



Volleyball
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– 1B



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Today’s Outlook
High: 81
Low: 56
Weather

ELECTION 2026



Voters on Tuesday at the Temple Independent School District voting location in downtown Temple wait to cast their early ballots. The line at times stretched out the front door and wrapped around the corner of the building. The location offers drive-up voting.

Shawn Ankrom/Telegram

Day one early voting tallies smash previous midterm record in Bell County

BY IAN CAMACHO
TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

BELTON — A total of 8,796 Bell County residents cast ballots Monday, the first day of early voting, with 7,111 voting in person and 1,685 by mail, smashing voting records set in the 2022 general midterm election.

Lines formed outside all eight early voting locations, including two of the busiest: the Temple Independent School District administration building and the North Belton Annex, each with more than 1,100 voters.

James Stafford, Bell County public information officer, told the Telegram that in-person turnout far exceeded the 4,677 ballots cast on the first day of early voting in 2022, representing more than a 50% increase in voter turnout.

Day one did not exceed the 7,844 votes cast in-person during the 2024 general election.

While midterm elections typically draw fewer voters than presidential election years, ac-

Bell County early voting

Early voting is set through Oct. 30 for the Nov. 3 election.

Voting is available at eight polling locations across Bell County. Voters may cast a ballot at any location with varying hours.

- Belton Annex: 550 E. Second Ave., Belton
- Temple ISD Administration Building: 401 Santa Fe Way, Temple
- Morgan’s Point Event Center: 60 Morgan’s Point Boulevard, Morgan’s Point Resort
- Thomas Arnold Elementary School Gym T3: 620 Thomas Arnold Road, Salado
- Harker Heights Parks & Recreation Center: 307 Miller’s Crossing, Harker Heights
- Jackson Professional Learning Center: 902 Rev. R.A. Abercrombie Drive, Killeen
- Killeen Senior Center at Lion’s Club Park: 1700 E. Stan Schlueter Loop, Killeen
- True Deliverance Ministries: 709 W. Dean Ave., Killeen

Early voting hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. through Friday; 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturday; noon to 6 p.m. Sunday; and 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Oct. 26-30.

cording to AdImpact and various media outlets, advertising spending on the James Tal-

race has topped \$500 million, making it the second nonpresidential race in U.S. history to surpass the half-billion-dollar

mark, drawing higher-than-average voter enthusiasm across Texas.

By early afternoon Tuesday, a line at the TISD Administration Building stretched around the corner with nearby parking lots nearly full.

Voters showed enthusiasm for candidates from both parties.

Rita Spinn, a retired nurse in Temple, said she waited about 25 minutes, and noted that the line Tuesday afternoon was the longest line she had ever seen in a midterm election during early voting.

Spinn said she always votes early and split her ticket this year, adding she votes for the person and chooses candidates she feels are best for the area and the country.

Randall Duncan, a retired programmer in Temple, said he waited about 35 minutes. He also votes early but he voted a straight Republican ticket, identifying as a Christian conservative who voted with his heart.

Please see VOTING, 3A

PROPERTY TAXES

Homestead exemption

Hundreds of thousands of potentially eligible Texas homeowners aren’t claiming their property tax savings

BY JOSHUA FECHTER
THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

DALLAS — When the Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge opened more than a decade ago, it connected downtown Dallas to West Dallas, one of the poorest parts of the city. With the new bridge came a spike of new development interest in the predominantly Hispanic neighborhood, once largely cut off from the city’s urban core.

As that newfound interest mounted, so did property tax bills. As homeowners in the neighborhood increasingly worried about their climbing tax bills, community advo-

cates came to a realization: many hadn’t claimed a benefit that might have helped keep those bills in check.

That benefit: the homestead exemption, which shaves at least \$140,000 off the value that school districts tax and triggers more property tax savings if cities and counties offer their own exemptions.

The exemption results in potentially thousands of dollars saved in taxes annually while unlocking a number of other benefits intended to keep bills from rising too quickly.

Please see TAX, 3A

Here’s how to claim a homestead exemption

BY JOSHUA FECHTER
THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

Texas has some of the nation’s highest property tax bills, but many may not know there’s a way to bring down their payments.

Texas homeowners can apply for a homestead exemption, which can cut thousands of dollars off the taxable value of a home. That gives homeowners a break on the taxes they pay to public schools, often the biggest chunk of an owner’s tax bill, and often on the taxes they pay to cities and counties, too.

Despite the savings potential, many homeowners don’t claim the exemption. Homeowners may face hurdles when it comes to applying or having the right documents in order. Others simply might not know about the exemption.

That means many homeowners are missing out on considerable savings on their property tax bill, which lo-

cal tax offices sent out this month.

Here’s what to know about claiming a homestead exemption.

Who qualifies for a homestead exemption?

Homeowners who have at least some ownership stake in their primary residence and live in that residence as of Jan. 1 can apply for an exemption. Homeowners may not claim more than one primary residence in Texas or anywhere else in the country.

Homeowners who are undocumented effectively do not qualify for a homestead exemption. It’s illegal for undocumented immigrants to obtain a Texas drivers license, which is crucial for claiming the exemption.

How much is the homestead exemption?

Texas law sets the homestead exemption school districts must provide at \$140,000.

Please see APPLY, 3A

BELTON ISD

BISD approves school improvement plans, extends superintendent’s contract

BY SAM SCHAFFER
TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

BELTON — The Belton Independent School District board approved school improvement plans and extended Superintendent Malinda Golden’s contract.

The board also allocated over \$500,000 for outside educational help, which will be used

to support school improvement plans, according to board documents during a regular meeting Monday.

The superintendent’s contract extension will last from Tuesday until June 30, 2031, according to meeting documents.

Golden will be paid a salary of \$236,860, “which shall be automatically increased each year by an amount equal to the high-

est percentage raise given to the district’s administrative staff,” according to the documents.

Also at the meeting, the board passed improvement plans for four schools.

Certain campuses must implement plans that align with specific criteria under state and federal laws related to academic performance on accountability assessments.

“Each of them have a unique reason,” said Gabrielle Niño, assistant superintendent of teaching and learning for the district.

For the 2026-27 school year, Southwest Elementary will continue to implement the Turn Around Plan (TAP) established in the 2025-26 school year.

Please see BISD, 3A



Ronaldo Bolaños/The Texas Tribune

A recently built home, left, sits next to another home July 29, 2025, in South Dallas.

WASHINGTON

Trump and Vance announce \$25M whistleblower program

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance on Tuesday announced a \$25 million program to encourage the public to blow the whistle on suspected fraud in the U.S. government as they ramp up efforts to end the abuse of federal programs and dollars.

The White House said that under the Fraud Whistleblower Incentive Program, anyone who submits a tip that leads to a fraud conviction or a significant federal enforcement ac-

tion is eligible to receive up to \$30,000, and that the Justice Department will administer the program.

During the announcement, Trump said payments will amount to a 1% commission on the amount of fraud the tip helps uncover. Trump also said he will decide who gets reward money in cases where more than one person claims to have provided the tip.

“I will be the arbitrator of all of these decisions,” Trump in the Oval Office with Vance

and other administration officials standing behind him. “It’ll be a binding arbitration.”

Trump said journalists could participate in the program.

The Republican president has undertaken an aggressive effort to eliminate fraud in government, establishing a task force on the topic in March and putting Vance in charge of it.

Critics have accused Trump and his family of profiting from the presidency through their many business ventures.

The White House says Trump acts only with the best interests of the American people in mind.

Vance, who said his work leading the task force is “fun,” said tax dollars are being stolen.

“The president has said it must stop. It is stopping. And if you want to help us stop it, you get to share in the rewards,” the vice president said.

The White House had said Trump would present a

\$10,000 check to Nick Shirley, a right-wing influencer who posted a video last year that said members of Minnesota’s Somali community were running fake child care centers to collect federal subsidies. But a check was not given to Shirley in the presence of journalists.

The 24-year-old’s video caught the attention of the Trump administration and conservative activists, though inspectors said the centers were operating as expected. Investigations, searches and

arrests followed.

Shirley said during the event that fraud robs from poor and needy people.

“When you expose fraud, you help save America,” he said.

In July, Fahima Mahamud pleaded guilty to wire fraud and conspiracy to defraud the United States by submitting inflated reimbursement claims for meals allegedly served to children at her child care center, according to the Justice Department.