

Problem jackpot's fees not pursued

State hasn't tried to recover \$1.3 million in commissions earned by four retailers

By Eric Dexheimer
STAFF WRITER

Soon after announcing that a single player had won the \$95 million Lotto Texas jackpot in April 2023, the Texas Lottery Commission dispatched inspectors to the small Colleyville store where the winning ticket was purchased. Their job was to ensure that all the agency's rules had been followed in the sale and processing of the tick-

et. "It's not unusual for us to send investigators to visit with a retailer after one of these large jackpots are won," then-Executive Director Gary Grief said. The team gave the all clear, and two months later an entity called Rook TX collected \$57.8 million in a one-time payment. As a Hearst Newspapers investigation revealed, Rook TX comprised a group of international gamblers who, with the

assistance of state regulators, guaranteed their victory by buying up virtually all of the 25.8 million possible numeric combinations. To quickly process all the tickets, Rook TX enlisted four state-licensed retailers. Contrary to what the state's inspectors concluded, Hearst reported that their method — scanning preprogrammed QR codes of sequential numbers from personal devices — appeared to violate Texas lottery rules. At the time, the lottery agency reiterated it had found no problems: "The agency's unan-

nounced investigation at the selling retailer identified no violations of state law or Commission rules," a spokesman said. But in an until-now unreported acknowledgment of the breach, records at the State Office of Administrative Hearings show that regulators last year quietly pressured at least two of the retailers to forfeit their licenses to sell lottery tickets, citing their use of the QR codes. In addition to confirming that lottery officials determined that the method Rook TX used to beat the system was improv-

er, the revelation raises additional questions about how far Texas officials are willing to go to unwind a scheme that was widely seen as unfair to everyday lottery players. The Texas lottery pays retailers a 5% commission on each \$1 ticket sold. That means the four retailers who helped Rook TX together earned nearly \$1.3 million for their roles in the Lotto operation. Another state incentive program pays \$25,000 to licensed retailers that sell a Lotto jackpot ticket. Attorneys and officials fa-
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SOLDIER LAID TO REST



Soldiers from Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment carry the casket of Pvt. Isabella Gonzales during a funeral service on Sunday at Dallas-Fort Worth National Cemetery in Dallas. Gonzales, a Carrollton resident, was killed during Iranian strikes at Muwaffaq Salti Air Base in Jordan, where she was supporting Operation Inherent Resolve, the U.S. mission against the Islamic State group. She and another soldier were killed as they were defending against the incoming Iranian strikes. **Story, page A4**

ELÍAS VALVERDE II/DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Alamo Ranch could become a freeway

Plan would turn parkway into artery similar to Wurzbach

By Richard Webner
STAFF WRITER

The traffic-clogged Alamo Ranch Parkway on San Antonio's fast-growing far West Side is set to be upgraded into a freeway similar to Wurzbach Parkway under a plan drawn up by the Alamo Regional Mobility Authority, an arm of Bexar County. The project, with a preliminary estimated cost of \$133.5 million, would expand a 2½-mile stretch of Alamo Ranch Parkway, between Loop 1604 and Calaveras Way, from four lanes to eight lanes, according to a recent presentation from the agency. The expanded Alamo Ranch Parkway would initially feature two main lanes and a two-lane frontage road going each way. But the design would leave room for another main lane to be added each way to accommodate population growth, said Reggie Fountain, the agency's operations engineer. As of now, that stretch of Alamo Ranch Parkway has two main lanes each way and no frontage roads. The roadway's current main lanes would be repurposed to serve as frontage roads for the expansion, Fountain said. Under the mobility authority's plan, bridges would be constructed carrying traffic over busy intersections with Lone Star Parkway and Alamo Parkway, so motorists won't have to wait at stoplights. Shared-use paths for pedestrians and cyclists would be built beyond the frontage roads. In a sense, the expanded Alamo Ranch Parkway would serve
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Black Texas voters frustrated with Dems

By John C. Moritz
STAFF WRITER

When a participant at a recent town hall meeting accused Democratic U.S. Senate nominee James Talarico of ignoring key issues for Black voters, the exchange shed light on a simmering rift that some Black leaders warn could drag down the state Democratic Party as it

enters the final months of a pivotal midterm election. Critics online were quick to dismiss the remarks from activist Kandice Webber as misrepresentative of Talarico's broader standing with Black voters. But Houston Democratic state Rep. Jolanda Jones said Webber's criticism — that Talarico has paid mostly lip service to such issues as systemic

racism and economic opportunity and equality — must be taken seriously. And, Jones said, those same criticisms can rightly be aimed at many of the Democrats seeking office in the midterms and at past candidates who relied on the votes of Black Texans while offering them too little in return. "This is not about James Talarico," Jones said at a listening

session a few days later in Houston's predominantly Black Third Ward, speaking to party leaders. "We're trying to tell you what needs to happen and what needs to not happen in order to keep Black people loyal to the Democratic Party." The meeting organized by Jones and other local Democrats, called "The Road to Blue
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Trump says he will pause strikes on Iran, citing new deal



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman reportedly spoke to President Donald Trump about concerns with the Iran war.

By Aamer Madhani and Samy Magdy
ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump says he will order U.S. forces to hold off on new strikes against Iran, claiming that Mideast allies have reached the parameters of a deal to end the 5-month-old war. The emerging deal "would include the Immediate, Complete, and Total OPENING OF THE HORMUZ STRAIT, and an end to Iran's nuclear threat," Trump wrote in a Saturday evening social media post. "Based on this request, I have agreed, for the future benefit of the WORLD and, likewise, the survival of a successful and prosperous Iran, to cancel the

attack, subject to being able to rapidly make a DEAL," Trump said. However, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said Sunday that the Strait of Hormuz "will in no way return to the status it was before February 28th," the day the war started. On a call with Iranian state TV, he added that Iran is discussing shipping through the strait with Oman, on the other side of Hormuz, but that there's no current talk about reopening the crucial waterway. Trump has announced halts to strikes in Iran on several occasions since the United States and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28, only for things to unravel and fighting to resume again.

Iran's defense minister said on X that the country was "neither surprised nor passive" after Trump's announcement and that Iran continues to remain alert in the face of concrete threats from the U.S. While Iran's leaders appear united in a war strategy signaling strength and endurance, a struggle for control seems to be brewing within the theocracy's leadership between those who oppose all negotiations with the U.S. and others who count on military pressure to win at the negotiating table.
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