

## Lottery agency, ex-director charged

Allegations stem from \$95 million jackpot scheme in 2023

By Eric Dexheimer  
and Tony Plohetski  
STAFF WRITERS

Former Texas lottery director Gary Grief and the Texas Lottery Commission have been criminally charged with misusing their positions in a \$95 million Lotto Texas draw in which the agency assisted international gamblers to engineer a guaranteed win, earning tens of millions of dollars in profits at the expense of ordinary players.

The April 22, 2023, Lotto Texas draw was the subject of a Hearst

Newspapers investigation that revealed how the executive and agency tasked with overseeing the game helped the professional bettors buy virtually every possible six-number combination — more than 25 million tickets in all — thus ensuring that they would have a jackpot winner.

Court records show that the Travis County District Attorney's Office issued summonses for Grief and the commission last week, indicating that the defendants were being notified of the charges. Grief was ordered to appear in court on June 26. The com-

mission's summons was issued to Courtney Arbour, executive director of the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation.

The crime, abuse of official capacity, is a broadly worded offense alleging "intent to harm or defraud another" by misusing "government property, services, personnel or any other thing of value belonging to the government."

Prosecutors pegged the value of the alleged misconduct by Grief and the commission at more than \$300,000, making it a first-

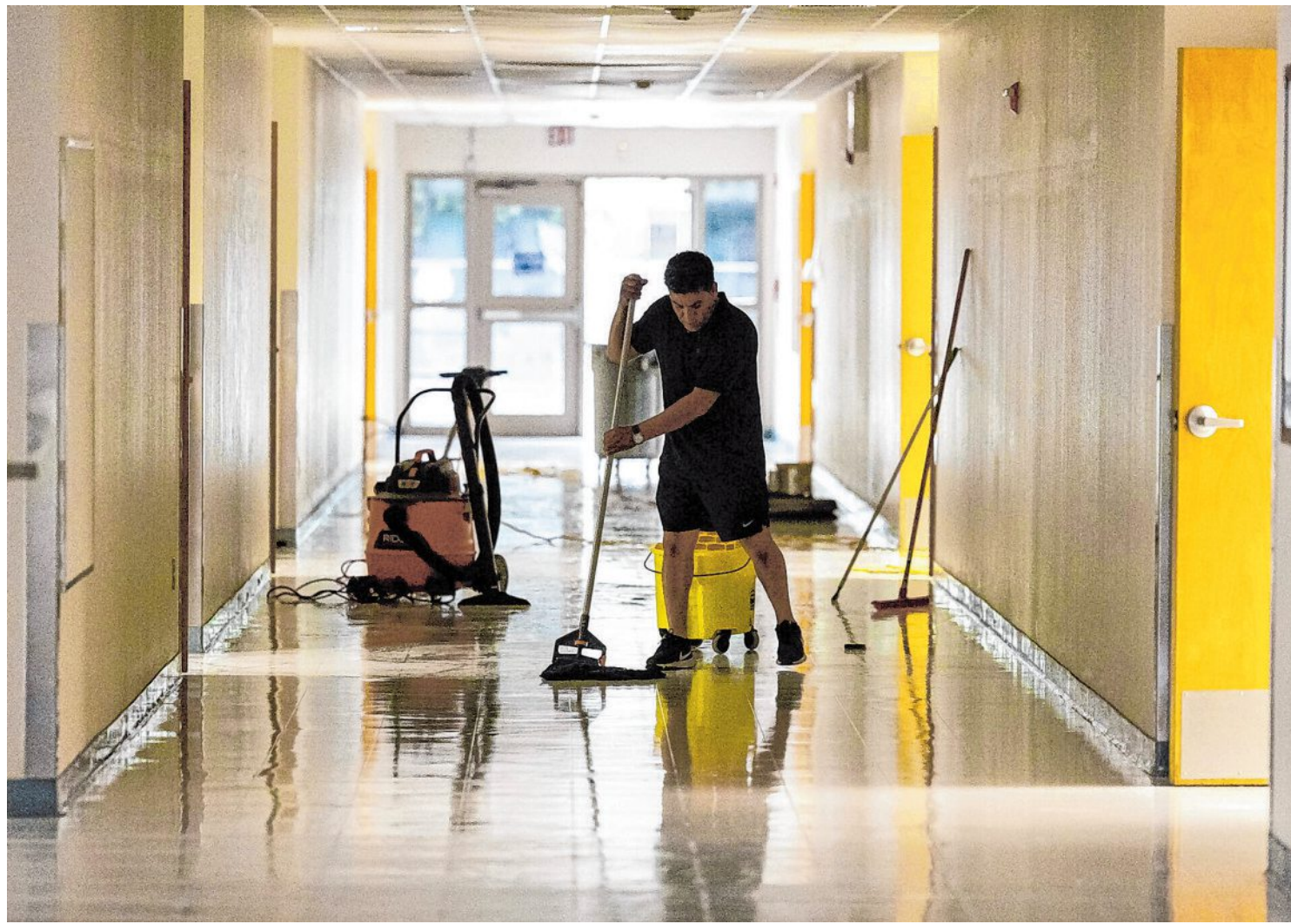
**Lottery continues on A7**



Austin American-Statesman file photo

**Former Texas Lottery Executive Director Gary Grief, shown in 2023, has been ordered to appear in court on June 26.**

## Transforming an empty school into a community service hub



Photos by Katina Zentz/San Antonio Express-News

**Santos Perez, with City Wide Facility Solutions, works at the Center for Health Empowerment in South Texas in South San Antonio.**

## Former council member's project addresses South Side healthcare disparities

By Kelsey Brown  
STAFF WRITER

The hallways of the Athens Elementary School annex have been empty since the campus closed in 2023. But by the end of the summer, its doors will reopen — and not just to students.

As Adriana Rocha Garcia, the CEO of the Center for Health Empowerment in South Texas, walked through the echoing building in March, she explained how the abandoned classrooms will transform into a community service hub run by her nonprofit.

Rocha Garcia sees an opportunity to use closed down campuses — a growing trend in public school districts across San Antonio — to address poor health outcomes and connect



**Adriana Rocha Garcia, the nonprofit's CEO, wants to use closed down campuses to provide key services.**

nearby residents with important services. If the pilot at South San Antonio Independent School District's former Athens Ele-

mentary succeeds, it could prove the vision for the rest of the city.

Rather than providing a singular service — like access to

food, clothing or counseling — the former City Council member aims to open a one-stop shop by the end of August to provide medical and social services. The former school space will be run as a collaborative nonprofit hub, hosting at least six organizations, with additional space available for rotating informational sessions or classes.

Services at CHEST will be free, though some of its partners may require certain eligibility requirements for service. But access to the food pantry, closet, classroom space and outdoor exercise equipment will have no cost and are open to everyone.

"It's almost like a back-to-school (event) for some of the adults that will be going back into the school building to learn

**Health continues on A5**

## Protest arrest upends life for teacher

By Nancy M. Preyor-Johnson  
STAFF WRITER

When Gavin Pope went to a federal immigrant detention center in Dilley to protest U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, he didn't expect it to upend his life. By nightfall, he was in jail. Days later, he was out of a job.

Pope, 25, originally from Kyle, spent his middle school years in Iowa, earned a bachelor's degree in history from Saint Louis University in 2024 and moved back to Texas to help care for his grandmother, who lives in Comal County.

He worked as a substitute teacher for Comal Independent School District and was thinking about pursuing a teaching certification. On the side, he was active in politics, volunteering as communications chair for the Comal County Democratic Party and helping to launch a Young Democrats chapter.

On Jan. 28, Pope stood outside the South Texas Family Residential Center, an ICE detention facility in Dilley, 70 miles southwest of San Antonio. He and other demonstrators were there to demand the release of 5-year-old Liam Adrian Conejo Ramos and his father, Ecuadorian nationals who were seeking asylum in the United States.

Federal agents had arrested the two in a Minneapolis suburb where they lived and transferred them to South Texas. A photo of Liam wearing a bunny hat and Spider-Man backpack as he was taken into custody drew national attention to the case.

The Jan. 28 protest unfolded amid renewed national debate over immigration enforcement and family detention. Inside the Dilley center, U.S. Reps. Joaquin Castro and Jasmine Crockett met with Liam and his father.

**Teacher continues on A7**

## Cornyn, Paxton hit road in final push before GOP runoff

By James Osborne  
WASHINGTON BUREAU

U.S. Sen. John Cornyn and Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton are beginning their final push to rally GOP voters, with early voting kicking off Monday in the Republican runoff for Texas' senate seat.

Cornyn is scheduled to travel to San Antonio and Austin for events with former Gov. Rick Perry and U.S. Rep. Michael McCaul, while Paxton heads to

Dallas and Tyler, as part of multi-day campaign tours to close out what is one of the nation's most closely watched elections.

Despite Cornyn's razor-thin victory in the March 3 primary, neither candidate has spent much time on the road to campaign ahead of the runoff on May 26. Instead, Cornyn and the groups backing him have spent close to \$18 million on television, radio and digital ads since the primary — more than triple spent for Paxton — raised from a

network of wealthy donors he has built up over more than two decades in the Senate.

Meanwhile, Paxton has largely relied on conservative influencers to carry his message online, while also generating news with a series of legal actions aimed at Netflix, school districts resisting posting the Ten Commandments and transgender care at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston.

"His strategy is not to communicate through paid advertis-

ing but targeted lawsuits," said Brandon Rottinghaus, a political science professor at the University of Houston. "You don't have to have a deep bank book to be successful in that respect."

Last week, Paxton's campaign reported raising more than \$590,000 between April 1 and May 2, while Cornyn reported a haul of \$4.3 million between his campaign and joint fundraising committee.

Candidates are not required

to report the finances of their joint fundraising committees until later this year, and Paxton's campaign did not respond to questions about those contributions.

But throughout the campaign Paxton has been unable to keep pace with Cornyn's fundraising.

**Runoff continues on A7**

