



**JUCO hoops**  
TC men beat Grayson; women fall

- 1D



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**A growing sport**

Texas' long love affair with wrestling could be getting serious

- 2B

**Today's Outlook**

**High: 68**  
**Low: 48**  
Sunny



**ELECTION 2026**

## Bell County Judge race draws 2 candidates

BY IAN CAMACHO  
TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

**BELTON** — The Bell County Judge position has two candidates in the Republican primary election and no Democratic Party opponents. The winner of the Republican primary will go on to the general election uncontested and therefore win automatically.

Early voting begins Tuesday. County Judge David Blackburn, who has held the position since 2019, will

face off against Precinct 1 Justice of the Peace Theodore “Ted” Duffield. Duffield has held the justice of the peace office since first elected in 1994, serving seven consecutive terms.

Candidates’ answers appear in the order they appear on the ballot.

**Why are you running?**

Duffield: I am running for Bell County Judge because I believe deeply in Bell County’s mission statement: to promote and sustain a superior quality of life in Central Texas through

cost-effective, personal, responsive, and innovative services in partnership with our communities. With over 30 years of county government experience, I understand how leadership decisions impact public safety, fiscal responsibility, and the everyday lives of our citizens. I am running to ensure our county government remains open, accessible, accountable and focused on serving citizens as valued customers who deserve the highest quality service.

Blackburn: I believe that I can con-

tinue to make a positive difference in the place I live. I have enjoyed public service for almost 40 years and would be honored and humbled to continue in that service.

**What are your goals for the county judge’s office?**

Duffield: My goals are to uphold and actively implement the Bell County Mission and Values. That means prioritizing public safety, ensuring responsibility and accountability in spending taxpayer dollars,

and fostering positive partnerships with local government organizations. I will work to promote fairness, integrity, and trust in every decision while encouraging teamwork, progressive thinking, and employee involvement within county departments. My goal is to maintain a government that is responsive, solution-oriented, and committed to delivering the highest quality services to every citizen of Bell County.

Blackburn: The same as when I was first elected ... to represent the people

## Puppy love



Nan Dickson/Special to the Telegram

Lauren Evers snuggles Saturday with Papi, a service dog with Go Team Therapy Dog Central Texas, during the Pal-entines Party at the Temple Public Library.

**BELTON**

## A rewarding experience

Bell County youths value time, effort put into annual livestock show

BY LARRY CAUSEY  
TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

**BELTON** — The 2026 Bell County Youth Fair and Livestock Show drew an enthusiastic crowd for the noon auction of 220 items — everything from pies to rabbits — and closed Saturday night with the Bell County PRCA Rodeo.

Breann Wolff, 11, a member of Central Texas Christian School 4-H, sold her grand champion market steer, Copus, for \$28,000. Cash Parker, 18, a member of Stampede Creek 4-H, sold his reserve grand champion steer for \$27,000.

John Potts, general agriculture superintendent, said it was one of the greatest

fairs he’s seen in the past 16 years. A lot of the children, he said, anticipate studying animal science in college.

“Most of them want to be in something that has to do with the farm,” he said. “Many of them are here to enjoy themselves with their animals that they have raised and loved very dearly. It’s a great family gathering. Everybody works on the project.”

Wolff said she and her sister, Brooke, 14, placed with a steer in 2024. Their parents are Krystal and Lance Wolff of Temple.

The sisters work with the family steers on the weekend, Breann said, washing and blow drying them. Another steer,

Wheels, also was entered in the fair.

“It’s a lot of hard work” she said. “You have to like the animal. You want to live with them 24-7. Copus is a snotty little questionable child. He can be grumpy at times. Wheels is like a sweet little teddy bear.”

Work hard, have fun and be consistent was her advice for newcomers. She said she wants to be a veterinarian.

“I love animals,” she said.

Parker showed the fair’s grand champion steer in 2024. He entered in the pee-wee division when he was 6 years old, he said, and has been showing steers since he was 9, in the third grade.

Please see FAIR, 6A

**ELECTION 2026**

## Packed field

Republican US Congressional candidates relay their stances ahead of March 3 primary

BY IAN CAMACHO  
TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER



With early voting beginning Tuesday, U.S. Congressional District 31, the office U.S. Rep. John Carter, R-Round Rock, has held since 2003, will see the congressman face nine challengers in the Republican Primary.

If no candidate gets more than 50% of the vote, the primary will proceed to a runoff between the two candidates with the most votes.

The winner will face off against the winner of the Democratic Party primary, which has two candidates: Stuart Whitlow and Justin Early.

The Telegram contacted Republican candidates via email, each getting the same questions regarding their positions.

Candidates’ answers appear in the same order their names appear on the ballot.

**Why are you running?**

Ed Ewald: I believe that our Founding Fathers intended for the House of Representatives to represent the people for two years and then go home and go back to work. So my platform is I’m running for ... two terms of two years, max. Our country’s a mess, and the problem is the House of Representatives. Of the three branches of our country — the legislative, the executive and the judicial — the strongest was supposed to be the legislative because it represented the people. They no longer do that. And I

feel that’s what my duty is to run for that position.

Raymond Hamden: I am running for Congress in hopes to help our district, our state, our nation. The Parable of the Talents teaches us to faithfully and courageously use the gifts and talents God blesses us with to help others, but more importantly, glorify Him. As a small business owner, I know the importance of balancing a budget, operating within a budget, making payroll, and working hard; something our government has not done in almost three decades. Furthermore, as a product of the district, and someone deeply rooted in our area, I know the challenges we face daily. We need someone to be our voice, not for today, but for the generations to come.

Abhiram Garapati: I have been fortunate in my personal and professional life to have built and lived the American Dream. As a businessman and father, I am very concerned about the future of our great nation, particularly regarding inflation, the rising national debt, and an unbalanced budget. I want to ensure that the United States remains a prosperous

Please see GOP, 5A

**ELECTION 2026**

## Democratic US Congressional candidate explains stances

BY IAN CAMACHO  
TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

With early voting beginning Tuesday, the Democratic Primary election has two candidates for U.S. Congressional District 31: Stuart Whitlow and Justin Early.

U.S. Rep. John Carter, R-Round Rock, has held the office since 2003. The congressman faces nine challengers in the Republican primary election, with primary winners facing off in November.

The Telegram contacted the Democratic Party candidates with questions to get their positions.

Stuart Whitlow did not reply after repeated requests for comment before publication. Only Justin Early responded to the questions

listed below.

**Why are you running?**

Early: I’m running because working families in Central Texas are doing everything right and still falling behind. I grew up in a military family, served as a paratrooper, and now work in cybersecurity protecting the systems our economy depends on. I’ve spent my life in service, and I believe it’s time for a new generation of leadership focused on lowering costs, protecting our freedoms, and making sure opportunity is real for the people who keep this country running.

**What are your goals for the office?**

Early: My goal is to bring real representative govern-



ment back to this district. That means being accessible, building partnerships across local, state, and federal levels, and making sure constituents always have a seat at the table. Success looks like delivering real results for veterans,

seniors, families and small businesses while making sure Central Texas continues to grow responsibly and sustainably. Most importantly, I want to hold informative town halls that bring people into the process of government and keep

them engaged in the decisions that affect their lives.

**Past history**

The Telegram has been sent roughly a dozen documents showing a history of bankruptcy, failure to pay child support, and a protective order against you from your ex-wife. In addition, a former campaign consultant has sued you for non-payment of fees.

What do you have to say about this material, given your Democratic and Republican opponents likely will use it to sow your character during the campaign?

Early: Negative campaigns often try to define candidates by the hardest moments of their personal or professional lives instead of the issues voters are facing today. The nar-

rative that has been circulated is false, and documents are being selectively pulled out of context from events many years ago.

I have always and will continue to follow the law, and none of the allegations or documents being circulated resulted in any legal actions against me. My ex-wife and I have long since reconciled, we continue to co-parent successfully, and she openly supports me and my campaign today.

My character is defined by how I live my life. I am a dedicated father, an Army veteran, a cybersecurity professional, and someone who has spent his career in service to others. It is through my lived experiences that I am confident in

Please see EARLY, 6A



**TODAY'S BIBLE VERSE**

“And let us not be weary in well doing: For in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”

— Galatians 6:9



**Security conference**

Rubio’s speech to European allies takes softer tone

- 4C

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