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SPORTS

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AMANDA MCCOY amccoy@star-telegram.com

At a Tuesday afternoon news conference at the Bob Bolen Public Safety Complex in Fort Worth, Gov. Greg Abbott proposes legislation that would freeze a city's property tax revenue if that city defunded its police department. Austin recently enacted a police funding cut.

Abbott backs plan to freeze tax revenue if cities defund police

BY KALEY JOHNSON
kjohanson@star-telegram.com

Gov. Greg Abbott announced a legislative proposal to discourage Texas cities from defunding the police at a Fort

Worth press conference on Tuesday. At the afternoon press conference at the Bob Bolen Public Safety Complex, Abbott, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and Speaker Dennis Bonnen proposed legislation that would freeze a city's

property tax revenue if that city defunded its police department. "Cities that endanger residents by defunding law enforcement should not be able to get more property tax dollars from those same residents whose lives the city just endangered,"

Abbott said. Abbott said that defunding the police would cause "lawlessness in our cities" and "chaos." The announcement comes after the Austin City Council unanimously voted to cut its police department budget by \$150 million on Thursday. State Rep. Craig Goldman, R-Fort Worth, commended Fort Worth for voting to continue the Crime Control and Prevention District tax, which provides revenue from a ½-cent sales tax to programs that aim to reduce crime. "Fort Worth is doing it right," Goldman said. "And we're not going to let a major city in the

SEE ABBOTT, 4A

Fort Worth attorney completes walk for changes

BY TESSA WEINBERG
tweinberg@star-telegram.com

AUSTIN After more than 200 miles and 10 days of walking from Fort Worth to the steps of the Texas Capitol in Austin, Leon Reed Jr. had finally made it. But on Tuesday morning his journey ended before a pair of closed gates with a chain holding them shut. Reed, a Fort Worth native and attorney who has practiced criminal law for 16 years, had traveled on foot to deliver a letter on police reform to Gov. Greg Abbott along with a thumb drive that had data on Fort Worth police operations. The day before Reed was scheduled to arrive, Abbott announced he would be traveling to Fort Worth on Tuesday — right where Reed had come from. And with the Capitol closed since March due to the novel coronavirus' outbreak, Reed couldn't even walk on the grounds. He was disappointed. "We need him to be the governor of the state of Texas. I came down here to encourage him. I came down here to build him up, to strengthen him, to toughen up his resolve," Reed said. "Because right now ... he is the captain of our ship. And the captain of the ship is obligated to lead. It is not a choice. It is a duty." Later he said: "God didn't tell me when I would get in front of the governor. And the governor is not here now.

SEE WALK TO AUSTIN, 3A



COURTNEY SACCO AP

A Graham-based company, Barron Petroleum, has found a large oil and natural gas field near the oil-rich Permian Basin.

Small company discovers 74.2 million barrel oil, gas field in West Texas

BY HALEY SAMSEL
hsamsel@star-telegram.com

Thanks to a partnership with a geoscientist in the Permian Basin, a family-owned oil company is celebrating its largest

discovery yet: a 13,000-acre field in Val Verde County holding an estimated 417 billion cubic feet, or 74.2 million barrels, in oil and gas reserves. Barron Petroleum, based in Graham, announced the discovery on Monday after working

with scientist William J. Purves on the project since 2018. Using Purves' 3D seismic model to estimate the location and size of the oil and gas reservoirs, the company confirmed the find by successfully drilling two wells at the site, located about 35 miles south of the West Texas town of Ozona. "We found out that it was exactly what 3D had shown on Dr. Purves' study," said Roger Sahota, president and CEO of Barron Petroleum. "We're very excited and now we're trying to figure out how to develop it or get someone to join the venture with us. It's a large project, and our company is small. It's just me and my three sons and my wife involved." Albert G. McDaniel, a petroleum engineer based in Fort Worth, completed the evaluation of the oil and gas reserves and wrote that the project is now so low-risk that it "more resembles that of a development project than an exploration venture." In an interview, McDaniel added that Barron Petroleum will have the ability to drill some 60 new wells, allowing energy companies to purchase large quantities of gas or oil

SEE OIL FIND, 4A

No happy ending for nutria colony at park

BY KALEY JOHNSON
kjohanson@star-telegram.com

The city of Fort Worth is removing a colony of nutrias from a Fort Worth park and euthanizing them to prevent damage to the local habitat. But the euthanization is not without just cause, as an urban biologist explained. Nutrias, also known as coypu, can be found in Central Texas and on the Texas coast in marshes, swamps, ponds and lakes, but they're considered an invasive species and can cause damage to their environment, said Dallas-Fort Worth urban wildlife biologist Rachel Richter. Richter said she's noticed a large population of nutrias at Krauss Baker Park for years, and the colony appeared to be growing as people fed the critters. "As exotics, they couldn't/shouldn't be relocated," a Fort Worth spokeswoman said about the nutrias. "The Parks Department is working with

Code Compliance to 'depopulate' them." "Depopulate" equals euthanized. The spokeswoman said the parks departments works closely with licensed and authorized wildlife staff, and frequently has to relocate various wildlife throughout the year. But in this case, our little swamp rat friends could not be relocated anywhere. Richter said relocating the nutrias would only result in the same level of destruction at another place, and their removal from Krauss Baker Park "is an opportunity for our native wildlife to flourish." "I trust that the City of Fort Worth assessed the situation and developed an appropriate management strategy to reduce the damage caused by the nutria," she said. "There simply isn't any good natural area in Texas for nutria." The main way the coypu cause problems is by burrow-

SEE NUTRIAS, 4A

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FROM PAGE 1A

ABBOTT

state of Texas turn into what Portland is doing, what Seattle is doing.”

Bonnen, the state House speaker, said the Texas House of Representatives will support the legislation. He criticized Austin Mayor Steve Adler for supporting what he called the “socialist agenda” of taking money from police.

“Law enforcement is not a tool of political agendas,” Bonnen said.

Abbott said while he is open to strategies that will make policing better, “Texas will not tolerate a reduction of law enforcement.”

“We need our officers, and we need them funded,” he said.

Since the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis police custody earlier this year, Black Lives Matter protesters across the country have called for defunding police — which many say would mean reallocating some police department funding to community programs.

In response to a question about the calls to defund the police based on brutality against people of color, Abbott said, “If we have police brutality, we don’t need less police, we need less police brutality.”

“And so we need to take action, whether it be as a Legislature or in police departments or whatever the case may be,” Abbott said. “We do need to take action to ensure that law enforcement officers are trained in ways in which they will not engage in police brutality.”

On Thursday, the Texas Legislative Black Caucus also proposed a bill related to Floyd’s death and law enforcement. The George Floyd Act aims to curb police use of force and further criminal justice reforms in Texas.

Abbott said he has met with Floyd’s family and wants to ensure that what happened to him does not happen again. He said the way to do so is to provide law enforcement with the training and resources they need, and reevaluate use-of-force policies.

Fort Worth Mayor Betsy Price, state Sens. Jane Nelson and Kelly Hancock, and state Reps. Charlie Geren, Stephanie Klick and Giovanni Capriglione also joined the press conference.

Price said she supported the proposal.

“For me and for most mayors, public safety is job one in this communi-

ty,” she said at the press conference. “It’s not political — it’s common sense to keep your community safe.”

Price said while she understands the concerns about the community’s relationship with the Fort Worth Police Department, “we will not defund our police to solve those issues.”

“Cities that are dismantling their police departments are putting their citizens at risk,” she said.

Reacting to Tuesday’s announcement, Enough is Enough protest group co-founder Kwame Osei Jr. told the Star-Telegram he feels that Abbott “just strong-armed all mayors in the state of Texas.”

“He basically blackmailed any mayor who wants to see a different kind of change,” Osei said.

He said the proposed legislation, even if passed, will not impact the work the group has been doing in Fort Worth. Enough is Enough is passing out clothing to people who are homeless on Friday and handing out school supplies on Saturday.

“We will continue to do our part to make our city safer, and we are willing to continue to talk with (Police) Chief Kraus for the time he is still there and with Mayor Price,” Osei said.

In July, Price sat down with Enough is Enough to talk about the group’s demands.

After Tuesday’s press conference, Price told the Star-Telegram that she found out about the proposed legislation Monday night. She said it is clear from the CCPD vote that Fort Worth citizens want a funded police department.

Altogether, the CCPD tax will provide Fort Worth police with an additional \$1 billion through 2030. This revenue is in addition to what the police department receives through the city’s general fund, which this year amounted to more than \$267 million.

Police Chief Ed Kraus proposed to City Council on Friday that some CCPD funding be redirected to nonprofits, civilian response teams and other alternatives to traditional policing.

The city faced criticism ahead of the May election that the sales tax fund amounted to a “police slush fund” that no longer serves the public.

Kraus told reporters he supports Abbott’s statement that defunding police is not the answer. He said police can use their funding to serve the community.

Kaley Johnson: 817-390-7028

FROM PAGE 1A

OIL FIND

from one site.

“This is a major discovery because these new field designations are all going to be made from this one 13,000-acre lease,” McDaniel said. “These are going to be high-volume, high-rate wells from a major new field that will be developed over the next five to 10 years.”

Sahota agrees, and is already negotiating a contract with energy companies Kinder Morgan and Enterprise to lay down a miles-long gas line and sell natural gas drilled out of the field.

“We like to purchase these kinds of properties and take a risk,” he said. “We’ve got our own crews and our own rigs, so we do most of the work ourselves except for the scientific or seismic work.”

This has been a tough year for oil and gas companies, which have suffered from a lack of demand during the coronavirus crisis. Barron Petroleum has not been immune from the economic downturn, cutting its full-time workforce from more than 100 oil field hands before the pandemic to 20, according to Sahota.

But, with oil prices hitting their highest point in five months this week, Sahota is hopeful that his company can continue to explore more potential reserves and rebound from the crisis.

“We’re very happy to have found this, and in Texas,” Sahota said. “This is where all of our projects are right now, and we hope we will have some more discoveries so the state will flourish with our country and we’ll employ a lot of people.”

FROM PAGE 1A

NUTRIAS

ing, according to Wildlife Damage Management, an online resource supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Their burrows can weaken roads, stream banks and dams. The Rodents of Unusual Size can also eat up to 3

pounds a day, so they can quickly destroy vegetation and habitats around bodies of water.

Louisiana even pays people to kill nutrias because they cause so much damage to the wetlands. For the 2019-20 hunting season, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries raised the nutria bounty from \$5 to \$6, USA Today reported.

It’s not really the nutrias’ fault that they become an uncontrollable infestation. Fur traders brought the coypu to the United States from their native environment in South America, where seasonal droughts keep their population under control, ac-

cording to Columbia University. But in the U.S., and, say, an urban Fort Worth park, there’s nothing stopping them from breeding to out-of-control numbers.

As of Tuesday, code compliance had caught 31 nutrias at the park and euthanized them. About 30 remained at Krauss Baker Park, awaiting their fate.

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