

Miller losing support of some in GOP



Abbott, other top Republicans back incumbent ag commissioner's rival

By John C. Moritz
STAFF WRITER

When Republican Sid Miller was introducing himself to Texas voters a generation ago, he seldom failed to mention the 22 world championship titles he'd won as a rodeo cowboy. But now, after 12 years as the Texas agriculture commissioner and a dozen more before that as a state representative, some of the state's most powerful Republicans and several one-time conservative allies are

trying their best to buck him out of the saddle. At 70, Miller is running for a fourth term to head the state agency that oversees Texas' largest-in-the-nation farming and ranching industry. He is facing beekeeper and businessman Nate Sheets in the March 3 Republican primary, an opponent short on political experience but long on influential endorsements. Gov. Greg Abbott, former Agriculture Commissioner Susan Combs, the Texas Farm Bureau's politi-

cal arm and a handful of state senators have thrown their backing behind Sheets. In endorsing Sheets, Abbott alluded to what he called Miller's "corruption," and later in a radio appearance, he questioned the commissioner's honesty. But he and others who endorsed Sheets kept most of the focus on the challenger. "Having served as Texas Agriculture Commissioner, I know the importance of principled, results-driven leadership rooted in integrity," said Combs, who left the agency in 2007 and later served as state comptroller. "Nate Sheets is not a career politician, he's a

builder who understands agriculture, business and accountability." Miller said he was unafraid of the competition and eager to defend his record among GOP primary voters. "They come after me every time because they can't tell me what to do," Miller said in an interview this week. "He (Sheets) is the establishment candidate, just like Abbott is the establishment candidate. I'm the MAGA candidate. I'm the MAHA (Make America Healthy Again) candidate. I'm the Trump candidate. So that's the difference." Trump, over the years, **Miller continues on A4**



Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller, left, and GOP primary challenger Nathan Sheets.



Detainees at the South Texas Family Residential Center wave signs Saturday during a demonstration in Dilley.

Brenda Bazal/Associated Press

Held in Texas

State houses country's only centers for detained immigrant families

By Benjamin Wermund
STAFF WRITER

The detention of a 5-year-old boy and his father in a South Texas immigration facility has sparked fresh scrutiny of the Trump administration's renewed practice of detaining families — most of whom are being held in Texas, even if they are picked up by immigration enforcement in other states. Texas is home to the only immigrant detention centers in the country that hold children and their parents, so virtually any family that is arrested and not immediately deported is sent here. On Wednesday, U.S. Rep. Joaquin Castro visited the South Texas Family Residential Center in Dilley to meet with the 5-year-old boy and his father, who were arrested in Minnesota last week and transferred here. Castro said he was checking on their welfare and called for their release. Outside the facility, a large group of pro-



Ali Daniels/Associated Press

Liam Conejo Ramos, 5, is detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers on Jan. 20.

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testers gathered in support of hundreds of detainees being held there. Protesters banged drums, chanted and carried signs that included "Children are not criminals!" Later, Texas state police used chemical irritants to try and disband the group. The Biden administration ended the practice of family detention in 2021, instead releasing families temporarily with ankle monitors and trackable cellphones. But President Donald Trump resumed it in March and reopened the facilities in Texas. Immigrant advocates say the Trump administration is holding families in those facilities — which have long faced accusations of poor conditions and medical care — for long periods, apparently in an effort to get **Centers continues on A15**

Tensions still high in Minnesota despite talks

By Steve Karnowski, Jack Brook and Giovanna Dell'Orto
ASSOCIATED PRESS

MINNEAPOLIS — President Donald Trump seemed to signal a willingness to ease tensions in Minneapolis after a second deadly shooting by federal immigration agents, but there was little evidence Wednesday of any significant changes following weeks of

harsh rhetoric and clashes with protesters. The strain was evident when Trump made a leadership change by sending his top border adviser to Minnesota to take charge of the immigration crackdown. That was followed by seemingly conciliatory remarks about the Democratic governor and mayor. Trump said he and Gov. Tim Walz, whom he criticized for weeks, were on "a similar

wavelength" following a phone call. After a conversation with Mayor Jacob Frey, the president praised the discussion and declared that "lots of progress is being made." But on city streets, there were few signs of a shift. Immigration enforcement operations and confrontations with activists continued Wednesday in Minneapolis and St. Paul. A group of protesters blew whistles and pointed out federal officers in a vehicle on a north Minneapolis street. When the officers' vehicle moved, a small convoy of activists followed in their cars for a few blocks until the officers stopped again. Associated Press journalists were in the neighborhood covering the enforcement actions. When the journalists got out **Minn. continues on A15**

Campaign dollars may hint at office ambitions

2 council members boast nearly as much as the mayor

By Molly Smith
STAFF WRITER

Mayor Gina Ortiz Jones' main foes on the City Council came close to outraising her during her first six months in office — a possible sign of the political ambitions of officeholders who are less than a year into their current four-term term. Jones raised just over \$53,200 from July 1 to Dec. 31, according to campaign finance reports filed on Jan. 15. That fundraising cycle started soon after she was sworn in on June 18 after winning a bruising runoff. District 7 Council Member Marina Alderete Gavito brought in \$42,650 during the same period, followed by District 10 Council Member Marc Whyte at \$36,550. Alderete Gavito has made her mayoral ambitions known in private conversations with friends and supporters, according to several sources. Publicly, she maintains that her focus is representing the near Northwest Side on council. Whyte, too, is seen as a future candidate, but for state or federal office. His first electoral bid was for Texas House District 121 in 2018. More recently, he mullied a run for either the open Congressional Districts 21 or 35 in this March's Republican primary, but ultimately decided to keep his Northeast Side council seat. Whyte and Alderete Gavito were first elected to council in 2023 and reelected to four-year terms in May. "It's pretty clear that both Marc and Marina have aspirations for other offices," said political consultant Laura Barbarena, who has managed council and mayoral campaigns, including Alderete Gavito's 2023 campaign. "For them to be constantly flexing, working and growing their donor list is part of preparing to run for another office."

Whyte and Alderete Gavito attributed their hauls to satisfaction with their work on council so far. "I think it shows the support of the community for the work that's being done out of our office," Whyte said. The council member who **Campaign continues on A4**



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