

# Edwards Aquifer at lowest in 4 years

Dropping water level could trigger tighter conservation limits for area

By Elena Bruess  
STAFF WRITER

The Edwards Aquifer's level is the lowest it has been since 2018, and without significant rain, it will continue to drop through the spring and into the summer.

On Tuesday, the Edwards Aquifer Authority marked the aquifer at 646.4 feet, nearly 15 feet below what's considered a healthy and sustainable level. Since the beginning of the year, the San Antonio region has not received enough rain to keep the aquifer level stable. Although some small storms have filled

the underground karst system with recharge, drought conditions have prevented the aquifer from rebounding completely.

"We've been fortunate the last few years to have decent rainfall, and it's not infrequent for it to fall into Stage 1 or Stage 2 for at least part of the summer," said Paul Bertetti, senior director of aquifer science research and modeling at the Edwards Aquifer Authority, referring to the levels of restrictions implemented to conserve water. "But what is a little bit unusual is that we're in Stage 2 so early in the year, without any anticipated rainfall."

## Aquifer dropping quickly

A long run of dry weather this year has lowered the Edwards Aquifer to levels that haven't been seen in nearly four years.

### Edwards Aquifer level

Measured daily in feet above mean sea level at J17 index well



Source: Edwards Aquifer Authority

Monte Bach / Staff artist

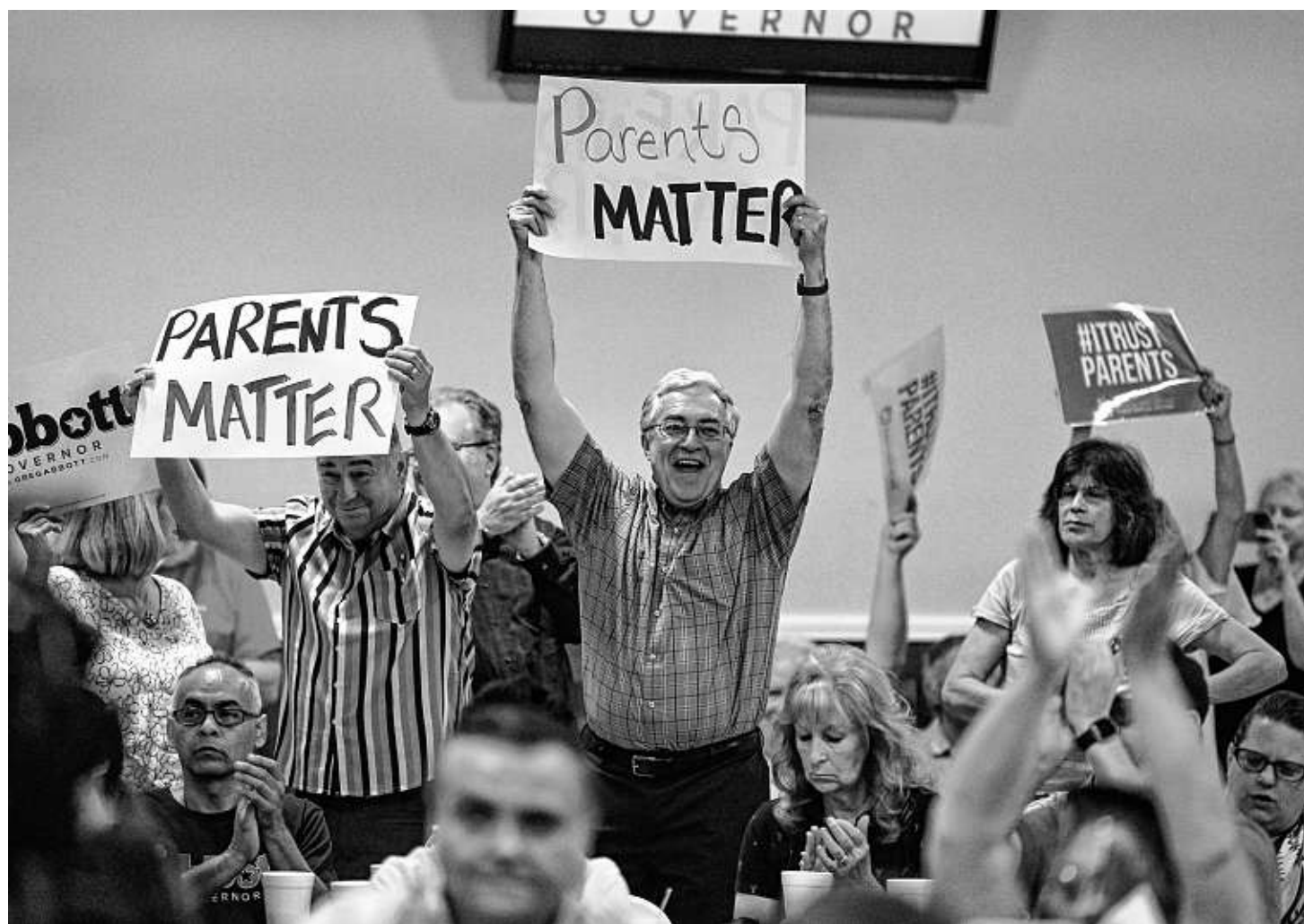
The last time the Edwards Aquifer was much lower than 646 feet, San Antonio had experienced one of the worst

droughts — which spanned 2011 to about 2014 — since the

drought of record in the 1950s. Today, meteorological conditions, such as the weather patterns caused by the atmospheric phenomenon La Niña, suggest this year is likely to be drier than average and that the aquifer could be more stressed.

As a result, Bertetti expects the aquifer's level to drop further, possibly requiring Stage 3 drought restrictions to be implemented by mid-May. For the Edwards Aquifer Authority, 640 feet triggers Stage 3 restrictions, meaning water authorities, such as the San Antonio Water System, would have to reduce usage by 35 percent, compared with the 30 percent reduction required during Stage 2 restrictions, which the city is under.

*Aquifer continues on A5*



Photos by Billy Calzada / Staff photographer

People show their support as Gov. Greg Abbott speaks about his "Parental Bill of Rights" during a Monday evening event held at South Side's PicaPica Plaza Event Center. Abbott pledged to fight for a school voucher measure.

# Abbott backs vouchers

Governor pitches school choice plan for Texas students at S.A. rally

By Edward McKinley  
AUSTIN BUREAU

Gov. Greg Abbott has pledged to fight for a school voucher measure that would allow students to use government funding to attend private schools rather than just their assigned public schools or charter schools.

Abbott pledged that public schools would receive equal per-student funding, and he couched his support for school choice as a tradition of empowering parents that includes his policies banning mask mandates on campus, letting parents choose when their students return to the classroom during COVID-19 and banning "critical race theory" in Texas schools.



Abbott speaks with Audrey Williams, 8, who gave him a handmade thank you card during the event that drew about 150 people.

"Nothing is more critical to the development and success of our children than parents," the governor said. "If you like the public school your child is attending, it will be fully funded."

Advocates for increased funding to public schools, traditionally Democrats and rural Republicans, typically oppose such voucher policies because they believe spurring enrollment to private schools or charter schools weakens the traditional public school system.

"Abbott is already underfunding our classrooms by \$4,000 per student," Beto O'Rourke, the Democrat who is challenging the governor, wrote on Twitter. "The last thing we need is to have him take our tax dollars out of our

# Federal funding aims to halt S.A. evictions

By Caroline Tien  
STAFF WRITER

More federal funds are on the way to protect San Antonio residents from getting evicted amid skyrocketing property values and inflation.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development announced a \$20 million grant that will be distributed to nonprofit organizations and governmental bodies in areas with high eviction or prospective eviction rates across the country.

One of the recipients: the Alamo City.

"We were notified this morning and are working with our partners on an approach to utilize this grant," said Elizabeth Mercado, spokeswoman for the San Antonio Neighborhood & Housing Services Department.

Roughly 95,000 households in Bexar County are having an increasingly hard time making ends meet, putting them at risk of being priced out of their houses or apartments, according to city estimates.

San Antonio tied with Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma, Legal Services of New Jersey, Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation and West Tennessee Legal Services for the largest award: \$2.4 million. The remaining disbursements ranged from \$1 million to \$2.2 million.

*Evictions continues on A5*



Billy Calzada / Staff file photo

Dominick Barrera has said residents at Jasper Mobile Home Park were harassed into moving out.

# Sheriff seeks more deputies to fight summer rise in crime

By Taylor Pettaway  
STAFF WRITER

Bexar County Sheriff Javier Salazar said he needs more deputies before summer to combat a rise in violent crime.

Salazar wants to add 12 patrol positions and five criminal investigators.

In a letter to Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff and the county commissioners, Salazar said he needs to "stay ahead of

the curve," notwithstanding the department's official budget request scheduled to be presented in a few weeks.

The sheriff cited a rise in shootings, domestic assaults, human trafficking and other violent crimes occurring daily, saying the increase has strained his office's already taxed resources.

The Bexar County Sheriff's Office has seen an increase in firearms being used during crimes, and Salazar is concerned



Salazar

ly fighting crime so we can keep Bexar County safe," Salazar wrote.

He said there have been several recent incidents in which dep-

uties have been shot at by suspects. In one night in April, deputies responded to six vehicle burglaries in Alamo Ranch where the suspects were openly carrying guns during the robberies.

While the sheriff's office will soon have a 28-member academy class graduating, with another patrol class anticipated to start in the next several weeks, the requested additions would fill the department's current law en-

forcement vacancies.

In addition to an increase in sworn positions, Salazar is asking the county to "unfreeze" 41 budgeted civilian support positions so that the department can resume filling them. He said those positions were left vacant as employees left and the Sheriff's Office was unable to recruit for them.

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## AQUIFER

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Meanwhile, SAWS has other means to possibly avoid having to implement Stage 3 restrictions, such as pulling from its underground aquifer storage and recovery reservoir, said Karen Guz, director of water conservation for SAWS.

The reservoir, which stores billions of gallons of excess water during wetter times, can be used during times of drought to prevent the water system from imposing harsher watering rules on San Antonio residents. SAWS said it would begin pumping from it Monday.

SAWS has also diversified its water sources, reducing its reliance on the Edwards Aquifer. Other sources include the Carrizo Aquifer, Trinity Aquifer and Canyon Lake.

“Residents should be concerned enough to follow their watering regulations, like watering once a week and such,” Guz said. “But they definitely don’t need to worry that they’ll run out of water, like water that they need for their homes or businesses. That’ll be there.”

Watering on designated weekdays is also better for SAWS’ infrastructure, since dry and hot conditions lead to more main breaks. Drying soils can contract against underground water pipes, causing issues in areas that normally don’t have them.

Overall, it’s hard to predict what the year will look like, Bertetti said. The next couple months are typically when San Antonio gets the most rain. How much rain falls in May and June will determine how far the aquifer falls.

The aquifer can typically recover by midsummer as farmers harvest their crops around the Fourth of July and pump much less water than they do during spring. Still, Bertetti said it’s a long way to July and that Edwards Aquifer users, such as Bexar County residents, should be prepared for continued conservation and watering rules.

“This has happened in San Antonio before when we’ve had unusually dry spring and summer periods,” Guz said. “And we’ve gotten through those times remarkably well.”

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## EVICIONS

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The new HUD grant doubles the funding initially allotted to the department’s Eviction Protection Grant Program when it was announced in November, three months after the federal eviction moratorium instated due to the pandemic ended Aug. 26.

The funds will subsidize legal assistance for low-income tenants “at risk of or subject to eviction,” according to a HUD news release. They have been earmarked for 11 entities, mostly legal services providers.

“We need to keep doing all that we can to help people maintain quality housing,” Secretary Marcia L. Fudge said in the release. “We know that access to legal services and eviction diversion programs works. It helps people avoid evictions and protects tenants’ rights. Legal

# O’Rourke talks border on ‘The View’

By Jeremy Wallace  
STAFF WRITER

In a national TV appearance, Democratic candidate for governor Beto O’Rourke voiced support for lifting pandemic-related restrictions called Title 42 on the Texas border even though it could lead to a dramatic increase in border crossings.

Tuesday on ABC’s “The View,” O’Rourke said he wants order and the rule of law at the border but said Title 42 was keeping people with legitimate asylum claims from getting into the U.S. for their day in court. He said he’s spoken to Border Patrol officers who warn those people are making repeated attempts to come across, taking up even more of their time as they



O’Rourke

turn back the same people over and over without being able to determine the veracity of asylum claims.

“When we lift Title 42 and when we can process and where appropriate detain people, especially those who may pose a danger to us, we’re going to be safer and we’re going to be following our own asylum laws,” O’Rourke said.

Department of Homeland Security officials have said they could face up to 18,000 migrants a day at the border once Title 42 is lifted.

It didn’t take long for Gov. Greg Abbott’s campaign to blast O’Rourke

for saying the surge in migrants would make the state safer. Abbott has made border security a top priority in the campaign, dispatching 10,000 National Guard troops and Department of Public Safety officers to the border.

“Beto’s comments today in New York City supporting the ending of Title 42 once again demonstrates that he is completely out of touch with the crisis at the southern border,” said Mark Miner, communications director for the Abbott campaign. “The fact that Beto made these comments in New York City while appearing on ‘The View’ is a direct slap in the face to law enforcement and local officials on the border who are working daily to keep Texans safe.”

O’Rourke said he hopes lifting Title 42 will put political pressure on Congress to rewrite the nation’s immigration laws.

Earlier in his appearance on “The View,” O’Rourke slammed Abbott for trying to be more like Donald Trump on immigration, abortion rights and transgender children.

“In Texas, you see Greg Abbott trying to mimic Donald Trump,” O’Rourke said. “He’s not trying to be governor of the state of Texas. He’s trying to get that pole position in the Republican presidential primary.”

He later told host Joy Behar that Abbott is competing with Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis for the title of being the nation’s worst governor.

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Robin Jerstad / Contributor file photo

**Marchers lead a caravan during a 2020 National Day of Protest against evictions, foreclosures, police brutality and racism in downtown San Antonio.**

services also help landlords access available resources to address rent arrears.”

In response to the developing crisis, city officials included a \$150 million

housing affordability proposition in this year’s \$1.2 billion bond program. The entire program passed Saturday, though the housing affordability proposition seemed to be

most divisive among voters.

While the same costs are also rising in other big Texas cities such as Dallas, Austin and Houston, San Antonio is uniquely ill-

equipped to address the fallout because of its widespread poverty and dearth of affordable housing infrastructure, according to Henry Cisneros, former mayor and HUD secretary.

Mercado said San Antonio’s share of the funds would be put toward expanding the city’s “Right to Counsel” pilot, which she described as “a partnership with Texas Rio-Grande Legal Aid (TRLA) and San Antonio Legal Services Association (SALSA.)”

“The goal of the Right to Counsel program is to reduce the number of evictions through legal advice and counsel,” Mercado said. “There is high demand for these services, and this grant will support outreach efforts, and the hiring of additional attorney and non-attorney staff, including navigators who operating full time out of the Justice of the Peace courts.”

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## BRIEFS

**SAN ANTONIO**  
**Teenage girl is one of two killed in shootings**

A 16-year-old girl was one of two killed in separate shootings early Tuesday morning, San Antonio police said.

Officers were called to the 5100 block of Warhorse Drive just after 12:30 a.m. for reports of shots fired outside a residence. When they arrived, they found the teenage girl already dead in the back seat of a car, officials at the scene said.

She had been shot multiple times.

Less than two hours later, police responded to a shooting at Perfect Score Sports Cantina in the 6400 block of Loop 410. Witnesses told police that gunfire erupted between two vehicles in the parking lot. One person who had started running was fatally shot, police said.

**TEXAS**  
**Federal watchdog opens ‘review’ of use of COVID aid**

A U.S. government watchdog is probing whether Texas misspent federal coronavirus aid, after Gov. Greg Abbott and top state officials shifted roughly \$1 billion in relief funds to help defray the costs of their crackdown on the U.S.-Mexico border.

On Tuesday, the inspector general for the Treasury Department said officials had opened a “review” into the way Texas has handled its federal allocation broadly.

The aid was supposed to help local governments pay their front-line workers, purchase protective equipment and offset other public health costs. Texas rerouted public health and safety funds to the border operations, Operation Lone Star, while relying on federal pandemic funds to replace some of the money.

**PALMHURST**  
**Voters re-elect mayor although he died in April**

A Texas town re-elected a dead man as mayor although he died April 5.

Although incumbent Palmhurst Mayor Ramiro Rodriguez Jr., 68, had died, his name remained on the ballot.

According to Texas law, if a deceased candidate’s name has been certified by the secretary of state for placement on the ballot, it cannot be removed without their authorization.

Rodriguez defeated challenger Israel Silva in the small town near McAllen, receiving 320 votes to Silva’s 234. The city will hold a special election for a new mayor.

**HOUSTON**  
**Vaccine expert Hotez is positive for COVID-19**

Texas vaccine expert Peter Hotez has tested positive for COVID-19, the physician said.

“Looks like I’ve tested positive for COVID, moderate symptoms of fatigue, headache, sore throat, isolating at home doing zoom meetings,” he posted on Twitter.

“I’m grateful to have been vaccinated/boosted, which certainly prevented more severe illness. Just started Paxlovid. Transmission up, be careful.”

Hotez is the dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine and co-director of the Center for Vaccine Development at Texas Children’s Hospital.

*From staff and wire reports*