



Texarkana Gazette

\$2.00 | THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 2026 | texarkanagazette.com | 2 SECTIONS, 16 PAGES

TEA reaffirms commitment to L-EISD conservator



Liberty-Eylau Middle School is seen Wednesday. (Staff photo by Mallory Wyatt)

MALLORY WYATT
TEXARKANA GAZETTE

TEXARKANA, Texas — Texas Education Agency has reaffirmed its commitment to the conservator at Liberty-Eylau Independent School District.

After the district requested an informal review of the conservatorship in March, TEA Education Commissioner Mike Morath sent a letter affirming the conservatorship would continue.

“After considering the district’s presentation and reviewing the district’s data, I have determined that the conservator appointment will remain in effect,” Morath said, in a letter to the district. “Accordingly, Quentin Woods will continue as the TEA-appointed conservator for Liberty-Eylau ISD.”

Liberty-Eylau Independent School District’s accountability rating, which

is comprised of graduation and state assessment data, is a “D” with a numerical score of 63. The district’s middle school has received an “F” rating for the past three years.

Morath noted in his recent letter to the district, dated for Monday, April 13, 2026, that the conservator was appointed to “ensure and oversee district-level support to low-performing campuses and the implementation of a targeted improvement plan.”

“It is my sincere desire that the district works with conservator in a cooperative and productive manner to address the issues identified in the district,” Morath said.

Morath stated that TEA reserves the right to implement all available interventions and sanctions under the Texas Education Code and Texas Administration code. One of the inter-

ventions listed is appointing a board of managers, which the code says majority of the managers would be residents of the district.

Superintendent Jeff Wright called the district’s ratings “unacceptable” at a previous board meeting.

“I know the campus ratings came out, and everybody at this table, plus everybody in this district, including our administration, knows that those are unacceptable ratings for Liberty-Eylau ISD,” Wright said.

Neither Wright nor Assistant Superintendent Kristi Brown were available for comment regarding the conservatorship.

The district’s communication specialist said the conservator, Woods, would be giving a presentation at the board meeting today at 5 pm.



Paramedics attach a portrait over the grave of Ghadir Baalbaki, 19, who was killed on Tuesday in an Israeli airstrike, at a temporary mass grave Wednesday in the southern port city of Tyre, Lebanon. (AP photo/Hussein Malla)

Pakistani delegation meets in Tehran hoping for more U.S.-Iran talks before ceasefire ends

SAMY MAGDY,
SAM METZ,
MUNIR AHMED
AND MIKE CORDER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAIRO — Pakistan’s army chief met Wednesday in Tehran with Iran’s foreign minister in the latest diplomatic move to ease tensions in the Middle East and arrange a second round of negotiations between the United States and Iran after

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almost seven weeks of war.

The White House said any further talks would likely take place in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad, though no decision had been made on whether to resume negotiations.

The U.S. naval blockade of Iranian ports continued as the Trump administration warned it would ramp up eco-

nomics pain on Iran with new economic sanctions on countries doing business with it, calling the move the “financial equivalent” of a bombing campaign.

Pakistan has emerged as a key mediator after it hosted direct talks between the U.S. and Iran in Islamabad that authorities said helped narrow differences between the two sides. Mediators are seeking a new round before the ceasefire

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Suspect in shooting of De Queen teen pleads not guilty

LORI DUNN
TEXARKANA GAZETTE

DE QUEEN, Ark. — A 21-year-old Sevier County man has pleaded not guilty to charges related to a shooting that killed one teen and injured two others.

Tristan David Mendoza is charged with first-degree murder, two counts of first-degree battery and unlawful discharge of a firearm from a vehicle, according to court documents. Mendoza was arrested in McCurtain County, Oklahoma, and was recently extradited to Sevier County. He was booked into the Sevier County jail on April 7 and arraigned April 9 before 9th West Judicial Circuit Judge Tom Cooper.



MENDOZA

A pretrial hearing is set for May 28, with trial to start the week of June 24, according to court documents. He remains in jail on a \$500,000 bond, according to jail records.

Kellie Kinne is prosecuting the case. Mendoza is represented by attorney George Moreledge IV, according to court documents.

Mendoza is one of three people charged in the Feb. 2 shootings.

Kaytlan Huesca, 18, is charged with accomplice to commit murder and two counts of first-degree battery, according to Sevier County Circuit Court records. She has pleaded not guilty.

A male juvenile is charged in the shootings and is being held in an Arkansas juvenile facility.

The shooting occurred at 9:05 p.m. at a residence in the 200 block of Vandervoort Avenue, where investigators recovered several spent shell casings of different calibers.

The victims were taken to De Queen Medical Center, where one of the teens died.

Law enforcement had a larger presence at De Queen schools due to community concerns in the days after the shootings. One juvenile was arrested for making a threat toward the school several days after the shootings and was taken to a juvenile detention facility, according to a statement from De Queen Police Department.

Senate confirms federal judge for Arkansas

ALEX THOMAS
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate voted Tuesday to confirm Arkansas Circuit Judge John Thomas Sheppard as a federal district judge, with Republican senators unified in support of the nomination.

Sheppard has served as a circuit judge in Arkansas’ 13th Judicial Circuit since January 2025. He will become part of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Arkansas, which encompasses the state’s western counties. The district has court locations in Fort Smith, Fayetteville, El Dorado, Hot Springs and Texarkana.

Sheppard will replace retiring Judge Susan Owens Hickey, a Barack Obama appointee.

The Senate voted 53-46 to confirm Sheppard. Senate Democrats opposed the nomination with one senator, Michael Bennet, D-Colo., missing Tuesday’s vote.

Carl Tobias, law professor at the University of Richmond, said the opposition to Sheppard’s nomination was



JOHN THOMAS SHEPPARD

discouraging. Tobias recalled Sheppard’s Feb. 4 appearance before the Senate Judiciary Committee, which did not produce any heated discussion among senators over the Arkansas nomination.

“I would like it to be a little more bipartisan if possible, and I’m sure the nominees feel that way, too,” Tobias said. “I thought he had a pretty good hearing and wasn’t controversial, from what I could tell.”

Sheppard used his Senate hearing to explain his legal

experience. He previously served as prosecuting attorney in Arkansas’ 13th Judicial District from 2017 to 2019, and was a partner at the Shepherd & Shepherd law firm alongside his brother, state Rep. Matthew Shepherd, R-El Dorado.

“Certainly, being on both sides of issues — both in the criminal context and the civil context — has been a benefit to me,” he told senators.

“All of that varied experience, I believe, gives me (a) unique perspective that has helped me on the state court bench, certainly, and I believe it would also benefit me if I’m fortunate enough to be confirmed to the federal district court.”

The Senate Judiciary Committee voted 12-10 during a March 5 meeting to advance Sheppard’s nomination.

Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., emphasized Sheppard’s legal experience in a Senate floor speech preceding Tuesday’s confirmation vote.

“Whether representing the people as a prosecuting attorney,

presiding from the bench as a circuit judge or practicing law in the private sector, Judge Sheppard has handled a wide range of cases with an exceptional track record,” said Cotton, of Little Rock.

Sen. John Boozman, R-Ark., spoke highly of Sheppard following the vote, expressing confidence in his ability to “serve with the same integrity, professionalism and sound judgment he has demonstrated throughout his career.” Rep. Bruce Westerman, R-Ark., said Sheppard will succeed on the federal bench.

“His integrity, deep commitment to the rule of law, and devotion to his community will undoubtedly serve him and Western Arkansas well,” the Hot Springs congressman added in a social media post.

Sheppard is the second Arkansas this year to receive the Senate’s approval to serve in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Arkansas. Westerman in February voted 54-40 to confirm former U.S. Attorney David Clay Fowlkes to the bench.



People chant during a protest Jan. 10 at Houston City Hall over recent fatal shootings by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. (Antranik Tavitian for The Texas Tribune)

Texas cities walk fine line between politics, people in immigration crackdown

ALEJANDRO SERRANO
TEXAS TRIBUNE

As he campaigned for Houston mayor three years ago, John Whitmire repeatedly leaned on his Austin connections after serving five decades in the Capitol, first as a state representative and then as a senator, to pitch himself as a peacemaker following years of GOP state leaders clashing with the city’s Democratic leaders.

“They’re ready to sit down and see how they can assist Houston,” the veteran Democrat said after he won the election. “From day one, there is going to be

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VOL. 150,
ISSUE NO. 105
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