

CURRENT ISSUES & EVENTS

NOTES



High School
2025-26

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NOTES

Academic Year - 2025-26

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- SB 175 - Ban on taxpayer lobbyists that would preclude local governments and school districts from hiring lobbyists to push their issues with legislators

KEY PROPOSITIONS FOR NOVEMBER ELECTION

- **HJR 1** - enables exemption of personal property used for producing income
- **HJR 2** - constitutional amendment to prohibit the legislature from imposing estate or inheritance taxes ('death taxes')
- **HJR 4** - prohibits enacting an occupation tax on registered securities market operators or a tax on securities transactions
- **HJR 7** - allocates part of state sales tax to water fund
- **HJR 99** - enables exemption of animal feed from ad valorem taxes
- **HJR 121** - requires future constitutional amendments become effective only if approved by a majority of the voters in at least three-fourths of the counties of the state
- **HJR 133** - authorizes the legislature to provide a residence tax exemption to a surviving spouse of a veteran who died as a result of a qualifying condition
- **SJR 2** - proposes a Dementia Prevention and Research Institute and a Research Fund
- **SJR 3** - increases the exemption amount on residences for ad valorem school taxes from \$100,000 to \$140,000
- **SJR 5** - denials of bail for those accused of certain felonies
- **SJR 18** - constitutional amendment prohibits taxing realized or unrealized gains of an individual, family, estate, or trust
- **SJR 27** - would change the composition of the State Commission on Judicial Conduct to be better able to sanction judges for misconduct
- **SRJ 34** - would affirm that parents are the primary decision makers for their child's upbringing
- **SRJ 37** - requires voting can only be done by citizens as part of the Texas Constitution
- **SRJ 59** - creates two special funds, the Permanent Technical Institution Infrastructure Fund and the Available Workforce Education Fund, for Texas Technical College System projects.
- **SJR 84** - authorizes the legislature by general law to provide for a temporary exemption from

property taxation of the appraised value of an improvement to a person's residence homestead that is completely destroyed by a fire

- **SJR 85** - authorizes the legislature to increase the homestead exemption of the elderly



FLASH FLOOD IN KERR COUNTY

HISTORIC TEXAS FLOOD

On Friday, July 4, 2025, in Kerr County, campers, locals and visitors celebrating Independence Day were woken unexpectedly by water flooding their lands, homes, beds and vehicles. Others were woken by power outages or by an emergency alert. This day became known as one of the most devastating in Texas history, with river water reaching 37.72 feet.

On Thursday, July 3, 2025, the NWS issued a flood watch through Friday morning for up to seven inches of rain and the possibility of river flooding in Kerr County. Early Friday morning, while most residents slept, NWS issued a flash flood emergency for the county.

The flood swept in like a river tsunami, bringing a fast-moving, destructive wall of water. It was triggered by a slow-moving storm that dropped nearly 12 inches of rain. As a result, the river rose more than 20 feet in less than an hour near Hunt, TX, where the north and south forks of the Guadalupe River meet.

The flooding was catastrophic and swept away buildings that held campers, resulting in numerous casualties. Several were from Camp Mystic, a girls' camp established in 1926.

The flooding went far beyond Hunt to the neighboring towns of Ingram, Kerrville, Center Point and Comfort. No one predicted levels would come close to what happened. The only comparable event was in 1932, when the river rose nearly as high.

Texas Governor Abbott signed a disaster declaration for several counties in Central Texas due to flooding, and U.S. President Donald Trump signed a federal



IT AND AI GIANTS

Musk is also actively developing Optimus, Tesla's humanoid robot, with a sales target of 2026. Already in use at Tesla factories, Optimus is designed to handle tasks such as lifting objects, carrying groceries and performing basic chores. Musk claims future versions could assist with elder care and personal tasks. Other Musk ventures include SpaceX, which continues to test the giant Starship rocket for future missions to Mars, and Neuralink, which in 2024 implanted its first brain chip in a human patient which aimed to help people with paralysis control computers with their thoughts.

- **AMAZON – JEFF BEZOS**, founder of Amazon and owner of the Washington Post and Blue Origin, Bezos stepped down as CEO but remains one of the world's wealthiest individuals. Bezos now engages in philanthropy while continuing investments in space exploration and media.
AMAZON – ANDY JASSY - Jassy has worked with Jeff Bezos, founder and original CEO of Amazon, for 24 years and took the reins of Amazon as CEO. Amazon is the second-largest employer in the U.S.
- **ORACLE – LARRY ELLISON** – Co-founder of Oracle, Ellison is executive chairman and chief technology officer. In 2024, Ellison surpassed Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos to become the world's richest person and he remains one of the wealthiest people alive, with major investments in real estate, yachts, aviation and a multibillion-dollar stake in Tesla. A key figure in enterprise software and databases, Ellison spearheaded Oracle's push into cloud services, competing with Amazon, Microsoft and Google.
- **NVIDIA – JENSEN HUANG** – Co-founder and CEO of NVIDIA, Huang catapulted the company as a world leader in graphics processing units

(GPUs). NVIDIA is known for chips power gaming systems, data centers and most notably—artificial intelligence platforms. NVIDIA is now one of the most valuable companies in the world and is on the forefront of the AI boom.

- **APPLE – TIM COOK** - CEO since 2011, Cook has guided Apple to become the first company to reach a \$3 trillion market value. Under his leadership, Apple has expanded in wearables, services and artificial intelligence while facing antitrust scrutiny over its App Store and competition in global smartphone and device markets.
- **ALPHABET/GOOGLE – SUNDAR PICHAI** - Born in India, Pichai is CEO of Alphabet Inc. and Google, its main subsidiary. Founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin remain influential as controlling shareholders and board members of Alphabet, the world's fourth-largest technology company by revenue. Pichai helped drive Google's growth with Chrome and Android and now leads major efforts in artificial intelligence, cloud services and search while navigating U.S. and global antitrust investigations.
- **META – MARK ZUCKERBERG** - The CEO and founder of Meta, formerly Facebook, has scaled back some metaverse projects but continues to invest in virtual and augmented reality. He launched Threads in 2023 to rival X (formerly Twitter) and is now steering Meta toward artificial intelligence, social media growth and digital advertising dominance.
- **ORACLE – SAFRA CATZ** – CEO of Oracle since 2014, Catz is one of the most powerful women in technology. Oracle is a global leader in databases, business software and cloud services. Under her leadership, the company has expanded its cloud computing business to compete with Microsoft, Amazon and Google, and remains a major player in enterprise technology.
- **OPENAI – SAM ALTMAN** – CEO of OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT. Altman has become one of the most recognizable names in AI. He is both praised for pushing AI innovation and criticized for raising fears about safety, regulation and the future of work.
- **MICROSOFT – SATYA NADELLA** - CEO since 2014, Nadella has strengthened Microsoft's core businesses and expanded its cloud services, with stock value tripling under his leadership. Since Windows 11 AI feature scans PC content,

LEADERS OF PRIMARY COUNTRIES OF ASIA & MIDDLE EAST

Asia & Middle East Leaders	Title	Name	Start
Maldives	President	Mohamed Muizzu	2023
Mongolia	President	Ukhnaagiin Khürelsükh	2021
	Prime Minister	Gombojavyn Zandanshatar	2025
Myanmar	Acting President	Min Aung Hlaing	2024
	Prime Minister & Junta Leader	Min Aung Hlaing	2021
Myanmar National Unity Government – unrecognized	Acting President	Duwa Lashi La	2023
	Prime Minister	Mahn Win Khaing Than	2021
Nepal	President	Ram Chandra Poudel	2023
	Prime Minister	K. P. Sharma Oli	2024
Oman	Monarch	Haitham bin Tariq Al Said	2020
	Prime Minister	Haitham bin Tariq Al Said	2020
Pakistan	President	Asif Ali Zardari	2024
	Prime Minister	Shehbaz Sharif	2024
Palestine (national Authority)	President	Mahmoud Abbas	2005
	Prime Minister	Mohammad Mustafa	2024
Hamas in Gaza – not recognized	Party Leader	Izz al-Din al-Haddad	2025
Philippines	President	Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos	2022
Qatar	Monarch	Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani	2013
	Prime Minister	Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani	2023
Saudi Arabia	Monarch	King Salman	2015
	Prime Minister	Mohammed bin Salman	2022
Singapore	President	Tharman Shanmugaratnam	2023
	Prime Minister	Lawrence Wong	2024
Sri Lanka	President	Anura Kumara Dissanayake	2024
	Prime Minister	Harini Amarasuriya	2024
Syrian Arab Republic	President	Ahmed al-Sharaa	2025
Syrian National Coalition – partially recognized	President	Hadi al-Bahra	2023
	Prime Minister	Abdurrahman Mustafa	2019
Taiwan (ROC)	President	Lai Ching-te	2024
	Premier	Cho Jung-tai	2024
Tajikistan	President	Emomali Rahmon	1992
	Prime Minister	Kokhir Rasulzoda	2013
Thailand	Monarch	King Maha Vajiralongkorn	2016
	Prime Minister	Paetongtarn Shinawatra	2024
Turkey	President	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	2014
Turkmenistan	National Leader	Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow	2023
	President	Serdar Berdimuhamedow	2022
United Arab Emirates - UAE	President	Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan	2022
	Prime Minister	Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum	2006
Uzbekistan	President	Shavkat Mirziyoyev	2022
	Prime Minister	Abdulla Aripov	2016
Vietnam	Communist Party Leader	Tô Lâm	2024

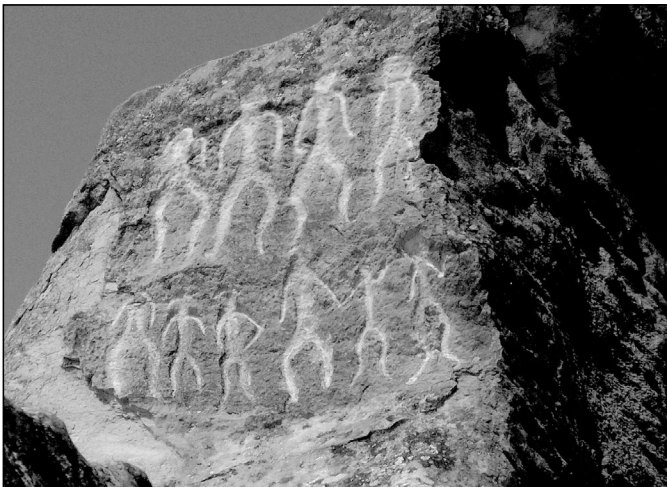
WORLD - EUROPE

ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN CONFLICT

Armenia and Azerbaijan have fought over Nagorno-Karabakh, a mountainous region in the South Caucasus, for more than three decades. During the Soviet era, it was an autonomous region within Azerbaijan but populated mostly by ethnic Armenians. As the USSR collapsed, the first Karabakh war (1988–1994) broke out after the local parliament voted to join Armenia. Armenia backed the separatists, and Azerbaijan resisted. Tens of thousands died, more than 1 million were displaced, and Armenia gained de facto control of Nagorno-Karabakh. A ceasefire brokered by Russia left the territory disputed but governed by a self-declared Armenian republic.

In 2020, Azerbaijan launched a second war, retaking large areas of the region with Turkish military support. A Russian-brokered ceasefire left Russian peacekeepers in place, but tensions persisted. In December 2022, Azerbaijan blockaded the Lachin Corridor—the only road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia—cutting off food and medicine.

On September 19, 2023, Azerbaijan launched a major assault on Nagorno-Karabakh. After a single day of fighting, ethnic Armenian forces surrendered, and by January 1, 2024, the separatist government dissolved. Nearly all of Nagorno-Karabakh's 120,000 Armenians fled to Armenia, ending centuries of Armenian presence in the region.



PETROGLYPHS IN AZERBAIJAN

In 2025, a peace deal was signed at the White House, creating a new trade and transit corridor between the two countries, nicknamed the "Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity." Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has acknowledged the end of Armenian control in Karabakh, while Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has rejected accusations of ethnic cleansing, insisting that displaced people can return. Russia, distracted by its war in Ukraine, played little role in the resolution.

BELARUS

Belarus remains one of Europe's most authoritarian states under President Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled since 1994 and is often called "Europe's last dictator." He claimed victory in the disputed 2020 election with 80% of the vote, sparking mass protests that were violently suppressed. Civil liberties, press freedom and opposition parties remain heavily restricted.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Belarus has become a key staging ground for Russian troops and military equipment. Its territory was used for the initial assault on Kyiv, and Russian forces continue to operate from Belarus. Lukashenko has aligned closely with Russian President Vladimir Putin, prosecuting critics of the war and outlawing anti-war demonstrations.

The West has responded with sanctions, while neighboring Poland and Lithuania have threatened to close borders over security concerns. Analysts warn that if Russia achieves lasting control in Ukraine, Belarus could face annexation pressures, effectively erasing its sovereignty. Meanwhile, Lukashenko has tried to maintain some independence by occasionally signaling openness to dialogue with the EU, but his reliance on Moscow leaves the country vulnerable.

POLAND

Poland sits on NATO's eastern front and has become one of the most important allies in responding to Russia's war in Ukraine. Since 2022, drones and missile debris from the conflict have landed in Polish territory, including a 2022 incident that killed two civilians. These events pushed Poland to expand its air defenses, host additional NATO troops, and strengthen coordination with the U.S.



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This year's Notes is dedicated to those who endured loss,
who rebuilt, and who remind us that even in tragedy,
hope can rise like the river after a storm.

Photo by Tony Gallucci



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