

UHD DATELINE

Student Run Since
Volume One

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Communication Studies discusses health communications amid COVID-19

By Indira Zaldivar

UHD Communication Studies program hosted its first virtual speaker even on Oct. 14. Three health communication experts comprised the panel which discussed effective communication strategies to inform the public, lead work teams, and help families and children deal with trauma and grief in the wake of COVID-19.

Toni Hoang, Ph.D., UHD alumna and associate professor of communication studies at UHD, said she approaches communication that

informs and persuades the public to minimize risks. Hoang informed of a study that supports the extended parallel processing model by showing that only a marginal perception of threat prompts actions that prevent the infection and spread of COVID-19.

“When people don’t feel susceptible to a threat, regardless if the consequences are severe, there is no response appraisal,” Hoang said. “It’s important to recognize that the threat of COVID-19 is real, and that only a mod-

erate level of perceived threat or detected threat is necessary to protect ourselves.”

Hoang pointed out that people are not always willing or psychologically ready to carry out the recommendations despite understanding the impact of those recommendations. “This gap implies a sense of complacency, and it is one of the most dangerous forms of human error,” Hoang said. “It’s how mistakes happen.”

She encouraged city and public health

officials to use the modeling technique in communication to convey the importance of wearing a mask and other recommendations against the novel coronavirus. In the same note, Willie Payton Jr., supervisory management and program analyst at Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center, also emphasized the use of visuals. He told communicators to refrain from text-heavy documents and opt for infographics instead.

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Local Business Spotlight Fix Coffeebar

By Keven Balderas

On Westheimer Road, between streets Whitney and Taft, lies Fix Coffeebar, a coffee shop owned and managed by Garry Freeman.

Tucked underneath a dental clinic, it does not proclaim its presence like a certain green-eyed international coffee chain, but the boldfaced signs reading “Fix” and “coffee” should not elude the eye of an observant passerby.

The good deal of cars keen to park in the few unreserved spaces near it would have been another clear sign pointing to Fix, were it not for the pandemic, which Mr. Freeman says brought him four straight months

of losses. A profit finally came last month, but it did not exceed a few hundred dollars.

The policies put in place to slow the spread of COVID-19, and the fear of contracting the virus have reduced walk-in traffic to a trickle at Fix, as well as at most other coffee shops in the country, but Fix is adapting.

In recent months, it has positioned itself on social media as purveyor of everything patrons need to enjoy coffee at home, including bottled cold brew, locally roasted coffee beans, and Chemex filters. Fix is, in fact, acting accordingly to customer needs. A new poll by

the National Coffee Association shows Americans drinking coffee as much now as before the pandemic, but restaurants are seeing about 20 percent less of them.

And in recent days, the team at Fix has decided it will soon allow seating at six tables and the window bar. “We did a lot of soul searching, and discussed it at length with the staff, and they wish to open up inside again,” said Mr. Freeman.

Gentle light cast from about twenty uncovered lightbulbs introduce the visitor to the subdued ambience of the large room. Black beams that serve as ceiling, and

smooth concrete as floor, are the biggest contributors to the smoky palette of its interior. Overlooking the wooden seating is the espresso machine, a large shiny apparatus, from in front of which the barista needs only look up to face all who enter.

That is the place which Mr. Freeman hopes may provide coffee drinkers (or tea drinkers) their next “fix” of caffeine, as it has done since the spring of 2016. If anything, they are invited to try the honey lavender latte, Fix’s signature drink.

For more information on Fix Coffeebar, follow @fixhtx on Instagram, or visit www.fixhtx.com.



THE DATELINE

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Submission Policy

The Dateline staff consists of students from the University of Houston-Downtown who complete all tasks required to produce the newspaper, which serves all UHD campuses. The opinions and commentaries expressed within reflect the views of the contributing writers. No opinions expressed in The Dateline reflect the viewpoints of the University of Houston-Downtown, its administration, or students.

The Dateline reserves the right to edit or modify submissions for the sake of clarity, content, grammar, or space limitations. All submissions become property of The Dateline and may not be returned.

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Press releases, story ideas, news tips and suggestions are always welcomed. We encourage all students to contribute.

Any student interested in joining The Dateline staff may request more detailed information sending an email to the editors at editordatelinedowntown@gmail.com.

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Health communications Continued from front page

According to the World Health Organization, 134 million adverse events occur in hospitals in both low and middle-income countries causing 2.6 million people to die each year because of unsafe hospital care. Payton said that effective communication among healthcare staff could prevent 80% of those deaths.

Payton urged leaders to foster an environment at work for people to talk because safe mechanisms are the "foundation for new ideas." He said that small groups, group projects, or facility wide efforts provide safe mechanisms for people to give leaders feedback and innovate to solve problems. He also told the audience to remain self-aware and curious and to learn to say no.

"Learn how to create those boundaries so that you are only accepting the things you can provide the highest outcome," Payton said. "Understand who you are communicating with so that you can effec-

tively change your communication styles. Create that space for yourself to have emotion, empathy, and remain private."

Leslie K. Taylor, Ph.D, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at McGovern Medical School of UT Health said that the pandemic is putting a strain on the family structure. Taylor said that the amount of murders between domestic-violence partners increased and overall domestic violence cases rose by 40% in Houston. Taylor also said children aged two to seven are having the most destructive behavioral problems at home and are at more risk for abuse.

"It's not very intuitive to everybody that it is important for children to have that safe base or that secure attachment with that one person and how much that can serve as a buffer and creates resiliency," Taylor said.

Taylor works with children, families, and school districts via virtual

sessions. Taylor said the pandemic altered the plans of Senate bill 11, a Texas legislation that passed in 2019 to offer mental care and support to Texas school children that experienced traumatic events. Virtual sessions present a challenge that Taylor approaches by building rapport. She said it is important to exaggerate facial gestures and emotions with children during virtual sessions because children and teens are still learning how to read emotions. She suggests giving virtual high fives, sharing the screen to show brief video clips, complete handouts, or to draw together.

The three panelists emphasized the need to take care of oneself and the importance of a support network.

"All of us are trying to figure out how to stay connected to our loved ones," Taylor said.

"You got to take care of yourself in these situations," Payton added. "This is the new normal, so you just have to adapt."

Health Empowerment Club discusses career options

By Salvador Hernandez

On Oct. 8, the Health Empowerment Club hosted their "Second Club Meeting Panel Discussion." The club is in their first year and is dedicated to providing basic health knowledge to the student body and an understanding of the health and behavioral science major offered by UHD. The major is broad, encompassing clinical and non-clinical aspects of this subject. The event provided current and future members with information regarding the club and field of health and

behavioral science.

The event was hosted by Health Empowerment Club President, Meghana Karra. There were two panel guests, Dr. Angelica Roncancio and Dr. Michael Lemke, both professors at UHD. Both guests focused on a different aspect of health and behavioral science. Roncancio highlighted the different job opportunities offered to those interested in majoring in health and behavioral science.

Roncancio started her presentation by explaining how she arrived

at her tenure as Assistant Professor of Health and Behavioral Science, explaining that her path was not a straightforward one. Having majored in Psychology and minored in Sociology, she decided that a job in a lab was not as fulfilling to her as one where she could see the difference in the life of others. Roncancio highlighted that volunteering and networking is key for those whom are interested in obtaining a job after graduation.

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Health Empowerment Club

Continued from Gator Life, Page 2

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for those whom are interested in obtaining a job after graduation.

Roncancio ended her presentation by displaying useful links to sites of organizations and possible jobs students could be a part of such as HIV prevention or working with the Houston Health Department.

Lemke focused on the opportunities available to students interested in pursuing higher education. Highlighting his own path to graduate school from

truck driving and his trouble with academics in his early years in college. Lemke provided a deep insight to those who were interested in pursuing a Masters or a Doctorate. Lemke let those present aware of key qualifications for graduate schools such as G.P.A. cutoffs and looking around to see if a specific program one's interested is better at one institution than others.

Health Empowerment Club President Meghana

Karra commented on the success of the event.

"There was such a great turn out even though we only had a total of 11 or 12 members... it [was] so successful [I] learn[ed] a lot of experience and divisions inside the structured name of health and behavioral science. I've only known... patient provider, front end billing [it was a] very informative presentation ...with all those opportunities and links we have been given...

that brings a different expectation for somebody who is unsure of what is in health and behavioral and know I have more opportunities that I didn't know previously."

Vice President, Gladys Chan added "It was a success since...we did not expect that they talk about their experiences and health and behavioral science. We did not expect... Power Point slides, but that was very surprising

The Health Empowerment Club

plans to schedule another event in November to honor Epilepsy Awareness Month. The club plans to host a virtual First Aid course for seizures, a certification valid for two years. Lessons will focus on how to administer first aid and C.P.R. to those who have seizures. The club holds bi-weekly meetings on Thursdays with all students welcome to attend.

Faculty Senate Update: Reducing cost of resources

By Sheryl Sellers

The Oct. 20 Faculty Senate meeting agenda once again contained an ample number of items to fill the 90-minute time-frame.

Ron Beebe, Ph.D. introduced the first speaker, Rob Austin McKee, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Leadership and Entrepreneurship, who gave an update from the OER (Open Educational Resources) Task Force. Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed Senate Bill 810 into law in 2017 mandating that institutions of higher education make free and low-cost materials available and accessible to students.

Per the task force text, Texas defines OER as "a teaching, learning or research resource that is in the public domain or has been released under an intellectual property license that permit the

free use, adaptation, and redistribution of the resource by any person. The term may include full course curricula, course materials, modules, textbooks, media, assessments, software and any other tools, materials, or techniques, whether digital or otherwise, used to support access to knowledge."

The task force is working on a system that will allow faculty to label courses that use a resource that is either free or costs \$50 or less. Dr. McKee created an informational, bilingual video on YouTube. Edmund Cueva, Ph.D., Professor of Humanities and chair of the OER Task Force, noted that OER will cause some courses to become more desirable to students based on the cost effectiveness. He ascertained that the average student works 28 hours a week

netting approximately \$200. It has been determined that 62% of students will drop a course due to the additional cost and 32% will not purchase the required textbook. While headed in the right direction, there is still work for the OER Task Force to complete.

Next on the agenda was Provost Eric Carl Link, Ph.D., who thanked the task force and offered a "tip of the cap" for the work they are accomplishing.

Dr. Link gave a short discourse on an updated budget since the pandemic displaced some items on the budget that was created last February and March. That budget was also prepared anticipating a 5% decrease in enrollment, whereas UHD has seen a 4% increase.

Regarding enrollment, the administration is approaching

the spring semester somewhat cautiously. Fall semester enrollment was an anomaly. Several area community colleges saw significant declines in enrollment. Lone Star College witnessed a 7% decrease and Houston Community College enrollments were down 12-13%.

Based on this data, UHD anticipates a "bigger slice of the [student enrollment] pie" coming to UHD in the next two to three years. Therefore, administration will launch a search for 34 full time faculty additions which will include 23 professors, five lecturers, one assistant professor and five spots to be determined. The department heads have been directed to look at filling the professor spots from under-represented demographics.

The proverbial wand was passed next to Kevin Buckler,

Ph.D., Professor of Criminal Justice, who opened a discussion on faculty development awards. He noted that there is no policy regarding lecturers at the university receiving these funds. He introduced Meghan Minard, Ph.D., Lecturer in Biology, who brought to the senate's attention that other staff are eligible for the awards, such as librarians, but lecturers are not. She asked the senators to support the lecturers in applying for these awards.

Alan Modrow, president of the Student Government Association (SGA), rounded out the meeting presenting a resolution (RP41-002) for the senate's consideration. The resolution calls for a "no instruction day" every two years on Nov. 3 in order for students, and faculty, to vote. This year the resolution requests

Nov. 3 to be an optional instruction day. The effect of this proposal encourages students to vote and adds another component to the university's civic engagement.

In answering the many faculty questions, Modrow responded that the request is that assignments would still be due and noted further that other universities are making similar requests of their faculty but are requesting that assignments not be due on that day.

Many senators had praise for the SGA operating as "meaningful change agents" but also realizing that a closer look at the document is needed.

Dr. Beebe concluded the meeting requesting that each department send him three to four priority subjects for the senate to deliberate this year.

Harris County Clerk's Office answers voting questions

By Keven Balderas

On Oct. 15, John Hudson, Ph.D., Director of the Center for Diversity and Inclusion at UHD, hosted "Your Voting Questions Answered," a Q&A session with Roxanne Werner, Director of Community Relations for the Harris County Clerk's Office.

The discussion began with the topic of drive-thru voting. Although an unprecedented way of voting in the state of Texas, it is similar to doing so in person. Ballots are still cast on machine. Poll workers are still present, assisting every voter and attending every tent.

Harris County ran a successful pilot for it in July, but its sustainability beyond the pandemic is uncertain, according to Ms. Werner. "It is a higher budget item, but we believe it's really important for this moment, where not everyone is really able to go inside," she said.

Ten drive-thru locations in Harris County have been operational since early voting began on Oct. 13. They faced the possibility of being shut down as soon as the tents went up. However, when the Texas Republican Party filed a lawsuit challenging drive-thru

and curbside voting on Oct. 12, the State Appeals Court soon dismissed their case because they failed to show standing and file on time.

The topic of mail-in ballots found its way into the discussion, as well. Controversy has come fast at the heels of that option to vote largely since President Trump and his political allies began claiming without evidence that it leads to voter fraud.

Harris County officials have mailed out about 230,000 ballots, according to Ms. Werner. That number represents 9.3% of the nearly

2,469,000 registered voters in the county.

"One of the lines that the county clerk actually really likes to use is that you're more likely to be struck by lightning than you are to be a victim of voter fraud," she said. She further commented that because the allegations of voter fraud surrounding mail-in ballots sow deep mistrust in the democratic process, they are another form of voter suppression.

As to whether there were enough poll workers to staff the longest early voting period in Texas history, which, according to Ms.

Werner, may potentially welcome up to 75 percent of all registered voters, she assured her listeners that they should not be concerned.

"Even in the event that some poll workers back out, or things happen and people can't work, we still have plenty of back-up."

She also stressed that voters who arrive at the polling stations in time would be allowed to stay and cast their ballots.

The Q&A session lasted nearly 40 minutes. Dr. Hudson planned to hold another one with Ms.

Werner on Oct. 21. He arranged the sessions because in addition to doing anything to encourage UHD students to vote, he knew students might have family members, much like his mother, who were concerned about early voting and mail-in ballots.

"They want their vote counted on the one hand," he said, "but we want them to be safe, right?"

More information on how to vote in Harris County is available at harris-votes.com.

Faculty Profile: Dr. John Rountree

By Priscila Batres

John Rountree, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. He has been teaching communication courses at UHD for a year. His educational background consists of an undergraduate degree in English and a minor in communication. A master's degree in communication from Georgia State University and a Ph.D. from Pennsylvania State University.

Dr. Rountree likes teaching communication at UHD because a lot of students know what they want, have community engagement, and are involved with the university. As a communication

professor, he specializes in Rhetoric and Public Address, which focuses on rhetorical theory and explores the audience analysis and persuasion of speeches. One of the things he likes about this course is that he always learns something new each semester from his students work and how involved they get with the class.

Aside from this, he also teaches public speaking and communication, and public decision-making.

Additionally, teaching communication courses entirely online can be challenging for many students, primarily if some classes are meant to be conducted face-to-face. Dr. Rountree shared

what he considers the most difficult aspect of educating during COVID-19.

He said one difficulty is "working with students with technical difficulties such as getting kicked out of zoom meetings, microphones not working, the unstable internet connection."

As well as "not having all channels of communication available" because for communication majors specifically, they not only communicate verbally but through non-verbals.

So, with this type of challenge, Dr. Rountree always takes into consideration these difficulties students may have. The available communication lines must be used in case a

student goes MIA or start missing assignments. He doesn't penalize students if they are having trouble outside of class but instead, wants to help his students the best he can and make sure they are back on track to finish the course successfully.

Dr. Rountree is also involved with the Center of Public Deliberation (CPD), in which he works closely with the head center, Windy Lawrence, Ph.D.. He works and helps organize civic events such as candidate meet-and-greets, in which political candidates engage with students to interact and answer questions before election day.

Rountree's expertise in rhetoric is

essential for working in the CPD because he contributes to a lot of the success of civic events and studies that this center hosts for students of the UHD and the larger Houston community.

Dr. Rountree



Image courtesy of UHD website

Trump tests positive for COVID-19, refuses to participate in virtual debate

By Lauren Anderson

On Oct. 2, President Donald Trump, who has spent most of the year downplaying the threat of a virus that has killed thousands of Americans, said that he and first lady Melania Trump have tested positive for the coronavirus and will be quarantining. Hours before Trump said he had contracted the virus; the White House said a top aide who had traveled with him had tested positive.

“Tonight, @FLOTUS and I tested positive for COVID-19. We will begin our quarantine and recovery process immediately,” Trump tweeted. “We will get through this TOGETHER!”

Melania Trump also later revealed through an essay published on the White House website that her son, Barron Trump, contracted the virus as well. She stated that he had already recovered and experienced no symptoms and spoke about her experience with the disease. The first lady offered insight into her emotional state during this challenging time and admitted she had been “caught up” in the negative energy of the election. She ended her essay by stating that she has since then tested negative and with an appeal to Americans to live healthy lives.

“Along with this good news, I

want people to know that I understand just how fortunate my family is to have received the kind of care that we did,” she wrote. “If you are sick, or if you have a loved one who is sick - I am thinking of you and will be thinking of you every day.”

While Melania Trump, 50, experienced only mild symptoms, President Trump, 74, was taken to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center with concerning vital signs, and received experimental treatment with antiviral drugs. However, he was discharged 4 days later and has since returned to the campaign trail.

Trump’s handling of the pandemic has been a major point to address in the race against Joe Biden, who has resumed his campaign schedule after a break last summer due to the virus. His campaign consists of small, socially distance crowds, and he regularly wears a mask in public, which is something Trumped mocked him for in a previous debate.

It was confirmed by Trump that Hope Hicks, one of his most trusted and longest-serving aids, had been diagnosed with the virus on Oct. 1. Hicks began feeling mild symptoms during a plane ride home from a rally in Minnesota, and it was revealed that she was

isolated from other passengers on the plane.

Multiple White House staffers have tested positive for the virus, but Trump has consistently played down concerns about vulnerability to the virus, even as many White House staff were exposed and sickened. Since the coronavirus first emerged, Trump has refused to follow basic health guidelines, such as wearing masks and practicing social distancing. Instead, he continues to hold campaign rallies that hold thousands of supporters.

This news was an added concern to a nation still discussing how to reopen the economy without further spreading the virus. The White House has the resources to test staff, but still failed to protect the president, which raised questions among the public on how the country will protect workers and students as schools and businesses reopen.

The White House begun implementing daily testing for the president’s aides after earlier positive cases. Anyone near the president or vice president is also tested every day, including reporters.

Since the early days of the pandemic, health experts have questioned the health and safety protocols at the White House. Trump shook hands

with visitors long after public health officials warned against it.

Trump announced without evidence on Oct. 11 that he tested “totally negative” after contracting the virus, and planned to hold another rally in Florida, which is another event that has high risk of further spreading the virus.

“I’m immune. So, the president is in very good shape to fight the battles,” Trump said on Fox’s “Sunday Morning Futures.”

The Commission on Presidential Debates later cancelled the debate between Trump and Joe Biden that was originally scheduled for Oct. 15 after the president refused to do a virtual debate, despite concerns on his previous diagnosis.

The commission stated that because Trump tested positive for the coronavirus, the debate that was scheduled for Miami would be held virtually, with the candidates appearing from remote locations. However, Trump rejected this plan, saying he would not “waste my time with a virtual debate” and put the future of all general election debates into question. In response to Trump’s cancellation, the Biden campaign stated that they would be hosting a town hall with the former

vice president to take voter questions. The Trump campaign then stated that they would be willing to push the Oct. 15 debate back a week to Oct. 22 and then move the third debate to Oct. 29, but Biden’s campaign rejected the proposal, saying that the debate commission are the ones to make the debate schedule.

Trump then scheduled his own town hall event for the night of Oct. 15, which was aired on NBC in Miami.

“On Oct. 8, CPD announced that for the health and safety of all involved, the second presidential debate, scheduled for Oct. 15 in Miami, would be conducted virtually,” the commission said in a statement.

“Subsequently, the campaigns of the two candidates who qualified for participation in the debate made a series of statements concerning their respective positions regarding their willingness to participate in a virtual debate on Oct. 15,

and each now has announced alternate plans for that date.”

The president’s refusal alarmed Republican strategists, who say it was the best chance he had to pitch his case directly to voters. The president also suggested holding campaign rallies for the remainder of the election.

Both candidates agreed to participate in the next debate on Oct. 22 in a traditional debate format.

“Subject to health security considerations, and in accordance with all required testing, masking, social distancing and other protocols, the debate will take place at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee,” the commission said in a statement.

The debate was held on Oct. 22, and it was considered the third officially scheduled debate, but is only the second debate to take place.



Image courtesy of AP News

Biden hosts town hall meeting

By Sheryl Sellers

President Donald Trump, recently left Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and purportedly fended off COVID-19, refused to virtually debate with Democratic presidential nominee, Joe Biden. Instead, the candidates held their own town halls, concurrently, on Oct. 15. Same time, same date, different channel.

Moderated by George Stephanopoulos, former Vice President Biden answered questions from a masked, socially distanced audience at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia. The audience included young and old, Black and white, Republican and Democrat. Throughout the broadcast Biden was clear, concise, emphatic, empathetic and

displayed confidence and sincerity. Audience questions surrounded the highlights of recent national issues such as the economy, COVID-19 and a possible vaccine, crime and especially highlighted here, the Black vote.

One of the attendees that Stephanopoulos called upon was Cedric Humphrey, a progressive Democrat and student from Harrisburg, PA. Humphrey stood, thanked Stephanopoulos and Biden and noted that the current mindset of Black people is to not vote in the current election.

“Many people believe that the swing demographic in this election is the young Black voter under the age of 30. Not because they will

vote for Trump, but because they will not vote at all,” he proceeded to ask a valid, direct question.

“Besides you ain’t Black, what do you have to say to young Black voters who see voting for you as further participation in a system that continues to fail to protect them?”

Biden channeled John Lewis in responding, reminding Humphrey of Lewis’ words, “It’s a sacred opportunity and a right to vote.”

He continued that a further question would be, “Am I worthy of your vote? Can I earn your vote?”

To follow up on his own question, Biden named policies he initiated throughout his career and those he would support. He mentioned

the need to create a good, fair, and decent criminal justice system. Biden also offered that he granted additional funds to Title I schools, an increase from \$15 billion to \$45 billion, improving teacher salaries, among other benefits.

Early education is also a key to future success, and Biden believes that every 3, 4, and 5-year-old should attend school – not daycare, but actual school. Based on what schools say, that alone would affect a 58% increase in a student’s chance of a successful in the following 12 years of school.

Biden also reminded Humphrey and viewers that he provided \$70 billion to HBCU (historically Black colleges and

universities) schools for foundation support, so they can do what other universities are doing.

Additional items on Biden’s agenda are guaranteeing first-time home buyers a \$15,000 across the board down payment on a new home. Furthermore, he wants to abolish “red lining.”

Biden explained that a house in a Black neighborhood exactly the same as a house in a white neighborhood, is valued 29% less, but the insurance and taxes are higher. This is unfair and needs to be changed. During his remarks, Biden’s overall claim was that one needs the ability to accumulate wealth.

“It’s about accumulating wealth.

The vast majority of people of color are behind the eight ball [in accumulating wealth].”

“We can change so much, and we can do so much to change the circumstances to give people a real opportunity.”

Ending his remarks, Biden asked Humphrey to stay afterwards so they can discuss the issue in more detail.

A postscript: Humphrey did not stay afterwards because there were so many others who did not have an opportunity to ask their questions. But one of Biden’s campaign representatives contacted Humphrey later. They spoke for 30 minutes arranging for Humphrey and Biden to speak personally sometime over that weekend.

Texas officer charged with murder

By Shirley Bright

In Wolfe City, Texas, a town whose population is the one-tenth of the size of UHD’s student body, a white police officer was charged with the murder of a Black man. On the evening of Oct. 3, 2020, Officer Shaun Lucas was alerted of a disturbance at a local convenience store. The altercation subsided when he arrived, yet 31-year-old Jonathan Price was shot and killed.

Lucas arrived at the Kwik Chek convenience store. From witness reports and Lucas’ body

came out the store and attempted to greet the officer. Price made multiple attempts to greet Lucas and to shake his hand. When Price came in close proximity of Lucas, Lucas said he thought Price was intoxicated. Price never explained to the officer that he was not the perpetrator in the incident, and Lucas attempted to detain him, thinking he was the source of the altercation. Price’s only involvement in the disturbance was to break up the fight that occurred inside the store. According to an affidavit by the Texas Ranger, Price said there was no reason that he should

be detained.

Officer Lucas gave verbal commands as he tried to physically detain Price. Lucas’ efforts to detain him failed and Price began walking away. At that time, Lucas began verbal orders to stop or he would use the taser. Price continued walking and Lucas deployed the taser.

The affidavit states the taser “was not fully effective” but it does not state why it was not. At that time, Price turned and walked toward officer Lucas. The affidavit states that Price reached for the end of the taser. When he did, Lucas fired his

weapon four times, shooting Price in the upper body.

Wolfe City in Northeast Texas is a town of only 1,400 people – the police department is comprised of 3 officers. With a population this size and a police force so small, it is normal for most residents to be familiar, at least with the names of the local police officers.

Shaun Lucas was known as the “new cop” who was aggressive with traffic stops. Lucas had only been with Wolfe City Police Department for six months and previously served with Hunt County for five months as a jailer. On

this fatal night, Lucas was less than one year out of training from the police academy.

The death of Jonathan Price was the first officer-involved shooting in the county since 2018. The 22-year-old Lucas was not well known by the residents of Wolfe City, and they did not believe he knew them very well. On one occasion he arrested a 65-year-old resident who walked with a limp and charged him with intoxication. Lucas did not know that 31-year-old Price was a pillar of this small community.

Hunt County grand jury was not scheduled to have its monthly meeting until Oct. 30, but follow-

ing the investigations of the Department of Public Safety and Texas Rangers, Shaun Lucas was charged on Monday Oct. 5, with the murder of Price. He was booked into Hunt County Jail and would be held in Collins County. His bond was set at \$1 million.

The Texas Ranger’s report states, Lucas’ action “were not objectionably reasonable.” The footage from the body camera has not been released, but the report from the Texas Rangers states Price resistance was not threatening. Price’s family requested the release of the body camera footage and said they are glad that Lucas was arrested and is off the streets.

Trump hosts town hall meeting By Indira Zaldivar

On Oct. 15, NBC News hosted President Donald Trump's town hall in Miami, Florida at the same time as Joe Biden's in Pennsylvania. Trump spoke various misleading and false statements during the televised event.

Both simultaneous town halls replaced the scheduled face-to-face presidential debate that the Commission of Presidential Debates canceled after Trump contracted coronavirus and refused to participate in a virtual debate.

Savannah Guthrie, NBC news anchor, moderated the town hall and recounted Trump's nomination of Judge Amy Coney Barrett in the White House's Rose Garden on Sept. 26; days before

Trump announced his diagnosis on Oct. 2. The nomination included an indoor ceremony.

Guthrie questioned him about why many attendees were not wearing masks or socially distancing. Many sat closed together during the outdoor ceremony. Trump only responded that as president, he has to be out there and cannot be locked up in a room. 11 attendees tested positive to COVID-19 within a few days of the event.

He also falsely claimed that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 85% of people who wear masks get the coronavirus. Trump said his administration has done an amazing job in handling of the pandemic.

Trump said that the "US was expected to lose 2,200,000 people and maybe more than that from the coronavirus." However, that report is misleading because scholars from the Imperial College in London predicted in March the number of deaths from COVID-19 if no preventative measures were installed on any level of society.

Trump responded to a concern brought up during the town hall by Barbara Pena, E.R doctor. He assured Pena that the economy is getting back on track now. He said that 11.4 million jobs opened, GDP is going through the roof, and that the unemployment rate is only 7.8% despite people saying that it would be up to 42%. He warned that could

change if people elect "someone that quadruples taxes."

"We had the greatest economy in the history of our country, last year," Trump said. However, a September 2019 report by the Census Bureau shows that the economy in 2019 failed to be the greatest for all Americans. The top 1% held almost 40% of the nation's wealth, and income inequality in the U.S. reached the highest level in 50 years.

Trump responded to a question by Becky Lightman, an undecided voter. He said that before he was president, corporate taxes were the highest in the world and that now, the U.S has among the lowest in the world. However, the \$1.5 trillion tax cut enacted in December 2019, ranks below at least half a dozen others by several metrics.

"We've created more jobs than this country has ever created. We were up to 160 million jobs, we were never even close to that number," Trump said.

Jeanna Smialek, an economist reporter, fact-checked Trump. Smialek wrote that Trump employed "creative rounding." Smialek said Trump most likely rounded the number of workers on nonfarm payrolls in February that was about 152.5 million workers.

"I have done more for the African American community than any president with the exception of President Abraham Lincoln," Trump responded to Cindy Velez, Black mother of a Black son, after Velez asked what Trump would do to protect the lives of innocent Black and Latino Americans.

However, historians concur that the most powerful legislations happened under the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson through the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the Civil Rights Act and the Fair Housing Act. Paulette Dale, daughter of immigrants from Russia and Poland, said that immigration policies are personal for her

because her family immigrated escaping religious persecution. Dale asked Trump if he would pursue efforts to cut Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. Trump said that he is negotiating aspects of immigration law.

"DACA is somewhat different than Dreamers, you understand that," Trump told Dale.

His statement is false because DACA recipients are called Dreamers, given that the legislation is called the Dream Act. When Guthrie noted that Trump has curtailed the program, Trump added that he has altered the program because of the pandemic.

However, the Trump administration has attempted to end DACA, a decision the Supreme Court blocked in 2017. His administration has rejected new applicants since 2017 and forced recipients to renew status every year instead of every two years under the Obama Administration.



Image courtesy of NBC News

GOP stimulus package fails again By Priscila Batres

On Oct. 21, the GOP's "skinny" stimulus package of \$500 billion for COVID-19 relief failed to pass in the Senate. This was the same bill that Senate Democrats blocked in September.

The GOP, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch Mc-

Connell, has opposed the new White House stimulus package of 1.28 trillion in funds for COVID-19 relief, but their own version has failed to move forward twice. Negotiations await the White House to draft the language for their proposed stimulus package.

This comes several weeks before election day; there's a lot of pressure to get a stimulus bill in a bipartisan decision. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi mentioned that there is a possibility that a bill might get passed by next week.

"We want to have a deal by Nov.

3," Pelosi told SiriusXM radio. "That is going to be up to whether the president can convince Mitch McConnell to do so."

If an agreement isn't reached before the election, it is likely that we will not see one until early next year. As of right now, there is a high

possibility that there will not be stimulus checks this year. Harvard economist Jason Furman, a former top Obama adviser, presented a concern.

"If Congress doesn't act, the next administration is going to inherit a real mess," Furman said. "Economic problems

tend to feed on themselves."

He is in the Democratic camp that prefers imperfect stimulus now, rather than a larger package in four months or so.

As of now, there is uncertainty in what will happen or what type of agreement will be reached, but so far, economists predict that a positive turnout is unlikely.

By Alex Riley
This

year, with early voting having been available to Harris County voters for two (maybe 3 depending on publication date) weeks now, the turnout rate has shattered previous records for the Houston-area. In the first week alone, nearly 720,000 residents cast their vote for the national election.

Despite the ongoing pandemic, Harris County voters have managed to make their way to the polls to have their voices heard. It is not surprising when we consider the pandemic has caused city officials to provide alternative means for residents to cast their vote.

Houston-area residents have the option to vote at drive-thru voting stations set up at 10 different locations around the county. Residents can also vote by mail, however, recent events relating to the postal service have created skepticism about trusting the USPS with ballots. In response, Harris County Clerk Chris Hollins established multiple locations for voters to drop-off their ballots. Officials also increased the hours of several early voting sites, and six locations

will remain open for 24 hours in the final days of early voting.

On Oct. 1, just two weeks before early voting began in Texas, Governor Greg Abbott ordered Texas counties will be limited to one ballot drop box per county. This order forces potentially hundreds of thousands of Harris County

voters to wait in an excessively long line to drop off their ballot. Hollins took Abbott's order as a form of voter suppression.

"If you look at [election results] for Harris County, you see a very clear trend," Hollins said. "If I were in the business of trying to suppress Democratic votes, I know

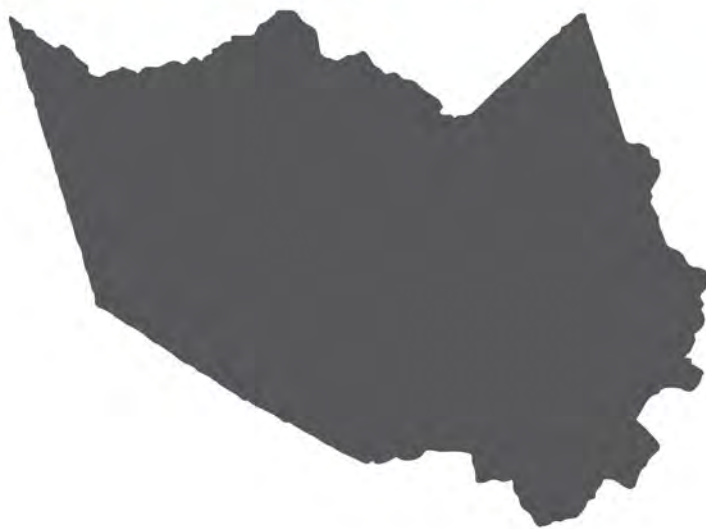
where I would target." In 2008, nearly 600,000 Democratic votes were cast in Harris County; this marked the first time Republican votes in the county were outdone in recent history. In 2016, that gap only widened with an additional 100,000 registered Democrats casting a vote.

By Whitney Barrett

With a record high turnout rate in Harris County so far, it remains to be seen whether the trend will continue, and if Democratic voters will cast enough votes to turn the longtime Red state into a more Progressive territory.

Record-Breaking Early Votes

Harris County



Texas

- 16,617,436**
Total number of registered voters in Texas
- 6,356,493**
Early/in-person ballots cast
- 837,089**
Mail/absentee ballots cast
- 80.2%**
Percentage of early votes cast to total 2016 turnout

Dallas Cowboys QB suffers injury

By James Jurewicz

Dak Prescott, the starting quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys of the National Football League, was seriously injured on the football field Sunday, Oct. 11, effectively ending his season. At AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas on a routine run of 9 yards, Prescott was legally tackled to the ground by New York Giants safety Logan Ryan. Immediately following the tackle, Prescott abruptly sat up and held his right leg off the ground, his foot was bent at a 45-degree angle to in relation to his knee and hung limply off his shin.

“If you are a Cowboys fan you are hoping that this is a cramp,” stated color commentator and Prescott predecessor, Tony Romo. Romo had lost the starting job of Cowboys quarterback to Prescott when Romo himself was injured in August of 2016. Romo retired in 2017 and took a Play by Play announcing job with the CBS network.

Dak Prescott is no stranger to heartbreak and tragedy. His mother, Peggy Prescott died after a battle with colon cancer in 2013. He still honors his mother while playing football, Prescott points to the sky with each touchdown celebration. In Sept. 2020, Prescott publicly addressed his own battle with depression which he said was intensified during the

COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent quarantine. In April 2020, Prescott’s brother Jace Prescott died by suicide. It was then that Prescott sought help for his mental health.

Prescott decided to speak out on his depression publicly to raise awareness.

“Mental health is a huge issue and a big thing in our world right now,” he stated in an interview with Graham Basinger.

For such a high-profile person to speak on his own struggles with depression helps to lower the stigma behind mental health. Prescott has the ability to help many struggling people with his message and he encourages those affected to seek help.

Prescott had never missed a game in his NFL career, and his toughness and durability were undeniable. While he sat on the field patiently waiting for the team’s medical personnel, he pointed to his injured foot which turned out to be dislocation along with a compound fracture. Prescott’s bone had broken the skin. His stoic demeanor after the injury displayed Prescott’s toughness. His fist held proudly in the air, tears did not flow until he had to be carted off the field and taken to a local Dallas area hospital. It was then that the gravity of Prescott’s situation became apparent. Unfortunately,

Prescott had bet on himself and lost.

As a rookie, Prescott made the money of a fourth-round draft pick, substantially less than the average starting quarterback salary. Drafted as a developmental quarterback from Mississippi State, injury forced Prescott into a starting position. Prescott was waiting this past summer on a contract extension that never materialized. While he has more than proved himself on and off the football field with his talent and impeccable character, negotiations with the Cowboys front office never resulted in a long-term extension. Prescott was rumored to have been offered a 5-year contract worth \$175 million. His agent was attempting to negotiate him a more lucrative, yet shorter 4-year deal instead. He was given a 1-year \$31.4 franchise tag, also considered a “Prove It” deal. Through the first 4 games of 2020 Dak Prescott was breaking multiple NFL records, on pace to throw for a staggering 6,000-yard average and more than proving his worth.

“It was sick, the timing, I hope he gets \$500 million,” said Giants safety, Logan Ryan. The tackle was clean and legal, just a random unfortunate consequence of a contact sport.

Prescott loves the game of football – he recently had

a 45-yard football field installed in his backyard. There is no telling how he will bounce back from such a horrible injury, but his surgery was successful. Doctors estimate he will need 4 to 6 months to recover.

The new Giants offensive coordinator, longtime Cowboys head coach Jason Garrett, was fired from Dallas in early 2020 after a decade in the position. It was truly a surreal experience. Prescott’s former head coach Garrett, and his former quarterback mentor and player-coach Tony Romo announcing while Prescott sat injured on the turf, processing his catastrophic injury. Dak Prescott does have a \$50 million injury insurance

policy as well as his endorsements. Sleep Number, Pepsi and Dannon Oikos are just a few of the companies that endorse Prescott. In case Prescott never plays again, he is set financially.

Cowboys fans have been extremely critical of the front office due to their inability to close on a deal with Prescott. Many have mentioned the \$100 million contract Romo signed as Cowboys quarterback in 2013. Both men have comparable football production, though Prescott has not been signed for an extension. Prescott believes he will come back stronger, and so do his doctors. Many believe Dallas needs to pay Prescott as soon as they can to secure his services for

the team.

The Cowboys went on to win the game, 37-34, with a field goal in the last three seconds. Andy Dalton was serviceable in relief of Prescott though has since regressed. His poor play, throwing two interceptions in the game against the Arizona Cardinals on Monday Night Football on Oct. 19 proved Dalton’s inefficiency in Prescott’s position. The Cowboys lost the game 38-10. Dak Prescott was the only significant player that could help this football team remain competitive during games. Cowboys fans hope he gets well soon.



Image courtesy of ProFootballNetwork.com

“Supermarket Sweep” returns

By Anthony Raul Ramirez

In 2017, distributor Freemantle acquired the rights to the popular game show “Supermarket Sweep”. Beginning this October, ABC is having Leslie Jones of “Saturday Night Live” fame host a revival of the show. This will be the game show’s third incarnation after its debut run from 1965 - 1967 and its most popular run in television from 1990 - 2003.

“Supermarket Sweep” showcases the contestants’ knowledge of common grocery store items by using a combination of trivia and physical challenges

to win the game. The revival version of the show will be based on the previous 90s run in which there are four parts: Mini-Sweep, 90 Question Round, Big Sweep and Bonus Sweep.

There are three teams of two people that know each other in some way, whether it be siblings, parent and child, husband and wife or friends. In the Mini-Sweep, one person in each team answers a question related to a grocery store item. The person who answers correctly then has their partner run through the grocery store set to find the

item mentioned with a special logo on it. If the partner hands the item to the host within 30 seconds, their team earns money that comes into play later.

After the Mini-Sweep, the Question Round has players compete in games ranged from simple trivia to taste testing. Trivia does typically relate to slogans of grocery store items or their brands but can also be about pop culture such as movies. The number of questions answered correctly adds to the team’s time in the Big Sweep.

The Big

Sweep is where all three teams have one member run around the store with a shopping cart to find items that can be rung up by cashiers to reach the highest amount. Bonus items are also available that provide bonus money, such as giant inflatable objects with a special logo or using a measuring scale to bring a 1lb bag of candy. Reports have said the show featured more technology in the 2020 version to make this section more modern. This is also where the Mini-Sweep reward money comes into play. The team with

the highest amount wins and moves on to the Bonus Sweep.

The Bonus Sweep has the two partners run around the store to find three items in a scavenger hunt. A riddle is given that relates to the first item, the team finds that item with another riddle attached to it for the next, and this is repeated until all three items are found within 60 seconds.

The original grand prize was \$5,000, but the 2020 version is setting the grand prize at \$100,000.

New host of the show, Leslie Jones, had recently

left her stint in “Saturday Night Live” with hopes of tackling newer projects. She is said to be a huge fan of previous incarnations of the show and that she is excited to “bring the iconic game show back to life on ABC.” Previews of episodes show Jones involved in comedic antics such as signing a man’s ribcage and dancing to a freestyle made by a participant.

“Supermarket Sweep” debuted Oct. 18 and will air episodes every Sunday at 8/7 c on ABC.

Thoughts from a veteran on non-voters

By Alex Riley

As a United States citizen, voting in an election is both a privilege and an obligation.

Whether you are black, white, Latinx, Asian, or anything outside or in between, as an American citizen in a functioning democracy, you must cast a vote. Not only in the general elections that determine the President of the United States, but in mid-terms that have a more direct effect on the community in which one lives.

As an African American veteran, I take it personally when I hear someone capable of taking the time to vote for candidates vying to represent them chooses not to. The part of me that served this country for five years wants to

ask, “Does my service and that of millions of other veterans and active duty soldiers who volunteer to protect the rights and freedoms for all American citizens means so little to you?” And the Black in me wants to ask those same people, “How many of us have to die in the streets at the hands of law enforcement before you believe leadership, being largely elected officials, must intervene to create change?”

Since the new administration took over in the White House, we have witnessed an uptick in racial violence. From a father-son vigilante duo chasing and gunning down a young black man going for a jog in his neighborhood, to police officers choking

a man to death while staring into a camera for eight minutes. These are acts that most Americans with any sense of human decency would be able to condemn. Unfortunately, the most we have been able to get is a quick remark of rebuke in the immediate aftermath, followed by a series of dog whistles to embolden the domestic terrorists that occupy our country.

It is important to consider where we as American citizens fall on this spectrum. One party has implored several measures to try and prevent people from casting their votes through the USPS, a government entity. This comes during a pandemic when people should be able to trust the government

service most. Deciding for yourself that you are not going to participate is complying with that party and continues the vicious cycle that a lot of people have been complaining about for years.

Complaining is another right that you forfeit when you choose to sit out elections. A lot of people like to say that they do not vote because politicians do not get anything done. A portion of that is your own fault as a non-voter for not recognizing who is there to get things done and who is not, so you can vote the unproductive people out. So if you do not want to do your job as a citizen and a voter, how can you expect to hold them to the standard to do theirs?

Like every election, the next one is the most important one, and while both candidates may be flawed, that is not a good enough reason to recuse yourself from the process. Texas is invaluable in the general elections, and it has almost certainly been a lock for Republican candidates spanning back decades.

In 2016, Hillary Clinton lost Texas by just 9% of the vote, miniscule in terms of population, but a game changer when her opponent took all 36 electoral votes from the state. Who is to say what the state of our country would have been had a few more people decided to take it upon themselves to go take the time to cast their vote.

Alex Cequea, of the NY Times, said it best in their 2018 opinion piece, “If ‘didn’t vote’ was a candidate in the 2016 election, it would have won in a landslide.”

Although only about 60% of Texas registered voters cast a vote, we should take that as a challenge to create historic voter turnout. Whether you are for one party or the other, or sit on the fence of choosing between “lesser evils”, sitting on the sidelines should never be an option, especially when we can look back and see the significant impact non-voters can have if they simply exercised their right to vote.

SSI Policy needs revision

By Michael Kowis

The disabled population is at risk. The Houston population has about 200K people with disabilities that use this program called Supplemental Security Income (SSI). This policy is designed to provide a few things.

Firstly, it provides a bare minimum income. Bare minimum meaning below the federal poverty level of less than \$12,000 per person, per year. The federal maximum for a person receiving SSI is \$783. This policy that has existed since 1971 has several limitations made especially apparent in the age of COVID-19.

The first limitation is this, while disabled people work, the SSI will not look at the first \$83 of earned income. There is a marginal tax rate of rate of 50% on

any earned income beyond that. The benefits drop sharply, starting at an earned income of \$2,000 for a blind individual. In order to illustrate this kind of issue, consider the following math. If an individual works full time at a decent rate of \$17 per hour for three weeks, they would have earned \$2,040 minus the first \$83 it leaves me with \$1,957 of earned income. This is the highest someone can earn while maintaining benefits. Anything higher than this pay rate would push them over the threshold. The SSI would start deducting any benefit that they could receive.

The second part of the SSI policy that needs addressing is that as a recipient of SSI, one cannot save more than \$2,000 (not adjust-

ed for inflation). It is crucial for long term financing, even more so during this pandemic. Why is it important? This virus could strike anyone at any time. Some people with disabilities live with family members who provide care and use money. either earned or saved, to support the person living with them. Allowing the disabled population to maintain a decent savings, can help shift the financial responsibility burden. As mentioned above, the \$2,000 savings is not indexed for inflation. If it were, SSI recipients should be permitted to save no more than \$12,000, which sounds more reasonable to me.

Finally, the last big issue is that of the arduous ordeal to get employment and get on the SSI pro-

gram itself.

According to Ari Ne'eman, author and disability rights activist for the New York Times, describes an "ordeal."

"Ordeals are a common attribute of programs serving the poor. Since beneficiaries cannot be charged money they do not have, policy-makers impose a cost in time and suffering. Such indignities are designed to weed out those who would rather go without than brave the bureaucratic gantlet."

To help illustrate this point, following is an example of an "ordeal" from my own life. My mother had to call the Social Security office and have them send her an application. On said application, it wanted a large handful of identifiers, including

my full name, Social Security Number and information from my birth certificate. Ultimately, my mother had that information and sent it off, only for my application to be rejected. Several years later, I am back in Texas. Now living with my grandmother, we needed to do the same thing to get me on SSI, so we went to the same office and did the same thing, twice. At the end of that application, I got rejected. My grandmother spoke to one of the ladies working the counters that day, arguing for fairness. The worker brought the conversation to her manager, who advised us to submit application for a third time. It was this third application that got me on SSI. This is an example of my "ordeal." The parents of those with challenges should not have to go

through the bureaucratic hell that we went through to get the support we need to live a decent life.

In short, the SSI administration policies need significant fixing if it will be any real help to those who need it. They need to revise the rules around earned income so that there is no artificial wage ceiling. Disabled people need to be free to at least attempt to make their own money while having a decent safety net. Secondly, they need to properly index their savings requirements so that people with challenges can save what they need to save for food, medicine and living accommodations. Finally, there needs a less arduous process for getting on this program.

TxDOT's I-45 expansion will harm Houstonians for generations

By Indira Zaldivar

On Sept. 25, the Texas Department of Transportation released the Final Environmental Impact Statement of the proposed North Houston Highway Improvement Project also known as the I-45 expansion that will cost an estimated seven billion dollars. TxDOT only gave Houstonians 30 days to review and comment on the technical report of 8,189 pages before they advance to segment 3. Houston community groups such as Air

Alliance Houston, LINK Houston, and Stop I-45 are some of the many Houstonians that deem the multi-billion-dollar project unnecessary and harmful to the most vulnerable members of North Houston.

The current version of the project would displace 160 houses, 433 multi-family residential units, 486 public housing units, 344 businesses, five churches, and two schools in low-income communities of

color amid pandemic. Houstonians that will remain living along the corridor would be exposed to more air and noise pollution due to an even bigger highway.

Susan Graham, a concerned northside resident and founder of the group Stop TxDOT I-45, told Houston Public Media that she fears the effects of the project.

"I'm afraid that peoples' lives will be disrupted in a way that they won't be able to recover

from," Graham said. "We have to start putting value on our communities in the inner city. These communities have been around for many, many years. They have deep historic roots, especially in our communities of color."

Historically, highways have negatively impacted low income communities of color for the benefit of others. Since 2017, Houstonians have expressed concern about the project and have issued

public comments that have resulted in some revisions to the project with the cooperation of city officials. On Oct. 24, the City of Houston Planning and Development and Harris County hosted one of the three NHHIP community workshops. Christof Spieler, vice President and director of planning at Huitt-Zollars and a lecturer in architecture and engineering at Rice University, highlighted the many issues TxDOT has failed to address.

He noted that TxDOT's traffic projections have failed to match current traffic trends.

In 2014, TxDOT projected that traffic volume would increase by 25% from 2011 to 2035. However, traffic has decreased by 10% since 2011. Spieler also said TxDOT failed to address alternatives proposed by local officials in segment 2 that fought the displacement of low-income communities living in historic neighborhoods and cemeteries. TxDOT only considered alternatives alongside North Main which happens to be where the richest and whitest people potentially affected live.

Continued on Opinions, Page 12

TxDOT's I-45 expansion Continued from Opinions, Page 11

Spieler talked about induced demand to explain that adding capacity to a highway does not mean it will relieve congestion. He said that it encourages people to make more discretionary trips, on average eight out of 10 trips are not to commute. He also recounted how the \$2.2 billion widening of the Katy Freeway ended up increasing average commute times for roughly 85 percent of drivers who used the 23-lane road.

According to Air Alliance Houston,

the FEIS reflects “minor changes proposed to the project as a result of the public input received on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement released in 2017.”

Air Alliance Houston has said that they will demand TxDOT an extension of 120 days to the original 30-day commentary period to thoroughly review the report to allow enough time for Houstonians to provide meaningful comment. They will also be reviewing if the new FEIS considers the project's potential adverse

health impacts and adequate mitigations that they outlined in their Health Impact Assessment.

An estimated 984,000 Houstonians have a high need for more affordable transit options, according to a 2018 LINK Houston study. Among transit riders, 31% belong to a household without a vehicle while 58% of bus riders and 22% of rail riders do not have the option to use a car even though they live in a home with one.

Many have applauded Houston's recent investments

in cheaper, healthier, and more sustainable alternatives of transportation: enhanced public transportation and cycling infrastructure. Houston is only seven miles away from meeting the goal of adding 50 miles of bike lanes that Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner and Commissioner Rodney Ellis announced on April 2018. The addition of safe bike lanes cost \$15.5 million.

“Great cities are more and more defined by the ability to have multi-modal means of transporta-

tion,” Ellis said. “And that includes walking and riding bikes.”

On Aug. 23, METRORapid Silverline, a five-mile, 10-stop bus rapid transit line that connects the Northwest Transit Center to Westpark/Lower Uptown Transit Center, carried its first passengers. This marks one of the milestones of MERO's Moving Forward Plan to add 75 miles of bus rapid services through an estimated cost of \$7.5 billion. The plan also calls for about 20 miles of light rail extensions and up-

grades to 21 park and rides for roughly \$3.82 billion.

Despite the availability and feasibility of various sustainable transportation options, the Texas Department of Transportation seems determined to increase the mobility of suburban and richer community members at the expense of local residents and business owners.

At a time when developed countries are evaluating how to reduce carbon emissions, switch to renewable energy, and implement sustainable economies to mitigate climate change, TxDOT seems determined to waste billions of dollars to increase carbon emissions and perpetuate environmental justices that will affect the air quality, health, and mobility for generations to come in Houston.

Meanwhile, Houstonians must keep up with two parallel discussions: TxDOT's advancement and local reviewal period by the city and county. Extending the commentary period by 120 days is the least TxDOT can do. Stopping the whole project altogether would be best. Taking into effect the City of Houston and Harris County's recommendations and designs in segment 3 of this project presents TxDOT a feasible task, assuming they have an ounce of consideration for the future quality of life of Houstonians facing a pandemic.

The original investigative journalist rehearsing her undercover role

By Keven Balderas



In October, 133 years ago, Nellie Bly went undercover to expose the abuse of the mentally ill in New York's insane asylum.

“I remembered all I had read of the doings of crazy people, how first of all they must have staring eyes, and so I opened mine as wide as possible and stared unblinkingly at my own reflection.” - Nellie Bly

The University of Houston-Downtown