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# San Antonio Express-News

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## In a close race, Dem blasts AG over raids

Paxton's office searched volunteers' homes amid vote harvesting claims

By Isaac Yu  
AUSTIN BUREAU

FRIO COUNTY — Most political candidates might avoid talking about being the target of a law enforcement investigation. Democrat Cecilia Castellano is making it a key part of her campaign to represent a competitive

border district in the Texas House.

At multiple campaign stops last week, Castellano went after Attorney General Ken Paxton for raiding her campaign volunteers' homes to look for evidence of possible ballot harvesting.

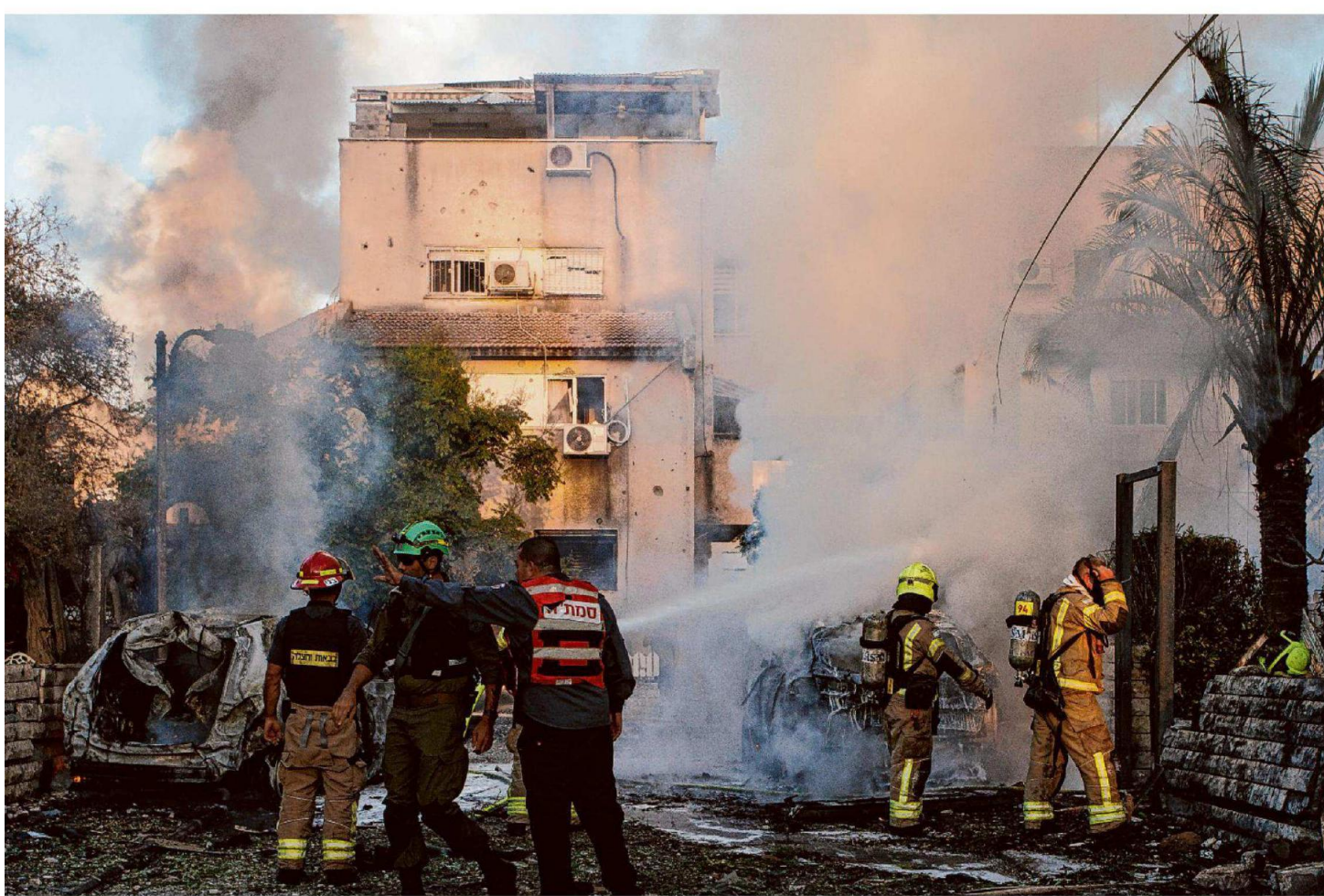
She called the searches a "political show" and encouraged

Latinos to vote to stand up to any attempts of intimidation.

"We are not going to back down," Castellano told supporters in Pearsall during a six-stop tour of the district on Wednesday and Thursday. "Every evening after I get out of the shower, I can't go to sleep in comfort. I

*Race continues on A5*

Josie Norris/Staff photographer  
"We are not going to back down," state House candidate Cecilia Castellano told supporters Wednesday in Pearsall.



Gil Nechushtan/Associated Press

Israeli security and rescue forces work at the site hit by a rocket fired from Lebanon, in Kiryat Bialik, northern Israel, on Sunday. "Today we saw fire that was deeper into Israel than before," Israeli military spokesman Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani said.

## Hezbollah, Israel trade barrages as tension soars

By Natalie Melzer and Kareem Chehayeb  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

'Open-ended battle' underway after airstrike in Beirut, attack on devices

NAHARIYA, Israel — Hezbollah fired over 100 rockets early Sunday across northern Israel, with some landing near the city of Haifa, as Israel launched hundreds of strikes on Lebanon. A Hezbollah leader declared an "open-ended battle" was underway as

both sides appeared to be spiraling closer toward all-out war.

The overnight rocket barrage was in response to Israeli attacks in Lebanon that have killed dozens, including a veteran Hezbollah commander, and an unprecedented attack

targeting the group's communications devices. Air raid sirens across northern Israel sent hundreds of thousands of people scrambling into shelters.

One struck near a residential building in Kiryat Bialik, a city near Haifa, wounding at

least three people and setting buildings and cars ablaze. Israel's Magen David Adom rescue service said four people were wounded.

Avi Vazana raced to a shelter with his wife and 9-month-old baby before he heard the rocket hitting. Then he went back outside to see if anyone was hurt.

"I ran without shoes, with-  
*Mideast continues on A12*

## Zoo may be fined on water pumping

By Liz Teitz  
STAFF WRITER

The San Antonio Zoo is facing a \$55,000 fine for pumping too much water from the Edwards Aquifer during drought conditions — a problem the zoo's leaders say was caused by a 78-year-old well that serves its animals.

The Edwards Aquifer Authority, which manages the groundwater system that provides water for more than 2 million people, is working with the zoo to negotiate a settlement for the 66-million-gallon over-pumping issue, which occurred during a year when permit holders saw their allocations reduced by more than one-third.

The zoo uses a 1946 well and well pump to get fresh water from the aquifer. That water isn't used to serve the zoo's customers; drinking water for the zoo comes from the San Antonio Water System, CEO Tim Morrow said. But the zoo's animals rely on the fresh, untreated water, Morrow said, including 15 endangered species and 25 imperiled species.

The zoo is run by the nonprofit San Antonio Zoological Society on 57 acres leased from the city. It sees more than 1 million visitors each year and houses more than 3,500 animals.

Habitats that use the water include the zoo's Africa Live exhibit, home to hippos and Nile crocodiles, and Big Lake, where whooping cranes, pelicans, storks and flamingos live, as well as the Center for Conservation and Research. After the water is used at the zoo, it's treated with ultraviolet light for disinfection, then released into the San Antonio

*Water continues on A4*

## Military, governors key parts of deportation plans



Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images  
Donald Trump, shown Saturday at a rally in Wilmington, N.C., has said he would invoke a 1798 law that allows the president to deport any noncitizen from a country the U.S. is at war with.

By Elliot Spagat  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

SANDIEGO — Donald Trump has long pledged to deport millions of people, but he's bringing more specifics to his current bid for the White House: invoking wartime powers, relying on like-minded governors and using the military.

His record as president shows a vast gulf between his ambitions and the legal, fiscal and political realities of mass deportations of people in the United States illegally — 11 million in January 2022, by the Homeland Security Department's latest estimate. Former President Barack Obama carried out 432,000 deportations in 2013, the highest annual total since records were kept.

Deportations under Trump never topped 350,000. But he and his chief immigration policy architect, Stephen Miller, have offered clues in interviews and rallies of taking a different approach if they are returned to power in November. They could benefit from lessons learned during their four years in office and, potentially, from more Trump-appointed judges.

"What Trump seems to be contemplating is potentially lawful," said Joseph Nunn, counsel at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University's School of Law. "There might not be a lot of legal barriers. It is going to be logistically extraordinarily complicated and difficult. The military is not going to like doing it, and they are going to drag their feet as much as

they can, but it is possible, so it should be taken seriously."

The Trump campaign, asked how the Republican presidential nominee's pledge would be carried out, said Trump would begin the largest deportation program in U.S. history, without elaborating in detail.

Karoline Leavitt, a spokeswoman, said Trump "would marshal every federal and state power necessary to institute the largest deportation operation of illegal criminals, drug dealers and human traffickers."

*Migrants continues on A12*





# 4 dogs put down after Southwest Side attack

By Elizabeth Zavala  
STAFF WRITER

Animal Care Services has euthanized four of eight dogs recently seized after they bit a woman as she walked in a Southwest Side neighborhood earlier this month.

Two other dogs remain in an ACS shelter as their owners go through the “dangerous dog” compliance process. The status of the remaining two dogs is unclear.

Lisa Norwood, ACS public relations manager, said the couple who own the dogs would have 30 days to comply with restrictions listed in the city’s Chapter 5 animal ordinance under the dangerous dog designation.

“If there is not compliance with the requirements outlined in the law, the dog must be euthanized to protect public safety,” she said.

The action comes two weeks after eight dogs, all Labrador-terrier mixes, approached the 44-year-old woman as she walked on West Southcross Boulevard near Priscilla Street on Sept. 4. The dogs bit her right leg.

The dogs attacked the vehicles of ACS and San Antonio police who responded to the scene.

The woman who was bitten was treated at the scene and later at a local hospital.

The designation of a dangerous dog is defined in city code as a dog that



Bob Owen/Staff photographer

**Severe dog bites, those that cause death, broken bones or disfigurement, soared in fiscal year 2023, which ended Sept. 30, 2023, reaching a total of 297.**

“makes an unprovoked attack on a person that causes bodily injury and occurs in a place other than an enclosure in which the dog was being kept and that was reasonably certain to prevent the dog from leaving the enclosure on its own.”

ACS Interim Director Mike Shannon said the couple who owns the dogs were issued 32 citations.

The offenses cited were for allowing the dogs to roam unrestrained, not having a rabies vaccination, and failure to prevent bites.

Shannon said three years ago, the couple had a separate ACS investigation after another one of their dogs bit a person who suffered minor injuries. The

pair was issued several citations, and the biting dog was euthanized after an investigation.

There are extensive requirements, as detailed in the city’s Chapter 5 animal ordinance, for owners of dogs deemed dangerous.

Among the 10 requirements, the canines must have a registered microchip, be spayed or neutered and be registered with ACS, and the owners must obtain a dangerous dog permit. The owners must pay for and have the animal wear a collar visible at 50 feet that identifies them as a dangerous dog.

The owners must complete a class on responsible pet ownership.

The owners must keep the animal in a securely

locked enclosure that protects it from the elements, and when taken out, kept secure on a sturdy leash of 4 feet with a muzzle.

Proof of public liability insurance in the amount of \$100,000 to cover injuries caused by the dangerous dogs is required.

The owner must also post no less than two “dangerous dog on the property” warning signs that include a decal understandable by young children and that can be read from a public street or highway.

The owner must also allow an annual inspection of the residence where the dog is kept in order for the department to verify continued compliance with all requirements. Additional inspections may be con-

ducted in response to specific complaints regarding non-compliance.

The Southwest Side neighborhood dog bite incident is the latest in a series of recent dog attacks and maulings in San Antonio.

In February 2023 on the West Side, dogs killed Air Force veteran Ramon Najera Jr., 81, of Leon Valley, and injured his 74-year-old wife. The couple was visiting a friend in the 2800 block of Depla when the two dogs escaped from a fenced yard next door.

Christian Alexander Moreno and his wife, Abilene Schnieder, both 32, pleaded guilty to one of two charges against them: dangerous dog attack causing death, a second-degree felony punishable by two to 20 years in prison. On Friday, Moreno was sentenced to 18 years and Schnieder was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Animal Care Services is still unable to respond to thousands of critical calls. While the department is making progress, officials there say they won’t be able to respond to 100% of the serious incident calls until 2026.

The city of San Antonio pumped millions of dollars into ACS last year after a string of gruesome dog attacks — including two that were fatal.

Severe dog bites, those that cause death, broken bones or disfigurement, soared in fiscal year 2023,

which ended Sept. 30, 2023, reaching a total of 297.

That’s a 58% rise over the previous fiscal year, when 188 severe dog bites were reported in San Antonio, but the number of bites had been rising for several years. Between fiscal years 2018 and 2022, the number of severe dog bites jumped from 110 to 188 — a 71% increase.

In October, ACS was responding to 44% of the “critical calls,” which report aggressive dogs, animal neglect or cruelty, injured or sick animals, and trapped or confined animals. The department’s goal is to improve that response rate to 64% this month. Its response rate is now 59%.

Two months after Najera was attacked, a pregnant woman was struck by a car on the North Side after a snarling, loose dog chased her into traffic. She was hospitalized with severe injuries, and the baby died. In August 2023, Max de Los Santos, then 76, was attacked by two dogs outside his home on the West Side. The injuries to de Los Santos’ legs were so severe that both were amputated.

In a Sept. 5, 2023, attack in a mobile home park on the Northeast Side, Paul Anthony Striegl Jr. was sitting in his yard when his next-door neighbor’s two American Staffordshire terriers slipped under a chain-link fence. Striegl died in a hospital less than a month later.

## WATER

From page A1

nio River, providing some of the flow that makes its way through the River Walk and southeast toward the Gulf Coast.

The San Antonio River Authority is currently managing a \$5 million project to replace that well, set to be completed next spring. The new well and well pump will allow the zoo to better control water flow, Morrow said, avoiding a repeat of 2023’s water woes.

### Forced cutbacks

The water that flows through the zoo’s habitats and river system rises from the aquifer, a massive limestone cavern system that spans more than 2,500 miles underground from Uvalde through San Antonio and Austin. It’s a vital water source for the Central Texas region, including the San Antonio Water System, which gets more than half of its water from the aquifer.

The aquifer authority is tasked with managing that system, ensuring that permit holders use only their allotted amounts to protect users’ water rights and to maintain the necessary springflow in the San Marcos Springs and Comal Springs to protect the endangered species that live there.

During drought conditions, the authority implements what it calls “critical period management,” which require permit holders like SAWS and the zoo to cut back on the amount of water they take from the aquifer.

Reductions are determined by the water levels in the groundwater system, including flow rates at the springs and the water level in the J-17 index well in Bexar County. The restrictions are cumulative, and each year, the aquifer authority reviews pumping data to ensure permittees met the mandatory reductions during the previous year.

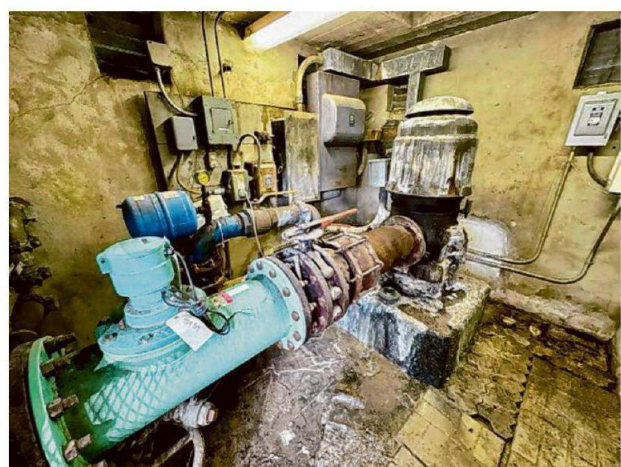
In 2023, when the aquifer authority moved back and forth between three drought stages, the total reductions amounted to 35.8%.

The San Antonio Zoo’s rights to 2,700 acre-feet of



Hope Roth/San Antonio Zoo

**Capybaras soak at the San Antonio Zoo, which pumps water from the Edwards Aquifer for its habitats. The zoo used more aquifer water than permitted last year, which the zoo’s leaders blame on a 78-year-old well.**



Tim Morrow/San Antonio Zoo

**The zoo’s well pump long has been a concern but became a major problem last summer when drought forced more intense cuts on pumping water.**

water were reduced to 1,765 acre-feet — but the zoo ultimately pumped 1,969 acre-feet, or 204 acre-feet more than was allowed, the aquifer authority said. One acre-foot is enough water to cover an acre in one foot of water, or about 326,000 gallons, so the zoo pumped 66 million gallons more than it should have.

The zoo is not alone in breaking the rules. In 2023, the aquifer authority identified 101 permit holders that took more water from the authority than they should have, Deputy General Manager Marc Friberg said, though some of those were later determined to be in compliance because they hold multiple permits under different names or had purchased extra water but hadn’t filed the paperwork, he said. Overpumping has increased in the

past two years due to more severe cutbacks. In 2021, a year with normal rainfall, there were 41 identified, followed by 100 in 2022.

Overpumpers can find another permit holder that didn’t use its full allocation during the year and work out a deal, essentially paying to take credit for the unused water to balance the books and paying a fee to the authority, Friberg said. If that’s not possible, they can go through a settlement process with the Edwards Aquifer Authority, paying a flat rate for every excess acre-foot, and if they can prove their overuse was caused by leaks and provide receipts for repairs, the authority can agree to reduce the fees.

The settlement rate is intended to encourage people to do things the right way, Friberg said, meaning to comply with drought restrictions and

to purchase or lease rights from other users at lower rates to avoid a penalty and higher rates.

The aquifer authority can take a permit holder to court if they refuse all of the settlement options, Friberg said, but he said he’s not aware of that ever happening.

For its excess water usage in 2023, the San Antonio Zoo would owe \$55,356.70, or just under \$272 per acre-foot, the authority said.

### Relying on aging well

In a typical year, the zoo uses only about three-quarters of its permitted water, Alan Kardon, the zoo’s vice president of animal care and horticulture, wrote in a letter to the authority in June, shortly before he retired after five decades at the zoo.

That water is pumped from the aquifer using a 1946 pump with an electric motor, and flow is controlled by a manual valve, Kardon said.

Friberg said the average well in Bexar County is from about 1980 but that it’s common to have “high-quality wells” constructed in the 1940s and 1950s; some wells are much older, dating to 1894. But while the zoo’s well itself isn’t unusually old, the well pump is, he said.

The well pump is the source of the water usage problem, Morrow said. The pump is so old that the zoo’s staffers can’t control the flow very well.

“We don’t have this

variable pump that we can guide into precision of where we want that flow to be,” he said. “If you turn it down too low or off, it may never turn back on again or collapse.”

“I would describe it as being held together by calcium deposits at this point,” he said. Photos of the pump show thick, white crusts from mineral buildup covering parts of the equipment.

That’s been a concern for years, but it became a major problem last summer when the drought forced more intense pumping cuts.

“We went into levels of restrictions that we have not seen since I’ve been at the zoo,” Morrow said. The zoo tried to turn down the flow to comply, but couldn’t throttle it down enough, he said. The zoo also started seeing problems with oxygen levels in the water, degrading its quality, he said.

The zoo would then have to flush the system, refill it and repeat the cycle, he said, because it has to maintain water quality and quantity for the animals.

The pump can’t be repaired because it’s so old that parts aren’t available, Morrow said, making replacement the only option. About five years ago, the zoo started conversations with local officials about funding the project.

In 2022, Bexar County commissioners approved \$2.5 million in funding for the project through the Creeks and Trails capital improvements program, which includes 11 projects being managed by SARA. The city chipped in an additional \$1.5 million for the project, and last January, after bids came in higher than projected, the county approved an additional \$1 million, bringing the total for the work to \$5 million.

The zoo is operated by the private San Antonio Zoological Society, a non-profit that leases its land from the city. The society brought in \$42.4 million in revenue in 2022, according to its most recent available tax filing, and spent \$37.4 million that year.

Work started on drilling a new well and constructing a new pump in March. It’s scheduled to be completed in the spring,

said Kathleen Rubin, program manager for SARA.

A new well was necessary because the old well is still in use and must remain in operation until the new pump and well are complete. When it’s done, the zoo will have much more flexibility in controlling water flow, Rubin said.

The zoo will be responsible for operating and maintaining the well, but the city, as the landowner, will be the well’s owner, Morrow said.

In the meantime, the zoo is working with the aquifer authority on a solution to last year’s over-pumping issue.

In his letter to the aquifer authority, the zoo’s Kardon said the proposed \$55,000 settlement “would significantly impact the budget required to provide world-class animal care, education and conservation support.” He asked for it to be resolved “without further financial penalty,” in light of the zoo’s efforts to replace the well and the \$231,000 it pays annually for its permitted water. In a more recent counteroffer, the zoo proposed a settlement of about \$17,000 to cover the aquifer management fees it would have paid for the additional water.

The authority’s board voted this month to reject that counteroffer, but instructed staff to continue discussions.

Friberg said the authority has to stick to its procedures to protect “the integrity of the permitting system.” The pumping limits are set to protect the springs and to ensure there’s enough water for everyone. While the zoo has been a good steward of its water in past years, it hasn’t fixed the pumping problem yet and the authority can’t set a precedent of letting people over-pump, he said.

Instead, the authority is working as a “matchmaker” to help the zoo find someone who had unused water last year and can lease those rights to cover the overage.

“Our goal is compliance,” Friberg said. “We try to give as much leeway as we can, as long as you’re working with us, and the zoo has been working with us.”