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## UHD students and organizations recognized for civic leadership

By Sheryl Sellers

All too often and most unfortunately when something goes wrong, it is quickly communicated. So, when caught doing something right, one really needs to celebrate. The UHD student body was commended for just that – doing something right. This occurred recently during a course taught by John Rountree, Ph.D.

Dr. Rountree invited a guest lecturer to his Communication and Public Decision-Making course. Guest speaker, David Brinker, Ph.D. is

the Senior Researcher at the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education (IDHE) at Tufts University in Medford, MA. Tufts is a private research college, and IDHE studies student political learning and political engagement. They also run a study called National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) which is the quantitative measure of student turnout and electoral participation.

In greeting Dr. Rountree’s class, Dr. Brinker stated that he was

happy to be a guest lecturer because Tufts refers to UHD as a “hero campus.”

Hearing those encouraging words, The Dateline reached out to Dr. Brinker to learn more about Tufts’ knowledge of and association with UHD, and how our campus got on the radar of a university located in Massachusetts. To begin, Dr. Brinker explained that IDHE is involved in a line of research that they call “Politics 365.”

“The contention [of Politics 365] is that

political learning and engagement and democratic citizenship are a year-round set of culture and norms and practices that can manifest on election day but that happen year-round. As a shop we are really interested in political learning and we see voting as an indication that students are invested enough in democracy to participate in it.”

As part of their research, Nancy Thomas, Ph.D., Director of IDHE, visited UHD a few years ago.

*Continued on page 4*

## UHD Bike Club rides to engage community



By Indira Zaldivar

UHD alumnus and a founder of UHD Bike Club, Alejandro “Lex” Perez, remains active on campus and in his Northline community to make UHD campus and downtown Houston more bike-friendly.

In the Spring 2019 Semester, Perez, Nathan Marquez, and Charles Vaughn founded UHD Bike Club to “share how fun bikes are with as many people as possible.” While Perez graduated with a degree in management information systems and a minor in math from UHD in Spring 2020, he still organizes some of the club’s

events and bike rides.

On Sept. 13, Perez volunteered with Recycled Cycles of Texas to help repair recycled bikes. Perez said community involvement is important and the reason why UHD Bike Club requires members to volunteer with local organizations that boost safe cycling.

Perez also helps lead UHD Bike Club’s social rides. During the rides, students, faculty and staff, get to ride for ten miles or more in downtown Houston. They make stops to see art murals, eat and socialize (masks required). Perez said what

keeps him involved is that the UHD campus is yet to meet the criteria set by the League of American Bicyclists for bicycle-friendly status.

The bicycle-friendly program rates a campus based on how well the university leads efforts that pertain to the engineering, education, encouragement, enforcement, and evaluation of cycling infrastructure and bike safety. Given recent implementations, UHD shows potential to obtain at least an “honorable mention.”

One of these improvements occurred in the Fall 2019 when Hous-

ton Bike Share and various city officials inaugurated four Houston BCycle stations on campus. Houston Bike Share is a bike-rental program where people pay a monthly or annual membership to borrow bikes from over 113 BCycle stations around Houston.

Other improvements include the addition of a bike repair station on campus under the I-10 bridge where bike trails connect. Perez said they are thankful for Tim Rychlec’s help in setting benches. Another effort was adding more light to the bike dock in the UHD North Deck to help keep bikers safe at night.

*Continued on page 3*





# THE DATELINE

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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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# A blast from The Dateline past

By Keven Balderas

Accessible on the UHD website is a host of past Dateline issues.

It is hard to believe 2010 was ten years ago. A decade is the time Odysseus spent making his way back home after the Trojan war, and the difference between the iPhone 4 and the iPhone 12. If anything, it is as half as long as current UHD undergrads have lived.

If anyone would like to glimpse into what life was like 10 years ago at UHD, all they need is a few clicks on the university website. Ten years prior to the current issue (65.4), The Dateline published Issue 45.4 in fall 2010.

The front page of the issue greets the reader with a picture of Michael Dressman, Ph.D. in black tie, who has spent much of his career at UHD in various roles. He had then just been appointed the Interim Provost, a post he

would hold for about four months.

Below his profile is a picture with three salsa dancers, informing the reader that UHD planned a few events in celebration of Latino Heritage Month. Also, it places in bold relief for the present-day reader the fact that the pandemic this fall has precluded any in-person events on campus.

Indeed, although ten years have passed since those three individuals danced in front of John Biggers' mural, "Salt Marsh," it is a stark reminder, among several others, of pre-pandemic times.

Standing out from the rest, however, is one image on page seven, next to the logos of Facebook and Twitter, which were then private companies and millions of users smaller. Arguably striking for its cynicism, the

advertisement from the Texas State Fire Marshal warns the reader that "in a fire, they stop being your friends," ostensibly in reference to the young people shown enjoying themselves at a house party.

The Texas State Fire Marshal may rest assured this year, when social gatherings of any sort are possibly at their lowest level since the Spanish Flu of 1918. What time has had no effect on at all, for better or worse, is the crossword and Sudoku puzzles on page 12, the answers to which can be found in the following issue.

The Dateline website is home to every issue published by The Dateline since 2005. It also includes a few select issues from the 80s and early 90s.

*Past issues of The Dateline can be accessed at: [www.uhd.org/student-life/dateline](http://www.uhd.org/student-life/dateline)*

# Zuckerberg on a roll with the new ads!

By Keven Balderas



"Hear my story and I will hear y- baa, baa."



# UHD Bike Club (continued)

UHD Bike Club also hosted bike-safety classes in the past year to teach students and staff how to bike safely to school.

He expressed concern of the I-45 Expansion; a project led by the Texas Department of Transportation. In early October, Community members and volunteers with BikeHouston led a bike ride to show the parts of downtown that will change given TXDOT's proposed plans. Perez said he enjoyed the ride, but that he is worried for the thousands of people that will be displaced and the businesses near Minute Maid Park that

will have to relocate. Neil's Bahr is one of his favorite local businesses that will be forced to move.

"Staying involved with my community and in local issues are important because no matter where you set your roots in the world, there are things happening around you," Perez said. "Locally, it's not hard to latch onto something you care for because the heart will guide that."

UHD Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning, Avenue, and Go Neighborhoods organized a panel discussion about the Latinx vote including community mem-

bers from Northline and Northside. As a resident of Northline, Lex said during the panel discussion that voting is important but attending town hall meetings informs you about concerns of other community members.

Perez said in the panel discussion that local issues, especially those that affect transportation and mobility initiatives in Northline are what drives his vote. He advocates for bike lanes and infrastructure that would increase the safety and mobility of pedestrians and cyclists. Perez said that the hard part is dedicating time to the cause because people

usually "do not get paid to engage unless you're in organization that can afford to pay you."

"I've always

asked myself why are some projects being done and others aren't? Who is pushing for them?" Perez said. "These questions lead

me to civic engagement in bicycling that stems from me doing the best I can to prevent a car from running me over."



Lex Perez leads 10-mile bike ride in Downtown Houston on Oct. 25, 2019. Image credit: Indira Zaldivar

## Did you know...?

Through a partnership with METRO, UHD pays 25% of monthly fare costs for registered students, faculty, and staff who participate in the university's RideSponsor program.

METRO estimates the monthly fare costs based on residency in zones 1, 2, 3, and 4. Debra Shouldice, parking assistant in One Main Building, specified the subsidy amount: \$22 (zone 1), \$35.75 (zone 2), \$41.25 (zone 3), and \$49.50 (zone 4).

The Q fare card attached to the RideSponsor program is distinguished by a red dot; the 25%

# UHD subsidizes 25% of Metro rides

By Indira Zaldivar

subsidy automatically reloads once a month when the card reaches a \$5 balance. Students can request a second Q fare card specific for students, that discounts 50% from each trip to pay for the difference in their monthly fare.

To qualify for the RideSponsor program, participants must not own or request a UHD parking permit while in the program. According to Parking & Transportation services, participants qualify for four parking validations per semester "to allow for those occasions when a participant needs to come to campus in a personal vehicle."

To register, participants must visit Park-

ing & Transportation Services located in One Main Building in room N117 and fill out the RideSponsor Registration form with their route number, home address, and student ID or employee number. Participants will need to visit the office a second time to pick up their METRO Q fare cards within a couple of business days.

Parking & Transportation services is open Monday through Thursday from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Friday from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. (appointment is not required).

Caterin Rivera, a business management student, said she preferred commuting to school by METRO than car because it is "cheaper that driving all the

way to school." Because of the pandemic, her classes are now all online.

"In the morning I could study for a test or if somebody else was with me, I

could take a nap," Rivera said. "I didn't have to worry about being stuck in traffic and just relax."



UHD partners with METRO to subsidize 25% of monthly fare costs to the UHD community. Image credit: Indira Zaldivar



# Students, organizations recognized (continued)

The visit took place the day following an election. One of the things that impressed the IDHE team was that UHD was holding registration efforts that day – the day after an election. Dr. Thomas even remembered that the students were conscientious about the design of the tables and where they were situated to intercept students.

“One of the things that we were impressed about is that they were doing, at least when we visited, they were doing registration the day after the election. That’s a very good sign and it’s something we encourage. If the campus does that, we take that as a sign that students there don’t see politics as a run up to an election and vote moment, then run up to an election and vote moment. Instead they see it as a habit and practice.”

Engaging with Dr. Rountree’s communication class, Dr. Brinker mentioned his colleagues excitement when he told them he was attending a Zoom lecture with a UHD

class.

“That was really a neat moment. I mentioned that I was going to be guest lecturing for the class and almost immediately our director, Dr. Thomas, said, ‘I just love I just love that campus!’”

Thomas mentioned a couple of specific reasons as to why she loves our UHD campus. One of these is the Center for Public Deliberation. Tufts has relationships with some of the scholars there.

“What [Thomas] really remembered and wanted to talk about was stories from when she visited and what she learned about UHD students. She told this story that there was a candlelight vigil for Nelson Mandela and that it was entirely student organized and members of the media were invited and local politicians were invited and this was all essentially without the knowledge of the administration. What does that tell you about the students there, right? And it tells you that they just knew what needed to be done to come

together in community as citizens to think about global politics in that case.”

Dr. Bradley also noted that Tufts became aware of a robust set of civic engagement training that the student government engages in that trickles down to club leadership. He credits this at least in part to UHD’s Center for Public Deliberation founded and directed by Windy Lawrence, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Communication Studies at UHD. He emphasized that the Center has great programming and a reach through the campus in terms of learning democracy instead of merely learning for voting.

These initiatives alone are impressive to Tufts because it appears, as he puts it, “it becomes part of what’s in the water” at UHD.

“We think that institutions can foster that and can certainly obstruct that by, for example, being disagreeable to student input in leadership. But at some level it takes a motivated and engaged student body

to create and sustain a culture of year-round politics and political engagement.”

Another example of UHD’s civic engagement that Tufts commended was the 2012 Walk2Vote, organized by the Student Government Association (SGA). UHD founded the Walk2Vote effort which is now taking place at other universities across the country.

Dr. Brinker applauds the students’ initiative, “There is a practice, a largely student-led practice, that has to do with accessing voting sites, a sanctioned event that involves students actually going to do the act of voting and feeling supported by the administration.” He praised the administration for promoting “political mobility as a core mission of higher education to prepare citizens to self-govern”.

Another facet at UHD that garnered Tuft’s attention was the diverse student population; and one that is active in both political activism and a sense of deliberation. They also often

seek out campuses based on favorable voting rate patterns, campuses with a high political participation, and high levels of diversity. UHD certainly fits those criteria.

“Where diversity meets deliberation is good for democracy. Healthy democracy occurs where pluralism resides.”

Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) reside geographically closer to Tufts, but their student populations are not as diverse as UHD’s.

Dr. Brinker noted that student bodies that are heavily weighted in female students or Black women have higher voting numbers because those demographics generally have higher voting populations. IDHE does not compare voting rates to voting rates among college campuses, because a school, for example that has a large female enrollment will most likely have a higher voting rate. In 2018, 50% of UHD students voted in the last election and the

national average is only 39%.

“The fact that UHD is outperforming the national average by that much is even more impressive because it’s not happening simply by virtue of having a demographic that tends to vote.”

“It’s clear from the data that UHD does a good job of [voter] registration. But students have to vote. At UHD they do that. It’s crucial to actually go to the polls. It’s showing up on election day that UHD students have done such a wonderful job, historically and continuing into the 2020 election. We’re talking about people who understand what it means to be a citizen in their daily life and act accordingly.”

In what could be considered the dark days of 2020, UHD students, organizations, and administration deserve a pat on the back for placing citizenship education alongside career education. Go Gators.

## Faculty Senate Update: Duo 2FA

By Sheryl Sellers

Faculty Senate president, Ron Beebe, Ph.D., opened the Oct. 6 Faculty Senate Meeting by reading a letter written to the Senate by Student Government Association (SGA) President, Alan Modrow. In his letter, Modrow expressed gratitude

and appreciation to the Senate for their commitment and hard work, particularly over the past eight months of dealing with changes due to COVID-19. He acknowledged the sacrifices that faculty make every day to bring quality educa-

tion to their students via Zoom. Modrow also recognized Dr. Beebe for his invaluable leadership.

The majority of the meeting encompassed explanation of and questions surrounding the new DUO authentication application. Mary E.

Dickerson, MBA, CISSP, CISM, PMP, Assistant Vice-Chancellor, IT Security, Chief Information Security Officer for the University of Houston System (UHS), opened the dialogue with a PowerPoint presentation to answer the question, as

she put it, “How did we get here?”

During 2017-2019 the UH System contracted an outside source to conduct an audit of all the information security programs across the UH System campuses. The audit determined that the UH Sys-

tem would be better served by consolidating the information security programs. The consolidation would also enable the sharing of monetary and staff resources.

*Continued on the next page*

# Faculty Senate Update (continued)

Issues that affected all campuses included non-existent asset inventory (although Dickerson mentioned that UHD does a good job in that category), shared administrator passwords and user accounts, and passwords that are simple to decipher.

Dickerson also mentioned the many instances of scammers impersonating UHD faculty using accounts such as Gmail. She asserted that this is one reason that UHD business should only be communicated via official university accounts.

To combat these issues and threats of cyberattacks, in July UHS implemented the DUO mobile app solution set up ini-

tially to provide protection to scan and eliminate harmful messages in student email boxes.

The DUO mobile app provides a two-factor authentication (2FA) requiring a second step to log into Outlook from a browser. The user can request a text message, a passcode, a “push” through the mobile app, a phone call, purchase USB tokens or purchase a fob that will randomly generate a number to input. Any device, cell phone, iPad, etc. can be used. The app also supports landlines.

Many institutions and agencies are already using 2FA. It is in place at Texas A&M, University of Texas at Austin, Texas State University,

University of North Texas, Texas Tech, Rice University, Baylor University, and Southern Methodist University, as well as the City of Houston. Dickerson explained that Federal Financial Aid will require it for due diligence purposes. If a university does not conform, it could lose all federal funding.

Faculty had many concerns and questions. They were distressed that faculty were not made aware of this large modification to the system back in the summer, and prior to receiving what many thought were suspicious, spam emails from DUO. Whereas other UHS faculty were part of the decision process and steering committees on their

campuses, such as UH-Clear Lake and UH-Victoria, the UHD involvement came only from the IT department.

When asked why faculty or any shared governance bodies were not consulted for input, and only the Student Government Association was contacted in advance, Said Fattouh, Director of User Support Services answered that they thought it would be best if the IT group maintained a level of comfort with the new program before engaging others. They wanted to have answers to as many questions as possible prior to informing faculty.

Fattouh acquiesced that there would have been “... better success and less confusion if we had involvement from different constituents.”

Her position as the university Ombuds is to lead faculty, confidentially, through policies and procedures of rank and tenure, grievances, ethical conduct hearings and other matters of concern.

Emails have been going out to students to download the DUO app. Currently 2FA is active for students who are already enrolled. Students had a deadline of Sept. 30 to download the app, but IT is being patient with those that have not done so. At this time, only 25% of students are enrolled. Web page details of the project can be found at [www.uhd.edu/2fa](http://www.uhd.edu/2fa).

The remaining 20 minutes of the meeting involved a presentation by Sandra Dahlberg, Ph.D., Professor of English, who was chosen by the Senate to be the Faculty Ombuds. She is a member of the International Ombuds Association.

All communication with Dr. Dahlberg is kept confidential and off the record. Due to time constraint, other items on the prepared agenda were moved to the following meeting.

Issues that affected all campuses included non-existent asset inventory (although Dickerson mentioned that UHD does a good job in that category), shared administrator passwords and user accounts, and passwords that are simple to decipher.

## Asteroid to cross earth’s orbit before elections

By Riyasa Shrestha

NASA predicts that a harmless asteroid will come close to earth on Nov. 2, the day before the presidential election. The asteroid was first identified in November 2018 and was named 2018VP1.

Its diameter is 0.002 km, or about 6.5 feet, according to NASA’s data. It was first identified at Palomar Observatory in California. NASA says there are three potential impacts, but “based on 21 observations spanning 12.968 days,” the agency deter-

mined the asteroid probably won’t have a deep impact. The data shows the chance of it colliding with Earth is just 0.41%.

NASA issued a statement regarding the asteroid.

“Asteroid 2018VP1 is a very small, approximately 6.5 feet, and poses no threat to Earth,” NASA said. “If it were to enter our planet’s atmosphere, it would disintegrate due to its extremely small size.”

It is not the first time this asteroid, 2018VP1, has

come close to Earth. It happened in 1970 too. This time, it is projected to fly somewhere between 4,800 to 260,000 miles from our atmosphere. Another asteroid named 2020 QG passed over the Indian Ocean on Aug. 16 at 1,830 miles. NASA did not notice it, which happens with smaller asteroids. Sky-watchers should not expect to notice the asteroid either. The chances to spot this celestial body are highly unlikely.

## Second presidential debate canceled by CPD

By Varah Thornton

The second presidential debate has been canceled by the Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD).

Originally scheduled to take place on Oct. 15 in Miami, Florida, it was canceled on Oct. 9, a day after announcing that the second debate would take place virtually. In a statement posted to their website, the CPD simply said, “It is now apparent there will be no debate.”

There were many concerns about the debates moving forward after President

Trump contracted and was treated for COVID-19 immediately following the first presidential debate. There has since been a large outbreak of COVID-19 at the White House including many senior level cabinet members with 37 cases confirmed as of the publishing of this article. It is believed that the Rose Garden announcement for the Supreme Court nomination of Amy Coney Barrett was a super-spreader event as many of those with confirmed cases attended.

As a precaution, the CPD announced on Oct. 8 that the second presidential debate “will take the form of a town meeting, in which the candidates would participate from separate remote locations.” Both campaigns immediately responded to the change in format.

The Biden campaign committed to participating while the Trump campaign dismissed the idea and instead asked to the date to be rescheduled to Oct. 22.



# Women accuses ICE doctor of performing unnecessary gynecological procedures

By Indira Zaldivar

On Sept. 14, Nurse Dawn Wooten filed a complaint against a contractor with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Georgia for allowing Dr. Mahendra Amin perform unnecessary gynecological procedures, including hysterectomies, on immigration detainees. Now, medical experts have reviewed medical records of seven detainees and consider Dr. Amin's approach as overly aggressive.

Wooten, a licensed nurse practitioner, worked for nine months until July 2 at the Irwin Detention Center in Georgia, operated by the private company and contractor with ICE, LaSalle Corrections. Wooten said at a press conference on Sept. 16 that she informed superiors of violations of health protocols

against COVID-19. She reported that new detainees were not separated from the rest despite CDC guidelines and protocols set to isolate newcomers because of the 14-day incubation period, and that the facility failed to test detainees despite having COVID-19 testing machines at their disposal.

Wooten said superiors asked her to come to work despite showing symptoms related to COVID-19 and despite having a doctor's referral to stay home. Superiors then demoted her to a "as-needed" status which Wooten considers a retaliation against her for raising questions in the facility. She said the sanitation was horrible, the facility lacked personal protective equipment, and that the standard of care "was not timely all

the time."

Specifically, Wooten recalled detainees asking her explanations to why they were given a hysterectomy.

"As a human, you just don't treat people inhumane," Wooten said. "As a nurse I took an oath that my life when I step in, no longer is my life; it became the lives of others. All I want is that people in triage are treated medically correct and treated in medical timeliness."

According to a report by the New York Times, five gynecologists reviewed the medical records of seven women detained at the center and concluded that Amin consistently overstated the size or risks associated with cysts or masses attached to his patients' reproductive organs.

"He is over-

ly aggressive in his treatment and does not explore appropriate medical management before turning to procedures or surgical intervention," said Dr. Deborah Ottenheimer, a forensic evaluator and instructor at the Weill Cornell Medical School Human Rights Clinic.

Benjamin Osorio, a lawyer for the women held in

the facility, told NBC News that two clients received hysterectomies for supposed cancer presumptions. Osario said biopsies were not conducted and that an oncologist later told one of his clients that she did not have cancer.

On Sept. 23, Bryan Cox, a spokesman for ICE, confirmed that detainees will no longer be sent

to see Amin, declined further comment, and cited an ongoing investigation by the Department of Homeland Security's inspector general.

"I became a whistleblower, but now I am a target," Wooten said. "But I will take a target anytime to do what is right and just than sit and be a part of what's inhumane."



Nurse Dawn Wooten protests inhumane conditions at ICE-contracted center in Georgia at a press conference on Sept. 15 in Atlanta, Georgia. Image Courtesy of Jenni Girtman

# Officials warn of brain-eating amoeba in tap water

By Riyasa Shrestha

In Lake Jackson, Texas, officials warned residents to

stop using tap water for 60 days because of possible contam-

ination from deadly brain-eating amoeba. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality warned the Brazosport Water Authority on Sept. 25 of the potential contamination of its water supply by the brain-eating microbe, also known as *Naegleria fowleri*.

The commission issued an advisory warning people not to use tap water for any other reason except to flush toi-

lets in Lake Jackson, Freeport, Angleton, Brazoria, Richwood, Oyster Creek, Clute, and Rosenberg. The advisory remained until the Brazosport authority's water system had been thoroughly flushed, and tests on water samples showed the system's water was safe to use again.

This issue was investigated after 6-year-old, Josiah McIntyre, died from the deadly microbe in

Lake Jackson on Sept. 8. Lake Jackson City Manager Modesto Mundo said that three of 11 water samples tested positive to genetic material related to *Naegleria fowleri*. Two of the positive tests were taken from water from the civic center water feature and a fire hydrant and one from a water hose bib at McIntyre's home.

Lake Jackson residents were initially warned not to use

tap water, but after a thorough investigation, they were advised to boil tap water before using it for drinking or cooking. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality lifted the boil water notice for Lake Jackson on Oct. 6.

Governor Greg Abbott held a news conference on Sept. 29 to address "the total tragedy" of the death of Josiah McIntyre.

Continued on the next page



Houston Astros fan, Josiah McIntyre, dies at six of complications from brain-eating amoeba in Lake Jackson, Texas. Image courtesy of Maria Castillo via ABC13.



# Brain-eating amoeba (continued)

“The most I could do with his family was to assure them that his life was not lost in vain,” Abbott said. “This is a total tragedy for Josiah as well as his family but we as leaders in the state of Texas must seize upon the strategy to

make sure this never happens again.”

Naegleria fowleri is a free-living microscopic amoeba commonly found in warm freshwater and soil, according to the Center for Disease Control and prevention. The CDC says it “usually infects

people when contaminated water enters the body through the nose.” The amoeba enters through the nose and travels to the brain where it causes a condition that is usually fatal. The CDC also mentioned that swallowing the contaminated water

does not cause infection.

The contamination of U.S. treated public water systems by this “brain-eating” microbe is rare but not unheard of. According to the CDC, the first deaths from Naegleria fowleri found in the

public drinking water systems occurred in southern Louisiana in 2011 and 2013. It was also found in 2003, in Arizona, and in disinfected public drinking water supplies in Australia and Pakistan. At the time of this writing, it is still unclear where McIntyre contracted the brain-eating amoeba.

Maria Castillo, McIntyre’s mother, said her son died while listening to an Astros game highlights.

“He was an active little boy,” Castillo said. “He was a really good big brother. He just loved and cared about a lot of people.”

# Sexual harassment bill honors slain soldier

By Priscila Batres

Bipartisan lawmakers introduced a bill in Congress on Sept. 16 named after Vanessa Guillen, the slain Fort Hood soldier who disappeared from the base in April, her remains found two months after. The “I am Vanessa Guillen Act” was introduced by Democratic Rep. Jackie Spier of California and Republican Rep. Markwayne Mullin of Oklahoma. The bill would make sexual harassment a crime within the Uniform Code of Military Justice and move prosecution decisions of sexual assault and harassment cases out of the military chain of command and into

a third party.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced the House will vote on the bill. If this bill passes, when a victim reports a sexual assault, an independent prosecutor will be assigned the case and allow the individual to file the lawsuit to the Department of Defense for a chance of compensation. It would also create an external review by the Government Accountability Office of the Military Sexual Harassment Response Program.

“Military leadership has repeatedly failed to reduce sexual harassment, sexual assault, and violent crime at Fort Hood, one of the

worst sites for attacks according to army officials, and throughout the armed forces,” Spier said while introducing the bill. “An endless cycle of harassment, assault, and retaliation for those who speak out reveals the deep roots of a toxic culture we must eradicate so that survivors are taken seriously and treated with respect, and assailants are held accountable.”

“The issue of sexual assault and harassment in the military is a bipartisan issue,” Mullin added. “We must strengthen the military’s ability to protect its most important resource, which is the people who willingly sign-up

to protect all Americans.”

Rep. Sylvia Garcia from Texas, who has supported the Guillen family since Vanessa Guillen’s disappearance in April, said the bill is a “transformative piece of legislation that will save lives and help keep our women and men in this Armed services safe.”

“The Army and Ft. Hood failed her,” Garcia said. “But in her name, we make the sweeping changes needed to stop this from ever happening again... While we can never bring Vanessa back, today we

honor her memory.”

As of now, the bill has 73 cosponsors in the house. A vote will happen soon. There have been at least five suspected homicides in Fort Hood this year and 23 deaths. Many demand a federal investigation

in the base. Fort Hood is one of the most violent military bases where nonviolent and violent cases have been recorded against military members. If passed, this bill would bring some justice to the Guillen family and protect the members of the military.



Vanessa Guillen’s sister and mother, Lupe (left) and Gloria (right), speak on the “I Am Vanessa Guillen Act” at a press conference at Capitol Hill. Image courtesy of Alex Brandon, AP

# EU sues UK for breaching Brexit withdrawal deal

By Priscila Batres

On Oct. 1, the European Union launched legal action against the United Kingdom after they failed to withdraw legislation that was part of the Brexit deal that both the EU and the U.K. signed in 2019.

This action was taken after U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson revealed

a plan that would put new legislation that would “override a specific part of the Withdrawal Agreement called the Northern Ireland Protocol.”

The president of the EU commissions, Ursula Von der Leyen, announced that the EU invited the U.K. to “remove the problematic parts

of their draft internal market bill by the end of September.” She said that the draft bill is “by its very nature a breach of the obligation of good faith laid down in the Withdrawal Agreement.”

However, the U.K. government responded to the EU. U.K. said that the bill ensures trade between

the four nations of the UK if the Brexit deal is not finalized by the end of this year. U.K. said they hoped they will not have to use the legislation. Meanwhile on Oct. 12, villagers in Sevington, England woke up to find bulldozers preparing the fields to build England’s new border wall. The 27-acre field is

earmarked for border infrastructure by the government, so consultation to locals is not required. Some villagers are concerned of the effect on property values, prolonged commuting times, and alteration to green spaces.

So far, these conflicts are moving fast, and both the EU and the U.K. are on

the final stages of reaching an agreement on Oct. 15. However, there is a lot of disagreement from both sides, so a favorable decision that would have a positive outcome seems unlikely, but there should be a decision in the upcoming days.

# FRS cuts interest rates

By Shirley Bright

In Sept. 2019, the American economy was rising. The unemployment rate was low, the stock market was increasing, and the Federal Discount Rate was 1.75%. President Trump relished in the fact that unemployment amongst the Black population fell to a historic low. Then everything came to a screeching halt as the world economies hit the wall of COVID-19. America's economy has yet to navigate around this wall.

In Nov. 2019, President Trump urged the privately owned Federal Reserve System (FRS) to lower its interest rate. Trump wanted the rates lowered to stimulate the growth of the economy. FRS lowered the interest rates earlier that year and believed the economy was coordinating with the current rate of inflation. Three months later, it would not take the urging of the president for rates to drop to a historic low.

In Jan. 2020, COVID-19 entered and quickly spread across the country. In the span of 2 months, the virus reached pandemic-level classification, and the economy was shut down at every avenue. In March, FRS did what Trump previously requested but not for his reasons. FRS dropped the rate a full 1%, bringing it to 0.0 – 0.25%. This drastic cut was implemented to maintain a stable financial market. This is equivalent to the

rates after the market crashed in 2008.

As Federal Reserve Chairman, Jerome Powell continually states that the purpose of the fluctuating rates is to maintain a stable financial market, keep inflation in check and to minimize the unemployment. On Sept. 16, it was speculated that FRS interest rate would increase, once again. FRS used other tools to grow the economy at a stable rate. FRS purchased \$80 trillion a month in treasury bills and \$40 trillion a month in mortgage-backed securities. These are intended to stimulate the economy and create a stable housing market. This lies in stark contrast to the recession of 2008 in which the housing market created the economic crisis. The banks have the backing of FRS to purchase or refinancing a home.

Chairman Powell and the Committee expects the economy to rebound at a stable pace, as long as all the proper tools are in place. In March, FRS provided investors with the hope of this inoculation to prevent a total economic depression. The CARES Act was on March 27 and included the purchase of corporate debts. Author and editor, David Dayen describes it as “a critical day ... on the road to pandemic apocalypse.” This was a relief to many corporations with outstanding debts, as CARES Act prevented many

companies from immediate bankruptcy.

The precautionary measures were working as effectively as possible, however Chairman Powell's remained skeptic of Main Street Lending – a program aimed at small and medium business. Powell's concern was rooted in the fact that companies were obligated to repay the loans or risk defaulting. The loans mature at 5 years with a 2-year deferral period for principal payments a 1-year deferral period for interest. This in addition to the onset of COVID-19, remain as unsettling factors that could prolong the recession more than any other factors. However, as other factors remain unchanged, FRS decided to leave the rates at the previous range of 0.0 - 0.25%.

FRS interest rates affect most Americans in some aspect of their lives. The interest rate affects the rate of interest for home loans and the possibilities of refinancing purchase power to buy cars or appliances.

Sylvia Bennett, Ph.D., Lecturer of Economics at UHD and former employee of FRS, shed some light on the economic status for the Houston and the energy sector. Dr. Bennett reiterated the fact that easing of the monetary policy creates favorable impact on consumer and business spending. The monetary policy could also create higher stock prices which are an impli-

cation of personal wealth and spending level.

All of this would have a ripple effect, and as Bennett states, it “will be reflected in overall economic activity.” She points to recent data from Dallas Fed, “an index of 10 leading indicators for Houston climbed over 6% for the 3 months ending in July.”

FRS has committed to purchasing at least \$40 billion in MBS on a continual basis to continue to stimulate and stabilize the economy. Unlike the 2008 recession, where subprime mortgages were considered a major factor in the cause of the recession, a pandemic is an unforeseen source of such economic destruction. Mortgage rates are affected by the federal interest rates. The mortgage rates in 2019 were 3.67% and 3.75% for a 30-year and 15-year fixed rate respectively. But there is uncertainty of the job market. Would it be a good time to refinance a home loan? If so, what factors are important to consider? The rates are so low, is now a good time to purchase a home for the first-time? Is it worth the 20% down payment and to forego the PMI, or put a large down payment to prevent it?

As a professor of economics, Bennett cautions to still consider your purchase or refinancing of a home during this time. She states that the federal funds target rate

will lead to lower mortgage rates and normally will make buying a home more affordable. It also will be a motivation to refinance which “will free up cash for other purchases.”

Current mortgages rates range from 2.56 - 2.76% for a 30-year fixed rate. Dr. Bennett encourages if someone is considering purchasing or refinance, do not wait any longer. The rates could begin to go up. Her caution is to those who would consider refinancing to consider more than the current low rate. She says the general rule of thumb for refinancing is to look for a rate 50-75 basis points lower than their current mortgage rate. The borrower must consider that the reduced rate compensates for the closing cost associated with the refinancing.

When asked about the oil prices and Houston's energy sector, Dr. Bennett stated that the Department of Energy expects oil prices to rise to \$60 a barrel by 2022. But she adds this is an optimistic forecast due to the bleak market demand and supply forces. Global supply is enormous and global demand is weak, having fallen substantially as a result of pandemic restrictions. She predicts in the more immediate term, Houston could lose tens of thousands of jobs, primarily due to the weakness in the oil sector. At a mere \$40 a barrel right now, it is difficult for many U.S. shale companies to make

a profit. But with an emphatic “if” Bennett states, “if the \$60 a barrel is correct, Houston could be back strong by 2022.”

Dr. Bennett also discussed how the interest rate affects spending and the unemployment rate. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows the employment rate for college graduates has risen from 1,405 to 3,276 between Aug. 2019 and Aug. 2020. Some area of change in the private sector for Financial activities from, 15,000 to 36,000 from Aug. 2019 to Aug. 2020; management, professional and related occupations, financial operations occupations numbers Aug. 2019 as 1,476 and Aug 2020 as 3,680, rates 2.3 and 5.5 respectively. This recession has hit all area of employment and some harder than others. But as for any recommendation for change of majors or career paths, Dr. Bennett chose to leave that one for the professional job coaches.

“My only guidance is to follow your passion. You have to know how your particular strengths could be of value to different types of organizations,” Bennett stated. “I'm on my third career now, and at each one, I was able to utilize my strengths and improve some of my weaknesses. Don't limit yourself. Today's dynamic economy will provide many opportunities to those who know their value and are able to also let others know.”



# TBF inspires readers despite virtual challenges

By Jaida Doll

The Texas Book Festival (TBF) will host its 25th annual “celebration of literature and literacy” from Oct. 31 to Nov. 15. Though seasoned festival-hosters by now, TBF faces new challenges in hosting an exciting, interactive, and inclusive festival amid COVID-19 restrictions.

Pre-COVID, the Texas Book Festival was hosted annually in Austin, attracting 40-50K visitors each year, according to Matt Patin, Literary Director for Texas Book Festival. Normally a one-weekend event, the Festival aimed to connect readers and authors by offering panels, discussions, and demonstrations to incite and encourage a love of literature. Authors of all genres unite to offer an inspiring and irreplaceable experience for readers of all ages. “Normally, we have a huge footprint in downtown Austin, which includes the Capitol building, numerous tents, and some off-site venues,” said Patin.

However, like all large gatherings in 2020, the Festival now is restricted to pandemic safety guidelines. To honor these, TBF has shifted to a virtual format.

This has presented certain difficulties that resulted in changes to the atmosphere and dynamic of the festival.

The exciting and exploratory spirit of Texas Book Festival is “a bit more challenging to capture in the virtual space,” according to Patin. A wholly virtual format revokes the opportunity of meeting a favorite author face-to-face or the experience of serendipitously discovering a soon-to-be favorite author in the next tent. However, Patin emphasized the mission of TBF that serves to keep that spirit thriving. Even via virtual format, TBF is striving to create an experience that is different, but no less inspiring and impactful for its readers and attendees.

“One of our primary goals this year has been to both in one way replicate the success of previous years, but not lose sight of how things can be a little bit different in the virtual space.”

In order to create an exciting, engaging and fulfilling reader experience via video chat, TBF has made foundational changes to the operations of their festival. Rather than a short, weekend-long event, the 25th an-

nual TBF will occur over a period of two weeks. Rather than overlapping sessions, TBF will host panels throughout the course of each day. This is one benefit to the virtual setting, as it allows readers to attend more panels, connect with more authors, and discover more literature.

To organize these sessions, TBF will divide sessions by reading level. The Texas Teen Festival kicks off the event (Oct. 31 – Nov. 1), followed by the Children’s Program (Nov. 2 – 6). The Adult Program (Nov. 6 – 15) follows, overlapping with the Austin Lit Crawl (Nov. 7 – 8 and 13 – 15). More details on the author lineup and session dates and times can be located on the TBF website.

In addition to expanding the opportunities to attend sessions, the virtual setting also expands the reach of the Festival. Patin hopes the Texas Book Festival will appear on a national radar.

“Because we’re not constrained by a physical space,” Patin says, “we will have audiences coming in from all over the state of Texas and hopefully from all over the country.”

The virtual setting not only

expands reader attendance, but it also expands opportunities for more authors to interact with TBF. Though usually constrained by time and space, the virtual setting allows and encourages national and international author presentations.

“We have a handful or more of authors calling in internationally this year,” says Patin.

Although, the virtual format does pose some issues for author participation “The lineup is half the size as it was last year... Authors have done so many Zoom and Crowdcast sessions already, and some of them are a bit ‘zoomed out’... But we’re no less proud of the lineup that we’ve secured... there is something for everyone.”

And that is certainly true of TBF – there is something for everyone.

“We’re looking for a mixture of fiction and nonfiction that reaches across audience categories,” Patin explained. “We’re also looking for diverse literary voices.”

The Festival offers something to readers of all ages and of all genres. Similarly, the presenting authors span all races, ages, and genres.

Some of the authors on this year’s lineup include Elizabeth Aveledo, Matthew McConahey, and Dean Koontz. TBF will also feature some Houston based authors including Anna Meriano, Lupe Mendez, and Jarett and Jerome Pumphrey.

Though an in-person festival is greatly missed and will likely be readily returned to when possible, TBF remains flexible and open-minded in the construction and delivery of their festival. Patin added that the adaptations they were forced to make this year, may influence the decisions they make in following years.

“We [will be] thinking about how we can meld together this idea of a [virtual and] in-person fest... I think everything we’ve learned this year will give us the ability to think about virtual elements in a different way next year. This year it was out of necessity. I think that next year it’ll be more out of opportunity.”

Though the 25th annual Texas Book Festival will look a little different this year, TBF is striving to create an experience that is no less exciting and

impactful than past festivals. Despite all changes challenges and restrictions, TBF remains constant – still connecting authors with their readers through interactive panels, discussions, demonstrations, and Q&A sessions that ignite and inspire love of literature, even via videochat.

The opportunity of connecting with an author and discussing their work is an invaluable and inspiring experience, regardless of the medium of that experience. Though the format may be different, that does not lessen the impact of such experience. Despite the challenges posed by a virtual format, TBF does not fail to inspire and encourage a love of literature across ages and genres.

“Even in virtual, it doesn’t change our mission – our vision – which is to connect all readers of all ages with authors through meaningful experiences.”

*Texas Book Festival will be virtually hosted Oct. 31–Nov. 15, and is free of charge for all attendees. Details on the author lineup, schedule, and instructions on how to participate can be found on their website [TexasBookFestival.org](http://TexasBookFestival.org).*



Photos from past Texas Book Festivals. Images courtesy of TBF website.



# “All In: The Fight for Democracy” illuminates history, complexities of American voter suppression

By Jaida Doll

Amazon Studios and Story Syndicate partner to present bold and insightful documentary, “All In: The Fight for Democracy.” The film, released on Sept. 9, follows the 2018 race for Georgia governor between Democrat, Stacey Abrams, and Republican then-Secretary of State, Brian Kemp. Though the film follows Abrams’ life and campaign+, it historicizes and contextualizes her experiences to illuminate larger issues within American society

and in the American political system.

Abrams did not win the race for Georgia governor. It was a narrow race, and although Abrams’ did not technically concede, she acknowledged her loss before the end of the race. The film opens at the close of this race, when Abrams delivered her non-concession speech. She used this announcement of her loss to draw attention to the issue she believed most largely affected her campaign

– voter suppression.

“This is not a speech of concession,” Abrams began her announcement. She continued by explaining the ideas of voter suppression: “The U.S. is the only country that makes it difficult for [its citizens] to own their power.” She described how America makes its citizens jump through hoops, simply to claim their right to vote. This leads many citizens to think that maybe it’s not worth the hassle when the next elec-

tion comes around.

The film bounces between recollections of Abrams’ experiences and historical lessons, with segments of commentary from a plethora of researchers and scholars. The narrative of Abrams’ recent experiences with voter suppression and intimidation is juxtapositioned with historical examples that bear striking resemblance to Abrams’ difficulties in the current time. In contrasting Abrams’ experiences to these historical examples, the film is able to communicate these issues in a larger political and historical context to identify the examples, implications, and pathways of voter suppression and intimidation in America.

These issues are as old as America, itself. The Constitution begins with a guarantee of democracy and equality for “we, the people.” But the lack of equality and equal representation over the course of American history begs the question, “Who are the people?” This phrasing “We, the people,” is restrictive in design – created to systematically keep certain groups of people from voting. “We the people” only included the white, male, land-owning people – only 6% of the 1776 American population, according to the film.

Although the proceeding Constitutional Amendments made voting possible for the other 94% of the American population, it did not make it easy. The passage of the 15th Amendment not only allowed Black men to vote, but also allowed them to hold office. This seemed like a victory in the war for racial equality, as many Black men not only began to vote, but also began appearing in local representative positions across the country. However, this was faced with much backlash. Laws like the Mississippi Plan and the toleration of the Ku Klux Klan’s 1915 “Reign of Terror” aimed to neutralize the effects of the 15th Amendment.

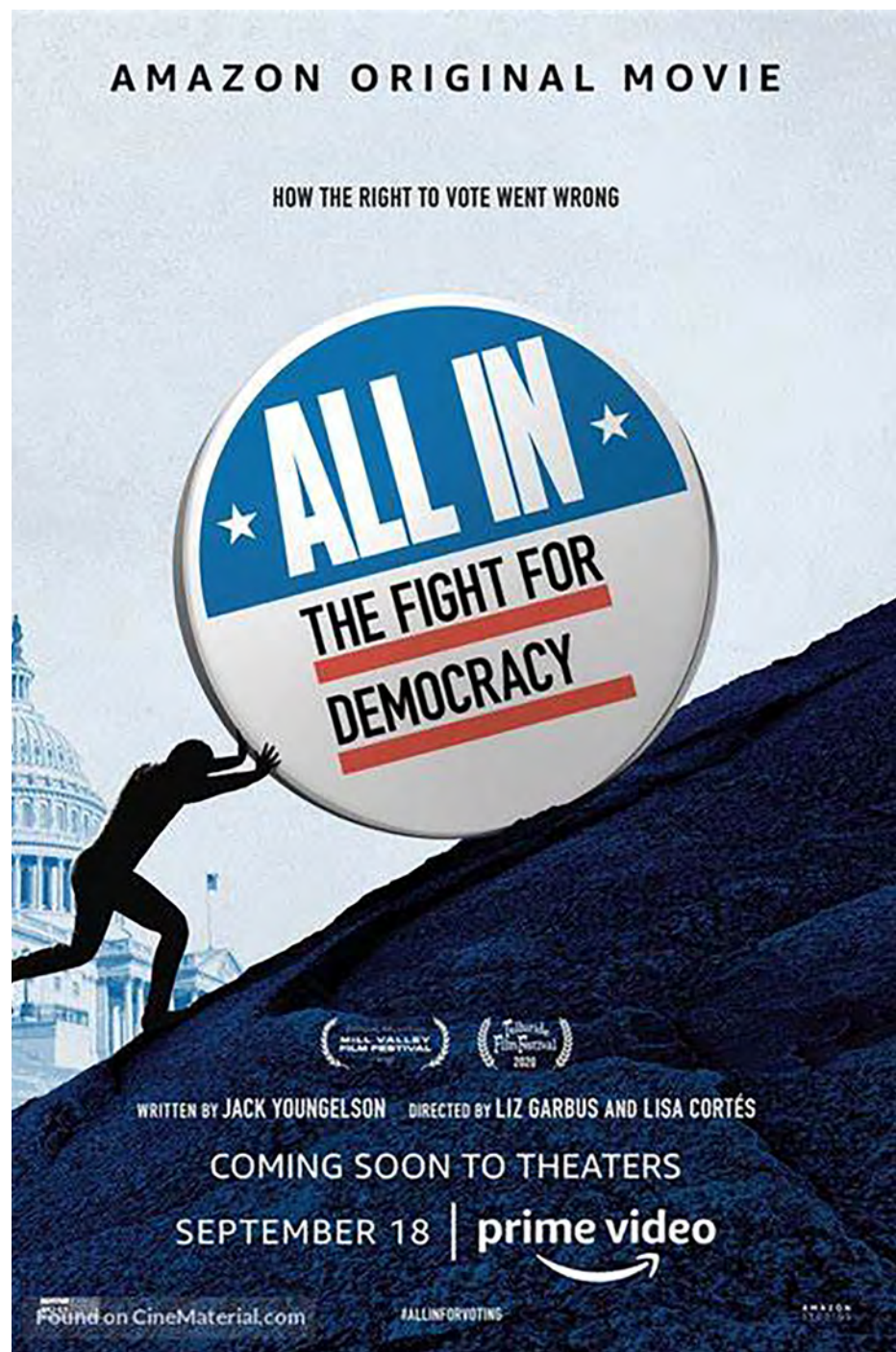
The Mississippi Plan of 1890 was the most influential in suppressing non-white votes which took the “societally imposed conditions of African Americans and made those the conditions to cast your vote,” according to one speaker in the film. Poll taxes literacy tests were implemented at polling stations across the country. The film delves into the ways in which these laws are systematically controversial and exclusive.

Political participation of the Black population was further complicated by felony disenfran-

chisement laws which revoked felons’ right to vote. These, in combination with the newly implemented “Black Codes,” which criminalized basic human behavior (for Black people), made it nearly impossible for the Black population to safely and legally cast a vote. In the 50-year span from the introduction of the Mississippi Plan in 1890 to the start of WWII in 1939, voting among the Black population had dropped to a mere 3% from its previous 67%.

This sort of “see-saw effect” in racial equality is not uncommon, even in the present political climate. Just as 1800s America seemed to make progress in racial equality by allowing Black people to vote and hold office, 2000s America saw unprecedented progress when it elected its first Black president in 2008. However, the administration that followed heeded unprecedented and explicit racism in American leadership, politics, and society. Though voter suppression tactics like poll taxes and literacy tests are a thing of the past, American politics has since found other, legal ways to suppress the non-white vote. of 2020.

*Continued on the next page*





## “All In: The Fight for Democracy” (continued)

Tactics including gerrymandering, poll closures, voting ID laws, and purging of registered voters have become the Jim Crow Laws of 2020. Though the film delves into all of these issues, it focuses most heavily on the issues of voter ID laws and voter purges.

Voter restriction imposed by identification is one tactic that has garnered much public attention. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was reauthorized in 2006, allowing for stricter laws surrounding voter identification. New laws that aimed to suppress non-white votes began appearing in states, only hours after the updated ruling. Texas led the way in producing and implementing these seemingly harmless voter restrictions.

Though these laws were supposedly designed to fight voter fraud, research throughout the film

indicates that voter fraud barely exists. Out of the 146 million votes cast between the years of 2000 and 2011, only 2,000 cases of alleged fraud appeared. Out of this nearly 150 million votes over more than 10 years of American history, only 10 cases of actual voter fraud were reported.

Though these voter ID laws claim to combat fraud, they actually combat the non-white vote. Though IDs are taken for granted by the majority of the population, the narrow set of identification that is accepted by these voter ID laws creates difficulty for young, or lower-class, or non-white voters. However, this difficulty is overruled by an inaccurate, fear-mongering narrative of “voter fraud.” Though identification laws claim to combat this fraud, “All In” makes it clear that these laws were designed to systemically

keep certain groups of citizens from exercising their right to vote.

Purging voter rolls is another tactic of voter suppression – one that was especially impactful in the case of Stacy Abrams. Officials regularly remove (purge) individuals from voting lists. Purging standards differ across states, but voters are often purged if they have not voted for a certain period of time (usually six years) or because of mail that returns as undeliverable to their address. When done properly, purging keeps the voter roll accurate and dependable. However, purging creates a problem when voters are wrongly or mistakenly removed from this list.

Throughout the 2018 campaign for Georgia governor, Abrams’ opponent and then-Secretary of State, Brian Kemp, personally and officially oversaw the process of voter purg-

es in Georgia. During the early voting stage of Abrams’ campaign, she received an influx of calls, letters, and emails from citizens who showed up to vote, only to be told that they were not on the voter registry.

In addition to this, Abrams’ highlights other issues of voter suppression that affected her campaign: “Students drove hours to hometowns to cast votes because mismanagement prevented absentee ballots from arriving on time. Parents stood in the fitful rain in four-hour lines, watching as less fortunate voters had to abandon democracy in favor of keeping their jobs. Eligible voters were refused ballots because poll workers thought they didn’t have enough paper to go around. Ballots were rejected by the handwriting police. Georgia citizens tried to exercise their constitutional rights and were still

denied the ability to elect their leaders.”

This is what drove Abrams’ decision to “concede” from the race. At the time Abrams’ acknowledged her loss, the race was close – Kemp held 51% of the votes. At the end of the race, Kemp led by 25,000 votes, but there were 35,000 rejected ballots that were not counted, in addition to those who were not able to cast a vote due to the voter purging process. Abrams’ acknowledged the impossibility of her election to the position of Georgia government, but she made it clear that this impossibility was due to the tactics of voter suppression that implicate “the erosion of our democracy.”

Though Abrams’ did not win the race for Georgia governor, her experiences communicated and analyzed throughout “All In: The Fight for Democracy”

illuminate the issues, the history, and the complexities of voter suppression in America.

In the words of Stacey Abrams, “Voter turnout is the best remedy for voter suppression.” As the 2020 Presidential elections are quickly approaching, Americans need to heed her words and claim their right to vote in the upcoming election and those to come. Regardless of one’s political standpoint, it is of utmost importance that that standpoint be heard. Early voting in Texas begins on Oct. 13. Be sure to find a polling station and make the time to vote. Make sure your voice is heard, and claim your right as an American citizen.

*“All In: The Fight For Democracy” is available for streaming on Amazon Video.*

## Celebrities use platform to encourage young voters

by Deniece Joseph

The 2020 election season is one of a kind in a plethora of ways, but a phenomenon being observed by many is the increased efforts by the rich and famous amongst us to encourage their U.S. fans to vote.

The first step is getting people registered to vote as nationwide registration deadlines approach. From music superstars such as Beyon-

cé, Ariana Grande and Rihanna, to acclaimed athletes like LeBron James and even internet sensation Rickey Thompson. Influencers of all variety have made a collective effort to encourage voter registration. Even beloved Hollywood actor Chris Evans, who after a highly publicized untimely incident, utilized the hype to rally people to register. This combined effort targets

demographics of all types, from younger and older generations to different levels of education and income.

But what are the tangible, lasting impacts of such efforts, especially in the midst of an on-going pandemic where fears of voter disenfranchisement are at an all-time high? The significance of celebrity efforts is the fact that they are celebri-

ties. In a highly commercialized world where everything is commodified, manipulating influence as a commodity can enact wide-reaching social change as we have seen in the past with the case of Colin Kaepernick. When a celebrity uses their platform to make social commentary to advocate for a charitable cause or to rally eligible individuals to register to vote, they

are positioning themselves into a different kind of limelight beyond their contractual work requirements.

The wealthy and influential have access to resources, institutions and individuals that are virtually inaccessible to the everyday person. Alternatively, they have access to audiences that politicians do not typically resonate with such as the younger and

considerably politically unmotivated. With such a unique position in society’s hierarchy, the effect of celebrities using their amplified voices has become integral to the American political sphere as the importance of voting no longer remains within established informed voters but engages all walks of life in the most quintessential election of our time.



## Film review: “Cuties”

By James Jurewicz

“Cuties” is a French film released by Netflix on Aug. 29. This is the first film directed by Mimouna Doucoure and was inspired by her own experiences growing up. The film portrays the life of “Aminata” or “Amy” (Fathia Youssouf), an 11-year-old Senegalese-French girl who is caught between two worlds – her family’s traditional Muslim way of life and the life of her precocious classmates who emulate the epitome of contemporary popular culture.

Amy’s family is highly traditional regarding their faith. Her aunt is the primary caretaker when her mother is not around and the strict religious teachings imparted upon Amy cause notable stress for the 11-year-old.

Amy has a

strong admiration for four classmates who call themselves the “Cuties.” When they are not bullying fellow students, they are practicing their highly suggestive dance routine. Upon the discovery that her father intends to marry a second woman, Amy secretly witnesses her mother’s devastated response. Amy acts out by stealing her cousin’s cell phone with the intention of learning new dance moves to impress the “Cuties.”

Her transformation is gradually revealed in the film, grinning in delight when swiftly receiving her first like on a social media picture with a make-up filter applied. She then takes her little brother’s shirt to wear as a “crop top” in order to resemble the “Cuties.” Amy trades her brother a set of

green prayer beads for the tiny shirt, symbolizing her focus on standing out as opposed to focusing on her faith. This is further illustrated when Amy watches explicit dance videos on the stolen phone under the protective shroud of her burka during a prayer session with her.

The results of joining the “Cuties” takes its toll on Amy. She begins to exhibit certain behaviors that are out of character, a major change from the quiet 11-year-old she once was. Stealing money from her mother to provide the “Cuties” a new wardrobe and even almost killing the ousted group member when she threatens her spot at the show. Amy eventually bears no resemblance to the character we met at the film’s start and seems to be headed

down a dangerously destructive path.

“Cuties” can be uncomfortable to watch at times. To see younger girls act as if they are filming an MTV music video along with highly suggestive dancing is unsettling. It is so unsettling that as of Oct. 7, a court in Tyler, Texas indicted Netflix just for distributing the film “Cuties” to its subscribers.

Though unsettling, this is the message and the impact of film. Precocious behavior of this type is performed by young girls all over the planet and sometimes even encouraged by society. This is evident in the stores that carry and market starter makeup kits to young children as well as clothing that could be considered age inappropriate. This film is about the process of trying to grow up too fast and the toll it takes on the participant.

Many people online were insistent on a boycott of the film due to the inappropriate behavior of the children involved. “Cuties” seems to pose the question, “Why is this behavior considered not acceptable in some circles yet celebrated in others?” This film seems to exist to make the viewer uncomfortable and that is its intent. The

online uproar caused by the film is confusing. Since when did it become offensive to release a salient social commentary, especially in the form of a film that directly deals with an issue that is very real and timely? Did the vocal online critics actually watch “Cuties” before they started with the condemnation?

“Cuties” is now available for streaming on Netflix.

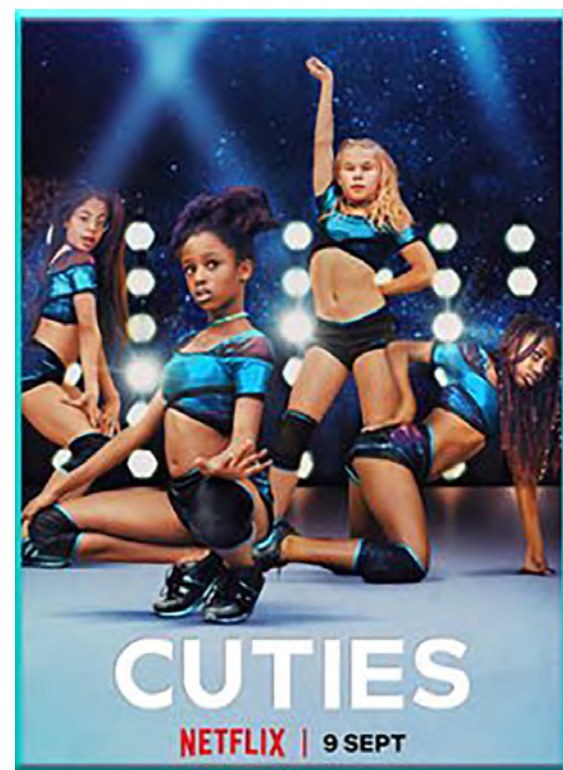


Image courtesy of Netflix

## Album review: Taylor Swift’s “folklore”

By Priscila Batres

On July 24, Taylor Swift released her eighth studio album, “folklore.” This announcement came as a surprise because Swift announced the album only a day before it released. Though the album dropped without notice, “folklore” became the bestselling album released that year, selling 2 million copies in its first week. Despite its commercial success, what makes this album stand out from Swift’s previous work is the alternative

sound many of her fans have waited so long for, displaying her versatility.

The album opens with “the 1,” a slow pop-style song about someone looking back at a relationship they wished had worked out. The song describes the regrets they have, the loneliness they feel, and the reassurance from themselves that they heal because the person was not “the one.”

Another stand out track is “the last great american dynasty.” It tells the story of the previous owner of

Swift’s Rhode Island home, an heiress from St. Louis who lived a controversial life. This song is arguably the highest contender as the best Swift has ever produced. She tells the story of another person’s life so well that it could be the soundtrack to her life’s movie.

According to Swift, the songs, “august,” “betty” and “cardigan” are about a love triangle in which each song is told from a different perspective at a different point of life.

For instance,

“august” tells about summer love and how that fell apart with the lyrics “so much for summer love, but you were mine to lose.” The country-style song, “betty,” tells the story from the other partner’s point of view and how they cheated in “august,” which is likely why the “summer love” fell apart. Lastly, “cardigan” is told from a third person’s point of view and how they felt like “an old cardigan under someone’s bed.” It is about remembering the feeling of

abandonment in that relationship.

Many of the ballads including “exile (feat. Bon Iver),” “my tears ricochet” and “illicit affairs” showcase some of Swift’s best lyrics. For instance, in “my tears ricochet,” Swift sings, “And if I’m dead to you, why are you at the wake;” in “exile,” she sings, “You’re not my homeland now, so who am I defending now?” And in “illicit affairs”: “For you I’ll ruin myself a million little times.” Though these lyrics are often

simplicistic, it works well in “folklore” because they capture the ballads’ emotion and make the songs that much more heart-wrenching.

On the other hand, songs like “mirrorball” can function as comfort songs. In “mirrorball,” Swift compares herself to a disco ball that reflects many of the personalities that she uses to fit in various situations. Some of the lyrics mention “I’m still on that trapeze, I’m still trying everything to keep you looking at me,” and “I’ve never been a natural all I do is try.”

Continued on the next page



# Album Review: MGK's "Tickets to My Downfall"

By Jaida Doll

On Sept. 25, Machine Gun Kelly (MGK) released his fifth studio album. Though most prominently a rap artist, MGK explores an entirely new musical direction in "Tickets to My Downfall."

Though MGK's style varies greatly between (and even throughout) many of his albums, his newest release is the largest deviation from any of his previous hip-hop albums. Rather than rhythmic beats and flowing rhymes, "Tickets to my Downfall" encompasses catchy choruses accompanied by drum and guitar-driven instrumentals. The result is reminiscent of the pop-punk sound that dominated the late 90s and early 2000s, akin to bands like "Blink-182," "Good Charlotte," "Paramore" and "A Day to Remember."

The album is laden with guest artists including Halsey (in "forget me too"), Trippie Redd (in "all i know") and blackbear (on "my ex's best friend"), among others. The music video for the album's single "bloody valentine" (released May 1) even features a surprise guest – actress and MGK's current girlfriend, Megan Fox.

MGK's inspiration for this album and his decision to pursue a pop-punk sound was sparked during a collaboration with YUNGBLUD and former Blink-182 drummer, Travis Barker. The (pop-

punk) song, "I Think I'm OKAY" became one of MGK's most popular songs on (rap) album, "Hotel Diablo." MGK further collaborated with Barker (among other artists) to produce what became "Tickets to My Downfall." With MGK on guitar and vocals, and legendary Travis Barker drumming and producing, the album was bound to be a success.

"Tickets to my Downfall" claimed the number 1 spot on the US Billboard 200 all-format albums chart. It sold more than 126,000 copies in its first week, making this release the most successful debut of MGK's career. The album was so successful, that MGK released a "SOLD OUT deluxe" version which added 6 songs to the already-existing 15. Some of these (many of which are arguably the best tracks on the album) include "body bag" featuring YUNGBLUD and Bert McCracken of "The Used", a cover of Paramore's "Misery Business," and an acoustic version of the single, "bloody valentine."

Though the sound may be different from his previous releases, the lyrical content is certainly similar. Drugs, sex, partying and self-destructive, depressive habits are recurring themes throughout the album, emphasized by tracks including "kiss kiss," "split

a pill," and "drunk face."

However, other titles including "lonely," "play this when i'm gone," and "hangover cure" express MGK's struggles and emotions regarding familial and romantic relationships. Though these tracks only scratch the surface of emotional depth, they show another, less frivolous side of MGK.

Though devout rap fans may be disappointed in Machine Gun Kelly's abrupt change in genre, "Tickets to My Downfall" proved MGK's success as a versatile artist. With the ability to move in and out of different genres, MGK was able to expand his reach and his appeal to cater to a more diverse group of listeners.

Though MGK may forfeit some fans in exploring the pop-punk scene, he has no doubt replaced and multiplied those fans with the release of "Tickets to My Downfall." Though he garnered some success as a rapper, it is clear that MGK triumphs in the pop-punk scene more than he ever did in the hip-hop genre. Regardless, "Tickets to My Downfall" proves Machine Gun Kelly is a creative and versatile artist. Though his style is ever-changing, fans anticipate the exploration and innovations in MGK's future releases.



Cover of Machine Gun Kelly's latest and most successful release. Image courtesy of Spotify.

## Swift's "folklore" (continued)

The listener can find comfort in the familiar feeling of wanting to fit in and putting on a different face to feel accepted.

Tracks including "seven" and "invisible string" are the songs that follow the theme of folklore. Both of these titles are composed with a lot of string instruments. Some of the lyrics that make these songs unique are "Passed down like folk songs, the love last long" in "seven;" and, "Cold was the steel of the axe to grind for the boys who broke my heart" in "invisible string."

Overall,

"folklore" is without doubt Taylor Swift's best body of work. This record captivates years of nostalgia with inquisitive lyrics that will have listeners reminiscing moments

from their own lives. This stripped-back album with marvelous storytelling allows Taylor Swift to make her mark as one of the most talented artists in the music industry.



Cover art for Swift's newest album, "folklore." Image courtesy of Beth Garrabrant



# Teigen and Legend grieve miscarriage

By Salvador Hernandez

On Sept. 30, Chrissy Teigen and John Legend announced that they suffered a miscarriage. This comes as shocking news, as it was the first time the couple tried to conceive naturally. Teigen and Legend have been transparent and public about the

miscarriage and have made their experience one that spotlights the grief of losing a child during labor.

They announced to the public that they were expecting a new baby with the release of John Legend's music video for the song "Wild" on Aug. 13. The cou-

ple has experienced the struggles of trying to conceive, having their first two children, Luna and Miles, by means of in-vitro fertilization (IVF).

Teigen has suffered a great deal during her pregnancy. On Sept. 27, Teigen was hospitalized in Cedars-Sinai Hospital

where she underwent two blood transfusions. Teigen revealed to her fans on Instagram she was on bed rest for a month due to bleeding of the placenta.

During Teigen and Legend's pregnancy, the decided to name their unborn child, Jack. Teigen

and Legend placed a joint statement on their Twitter regarding their emotions revolving around the miscarriage.

"We are shocked, and in the kind of deep pain you only hear about, the kind of pain we've never felt before."

Teigen and

Legend have received encouragement and support from other celebrities including Sarah Silverman, Jesse Tyler Ferguson and Viola Davis. Teigen is one of few celebrities that has publicly shared the very personal experiences and emotions regarding miscarriage.

# There is more to Rococo than we think

By Keven Balderas

Lovers of Western paintings do themselves a great disservice when they do not consider at length the Rococo school of art.

Dating roughly from the late 17th century to the mid-18th century, this movement in art served as the bridge between the Baroque and the Neoclassical. It flourished in France under the reign of the House of Bourbon, and its most influential artist is Antoine Watteau, whose

paintings and drawings, despite their shortcomings, have never failed to charm all who have laid eyes on them.

Indeed, an academic or a casual conversation on the Rococo school hardly ever takes place without the mention of Watteau and France.

It may stray from Watteau to François Boucher, the more successful painter, who got his commercial start by making and selling prints of Watteau's

drawings. From Boucher's Watteau drawings, the movement was overtaken by Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Boucher's greatest pupil. However, exploration of the Rococo school of art typically does not go much further than that.

Though Boucher and Fragonard undoubtedly deserve all the attention they receive, there are others' works that should pop up just as frequently in the minds of painting

enthusiasts.

For starters, there is the Italian branch of Rococo art. It seems on the surface that, because Rococo is a French term, it is confined to France, but on looking a little closer, it becomes clear that Italy welcomed it just as warmly. Three names suffice as irrefutable evidence of this: Rosalba Carriera, Giambattista Tiepolo, and Giovanni Battista Piazzetta.

Carriera's rich portraits per-

suaude us to sympathize with her sitters. Tiepolo's bright skies make us no longer fear heights, while Piazzetta's smooth contrasts make us no longer fear the dark.

And then, if we would like to sound the philosophical depth of that school, we ought not forget Jean-Baptiste Greuze or Hubert Robert. The former produces theatre out of domestic life, and the latter pitches novels through ancient ruins.

On the whole, throughout Rococo art, there runs a happy spirit that argues restlessly in favor of the color in life, as opposed to Baroque art that aims to bury it in heavy shadow, while flattering the day-to-day, which Neoclassical art thinks too lowly.

To pass by this school, then, is to pass by that sense of joy for life and in life, which once moved the painter.

# Trump administration impacts special education in pandemic

By Michael Kowis

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 7.4 million cases have been confirmed in America, and this number is steadily rising. Since March, President Trump has touted how these growing cases will magically disappear. On Oct. 9, it was announced that President Trump, himself, contracted the virus

and contributed to these growing statistics. Several months into the global pandemic, and we still do not have a united national response.

These inadequate and irresponsible actions from our federal government has resulted in over 200K deaths.

Though the Trump administration's pandemic response has been less than helpful to the

wider American population, consider how those with special needs — an especially vulnerable aspect of our population — has been impacted.

To better understand this, consider the following situation. If a child with learning conditions is enrolled in the public-school system, this child is entitled to a "Fair and Appropriate Education" (FAPE) under

the "Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act" (IDEA). All public schools are required to have FAPE programs, in order to facilitate FAPE, school districts implement what is called an IEP.

According to Leslie Francis, Assistant Superintendent for Communication and Community Relations for Cypress-Fairbanks ISD,

"An IEP is an Individual Education Plan for a student who requires specialized supports and services based on a standardized assessment."

Think of the IEP as an educational framework — a sort of outline that defines the types of classes or support that a student needs, depending on their unique and specific condition.

In my own case, my IEP mandated that I need more low vision support and extra walking time between classes to offset my

mobility condition.

These IEPs guarantee students with disabilities a FAPE program prior to this pandemic's slowdown. However, Francis worries that the services embedded within IEPs will be impacted even post-pandemic. Although Francis did mention that special-education services are being provided through Teletherapy sessions, many individuals, myself included, need these services in-person for one simple reason.



# The Hispanic-American dream By Jesse Fitzgerald Rodriguez Sr.

Even a crisis, amidst a recession, amidst a pandemic, during the continuous and controversial deportations of Mexican immigrants, Hispanics continue to set the bar high, especially in the arena of higher education.

On Sept. 17, Congress declared Sept. 14 as the start of National Hispanic-Serving Institutions Week. This is important to UHD because the Hispanic community accounts for more than half of its student enrollment population – 51.4% of graduate and undergraduate students. What does this mean?

A wave of change comes with a rippling effect of human ingenuity and Hispanic pride across all education spectrums. Data analytics and institutional research based on the 2010 Census show that Hispanics are the fastest-growing minority in America. Their presence is now stepping into the educational system arena and gaining political attention, as well.

As a result, the Hispanic community is gaining more influence and is realizing the need for higher education to reach their full potential. The Hispanic-

ic-American dream and the American dream is what we all strive to achieve. It is something many have died for and millions have crossed our borders for in hopes of grasping that American dream.

To emphasize the reality of the Hispanic growth in America, as of Sept. 17, Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) introduced and submitted in the Senate: Resolution S.Res.703 to the 116th Congress. Thereafter, a resolution designating the week beginning Sept. 14 as National Hispanic-Serving Institutions Week was

declared.

“This Resolution commemorates the Hispanic community,” the S.Res.703 states, “for its vigorous efforts to contribute their minds to specific sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).”

The United States Senate considered and agreed without amendment and with a preamble by unanimous consent.

“We acknowledge the Hispanic community as engines of ‘economic mobility’ and grand givers to the economic prosperity of the United States,” the Resolu-

tion continued.

What does this mean for the Hispanic community? They will be recognized for their goals and achievements from this day forward in the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and of course, throughout the UH System.

If that is not enough, “The Senate calls on the people of the United States and interest groups to observe the week with appropriate ceremonies, activities, and programs to demonstrate support for the Hispanic-Serving Institutions” as stated in the (2020) Resolu-

tion.

This is an excellent example of admirable character, perseverance, and stride for leadership by the rising Hispanic community, our next generation of leaders that will play an intricate part in the field and curriculum of STEM and beyond. I commend the Hispanic community, those souls who want to contribute to the economic mobility and prosperity of this country, today, tomorrow, and for many years to come.

# Trump administration (continued)

It helps to keep them on track with the multiple counseling, psych and other special services that occur daily. When schools can provide only a few of these sessions each week, students who consistently need of these services to maintain their academic achievement, get left behind. This shifts the specialty education to their parents—

most of whom do not have the training nor certification to do the job a specialist should be doing.

This lack of services during the pandemic impact specialty education students even in a post-pandemic climate. When the pandemic does end, these students need will be further behind their peers through no fault of their

own – simply due to schools’ inability to produce satisfactory services.

To illustrate just how bad, it is I asked my partner, Ashley Beenau, who herself has an aid, that aid has a child with dyslexia. In a regular school session, staff have a specialized kit that allows that student to read their normal reading material.

This s kit was likely mandated as part of his IEP, but now this child is at home with virtual zoom classes, and from what I was told their reading materials went virtual as well, which raises the real issue of how are they maintaining his FAPE.

If America allows the current president be re-elected, America will allow for more of our

youth with special needs to be several grade levels behind their peers. It is of utmost importance to get our children with disabilities back in school, so that they can receive a satisfactory and specialized FAPE. As long as they are in this virtual setting, they risk dropping in grade levels compared to their peer. and they cannot return to school so long as this pandemic

continues.

On top of continued and the ever-increasing death tolls, many of our youngest minds are not being properly nourished, which will result in an even larger impact on our economy. We must stand and fight for the education that our children – all our children – deserve, regardless of race, sexual orientation, or special needs.

# Student poll workers needed

By Varah Thornton

Due to this ongoing pandemic, there is a shortage of poll workers across the nation. That shortage has been most notably felt in Houston.

For the Nov. 2020 General and Special Elections, Harris County plans to hire an estimated

11,000 poll workers. Despite the pandemic, the Harris County Clerk’s Office (HCCO) expects record turnout and has launched the most pronounced recruitment effort in HCCO’s history. With a shortage of poll workers, the HCCO is specifically encour-

aging young adults to participate in the electoral process. The biggest reason students are targeted is to protect vulnerable populations like those with underlying health conditions and the elderly. Many of the election workers are older and fall into the more suscepti-

ble categories for contracting SARS-CoV-2, the virus that leads to COVID-19. Many have opted to remain home, creating a shortage during an election where the county already wants to hire far more people than they ever have.

A poll worker

is hired by a local elections office to administer local county, state, and federal elections. In many places like Harris County, this is a paid position. According to the HCCO website, “In Texas, at a minimum, to be eligible for appointment as an election worker/clerk,

a person must be a U.S. citizen and a qualified voter of the territory of the election.”

Poll workers, or election workers or clerks, are the general terms used to refer to any and every one actively participating in the administration of an election.

*Continued on the next page*



## A House divided

By Salvador Hernandez

Both Republicans and Democrats in Congress have fallen short in upholding the best interests of the people of the United States. The only response so far to the economic crisis has been the executive order and three memoranda that President Trump signed on Aug. 8. This move may have felt like a band-aid placed over a deep wound, but at least it was a band-aid.

The executive order was the only solution available

after Congress failed to propose any legislation on Capitol Hill. The clamor for a second stimulus package has been on American's minds since Aug. when Congress tossed around ideas to provide the people with a second stimulus package. This was the package that the American people needed but did not receive, due to the infamous Senate floor, known for being full of finger-pointing and unfulfilled promises.

According to the most recent

Gallop Polls, congressional approval ratings sit at a low 21% with a 75% disapproval rating and 4% holding no opinion. Both Democrats and Republicans played politics with people's money, and the inability to put forth a plan made them go on vacation. Congress resumed operations on Sept. 14, but there is no certainty about going with the stimulus package. It seems politicians are finally waking up as Democrats in the House of Representatives

introduced a revised stimulus bill, the HEROES Act.

According to CBS News, the proposed bill will provide "\$1,200 per adult stimulus checks targeted to middle and low-income families." In addition, "\$600 in extra weekly jobless benefits" will be given to those hit hardest by the pandemic's impact on the job sector of our economy.

There has been discussion between Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, and Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin,

to bring forth a bipartisan relief bill.

According to ABC News, "House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin emerged from last-ditch negotiations [on Sept. 30] with no semblance of a deal in sight." However, they made it clear that discussion on this topic will resume at a later time.

Former presidents, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan did not focus their attention on lobbyists or corporations. Rather, they focused on the

American people. The assumption that Congress forgot its promise turned into a popularity contest of who can gain the most support with the least effort.

It is best to choose politicians that actively listen and respond to what the people are saying. If not, it does not matter who wins the House of Representatives, the Senate, or the Presidency, if the American people are not being listened to – this counteracts the whole idea of democracy.

## Student poll workers (continued)

For those interested in becoming a poll worker, there are several ways to sign up. In Harris County, the easiest method is to go to the HCCO election website (HarrisVotes.org) and fill out the Election Worker Application. Another way to sign up is to get in contact with the Presiding Judge for that upcoming election. Presiding Judges are empowered to hire their Election Day staff and may submit information to the county.

Plenty of people qualify to be poll workers. If you are a registered Harris County voter and are willing to work, you can become a poll worker. There is also a provision for student clerks/volunteers. If a high school student is 16 years or older, they

can become poll workers and must apply directly through the HCCO website. They, like all poll workers, receive specific training from the county. It is recommended that students check with their schools for the possibility of accreditation for participating in an election.

There are many of benefits to working the polls. Aside from meeting plenty of new people, workers get to express and build on key management and leadership skills to look into how the electoral process works.

If worried about missing out on a payday to work the election, Harris County compensates each election worker, including high school students, for their services. The county now offers direct deposit,

prepaid card, or check options for payment. Workers are paid \$17/hr minimum and will be receiving county-issued personal protective equipment (PPE) for each day they will be working

If worried about missing out on a payday to work the election, Harris County compensates each election worker, including high school students, for their services. The county now offers direct deposit, prepaid card, or check options for payment.

Furthermore, of course, workers are allowed to be comfortable, but not too comfortable. Comfortable shoes and clothes are encouraged, but political attire and accessories are not allowed in polling locations for both election workers and voters.



The Dateline is now hiring for the fall semester! Student-run since volume one, The Dateline students with an opportunity to get involved on campus, gain valuable experience, and build professional skills. Students can also earn course credit with TCOM/ENG 4360 and can even make a little extra cash.

Students are encouraged to submit as many pieces as desired for each issue, however no commitment or experience is necessary.

We welcome students of all majors, and we are excited to see what you can bring to the team. We are currently hiring for positions including journalists, photographers, illustrators, cartoonists, and graphic designers.

To submit pieces or for inquiries about joining The Dateline, email the editor, Jaida Doll: [dollj1@gator.uhd.edu](mailto:dollj1@gator.uhd.edu)