is one step closer to losing as much as one-third of a \$322 million federal grant approved in the wake of Hurricane Harvey. The grant is part of a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development funding package intended to spur recovery in areas damaged by Hurricane Harvey. Subject to a strict February 2028 state spending deadline, the money has emerged as a point of controversy as officials grapple with project delays and other issues that have cast doubt over the county's ability to deliver the projects on time. The Texas General Land Office recently announced a one-year extension for Hurricane Harvey projects, and officials with the Harris County Flood Control District now expect to complete all 11 grant-funded projects on time. But the county will have \$13 million left over even if it finishes all of its current projects by the 2028 deadline, according to a Oct. 2 letter from flood control Executive Director Marcus Stuckett to Land Commissioner Dawn Buckingham.

It's an improvement from a previous estimate that found six of the projects would miss the prior deadline, jeopardizing \$245 million in federal funding. Even if all 11 projects finish ahead of the 2028 deadline, any unspent money would be returned to the GLO. "Everything will be complete with that one-year extension," Stuckett told the Houston Chronicle. "But in all cases, our (cost) estimates were high, and a lot of the projects came in below the engineers' construction estimates." Stuckett asked Buckingham to consider two alternative plans, both of which involved putting the \$13 million in leftover funds toward flood mitigation projects currently slated to be funded by a different Harvey recovery grant. Stuckett acknowledged, however, that doing so would require an additional extension to give the county time to identify new projects for that other Harvey recovery program. Buckingham rejected both plans in an Oct. 14 response to Stuckett. "Given Harris County's repeated inability to fully execute *Harvey continues on A6*

★★★★ ELECTIONS 2026 ★★★★★

The final sprint



Raquel Natalicchio/Houston Chronicle

James Talarico, left, says wealthy donors are trying to buy elections while regular Texas struggle to get by. Ken Paxton, right, says Talarico is a liberal out of touch with Texas, doubling down on the culture wars that have kept the GOP in power in Texas.



Elizabeth Conley/Houston Chronicle

Paxton, Talarico frame closing arguments in Texas Senate race

By Casey Murray and John C. Moritz
STAFF WRITERS

The state's nailbiter U.S. Senate race has officially hit the final dash with Democrat James Talarico painting the world's richest person as the poster child for political self-dealing and Republican Ken Paxton doubling down on the culture-war issues that have helped keep his party in power in Texas for decades. Both Paxton and Talarico are crisscrossing the state amid early voting, delivering contrasting closing messages with the same styles that have marked the race since each nailed down his party's nomination months ago. Talarico's closing argument takes aim at Elon Musk, the trillionaire founder of Space X and Tesla who has pumped a staggering \$158 million into a super PAC charged with boosting Paxton's fortunes. Paxton has continued to paint Talarico as

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a liberal out of touch with Texas. "This guy is really obsessed with transitions," Paxton, the state's three-term attorney general, said of his opponent during a weekend rally in San Antonio. "He wants to transition our kids. He wants to transition Texas off of oil and gas. How about we transition him and his crazy ideas right out of Texas?" As Talarico looks to break the GOP's 32-year grip on statewide office, he's done his best to avoid pitfalls that have dragged

down many Texas Democrats in past cycles. Instead, he's building on his argument that wealthy donors are buying elections while regular Texans struggle to get by. In his argument to voters in the final stretch, Musk personified the imbalance. "In all likelihood, if you have seen an attack ad on your TV, that was Elon," Talarico, a four-term state House member, said at a rally Monday on the campus of the University of Texas in Denton. "If you've gotten lies in your mailbox, that was Elon. If you've received a text message saying scary things about me, that was Elon, too. Ken Paxton is funded by one dude." With early voting already under way until Oct. 30, Ken Paxton and James Talarico face a fast-closing window to communicate their message to voters in the U.S. Senate race. While Talarico, who has clung to a *Senate continues on A5*

Poll: Dems' faith in election results falls

By Ali Swenson and Linley Sanders
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Daemien Williams used to trust U.S. election results, but not anymore. The 50-year-old Democrat in Centreville, Illinois, worries that President Donald Trump and other Republicans will try anything from intimidating voters to seizing ballots to hold on to power in November's mid-

term elections — and, in the process, jeopardize the outcome. "I don't put anything past these people," he said. "My trust level is at its all-time low." Registered voters who identify as Democrats have lost faith in America's election results since the midterm elections four years ago, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Their confi-

dence that votes will be counted accurately has dropped from 75% in 2022 to 55% this year. The overwhelming majority of Democratic voters also say the president attempting to influence U.S. elections is a "major problem," a view that's shared by independents but not most Republicans. Meanwhile, Republican voters' confidence in the results has risen slightly since 2022 — but they're still less likely to say

they have faith in the electoral process than Democrats. The survey, conducted less than a month before Election Day, signals how opinion has changed since Trump returned to the White House last year and began a wide-ranging effort to expand federal authority over elections. Even though the Constitution gives states and Congress control over voting processes, Trump has tried to over- *Elections continues on A5*

Prop A would make pot arrests lower priority for HPD



Richard Vogel/Associated Press

Activists argue Houston would be better served if police focused on more serious crimes instead of marijuana cases.

By Matt deGrood
STAFF WRITER

Houston voters this fall will decide whether to force the Houston Police Department to deprioritize low-level marijuana enforcement at a time when data show local police have been arresting more people on precisely those charges in recent years. Activists behind a statewide effort to reduce the number of people arrested on misdemeanor marijuana charges collected signatures to place Proposition A on the November ballot, arguing that Houston would be better served if police focused on more serious crimes. Voters in Austin,

Dallas and other Texas cities have already approved similar measures. Yet the recent upswing in marijuana cases here is more complicated than any one agency's enforcement priorities, experts said. Likely more important, they say, was a 2023 state law that put prosecutors at risk of being removed from office if they show leniency in enforcing entire classes of crimes, including misdemeanor marijuana possession. Local police booked nearly three times as many people into Harris County jail solely or primarily on misdemeanor marijuana possession charges in 2024 than the year prior, county data

show. The trend began in September 2023 — the month the law on prosecuting took effect. Marijuana bookings remained elevated last year, though the tallies in recent years still are just a fraction of the volume of charges filed a decade ago. Arrests spiked most among county deputies, with Houston police not far behind. "The city of Houston has deprioritized enforcement of arrests related to possession of small amounts of marijuana for several years," Mayor John Whitmire said. "When a person is charged with this type of crime, it is because the Harris County Dis- *Prop A continues on A6*