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Graduating seniors want graduation ceremony

By Shaheryar Khan

On March 1, interim President Antonio D. Tillis, Ph.D., released a statement regarding the 69th commencement for the spring 2021 graduates. He stated that UHD will once again conduct its graduation services in virtual setting on May 15. Many Gators were upset about this announcement, but one senior took his frustration to the next level.

Gabriel Corral is a senior majoring in technical communication, set to graduate this spring. Moments after receiving the news that commencement will be virtual, Corral started a petition

on Change.org addressing why UHD students deserve a chance to walk the stage on graduation day. In an interview on UHD iRadio, Corral shared his thoughts on the matter.

Corral explained that before the petition was launched, a group of students wrote a letter to President Tillis requesting an in-person commencement ceremony. The letter highlighted that the vast majority of students are adults who happen to be essential workers who risk their lives almost every day amidst the pandemic.

The president ignored the statement of the seniors and decided to

go virtual against students' input. Corral stated what he expects to gain from his efforts.

"The ultimate goal is for him [President Tillis] to reconsider and at least give us an option to maybe have commencement in smaller groups."

Corral also suggested following certain protocols, such as keeping six feet apart, wearing a mask, and limiting the number of people attending.

Seeing as other schools and communities carry on similar public events, Corral questions, "If they can do it, why are

we prohibited?"

When questioned if this was a responsible choice by UHD, Corral agreed wholeheartedly but said that it is also the "easy thing" to do when "nothing that we're doing is easy." Corral mentioned how many establishments have continued following strict safety guidelines. Many students have endured these daily "new normals."

"Bottom line, it just doesn't seem like they [UHD administration] are even trying," Corral added.

Several seniors share the same frustrations as Corral, like Michelle Duvall who majors in Media and Public Communication studies.

Continued on page 4

Interim Grading Policy returns for 2021

By Madiha Hussain

Students from both UH and UHD will be allowed to select the S/U option as grade for their classes this semester. Although UHD has not officially announced that it will be implementing the policy, a Faculty Senate meeting recently passed the interim grading policy for both spring and summer 2021.

Students can either choose between the options of receiving a traditional letter grade or choosing the S/U option. The Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory option has no impact on a student's GPA, which is extremely helpful for all students.

The interim grading policy is necessary this semester, as students and faculty alike continue to adjust to online learning.

Such an adjustment is already stressful, and the recent winter storm Uri has only compounded the stress that students normally face.

A poll was conducted with 46 students from both the Main Campus and Downtown locations. Students cited mental health struggles stemming from social withdrawal as the major cause for performing poorly this semester. The poll indicated that the second leading cause for poor

academic performance is online learning difficulties.

Several students have specifically complained about conducting lab experiments at home. They believe that lab experiments cannot be properly conducted at home or virtually.

One student stated, "There are few classes where an online format is acceptable, but they are far and few in between."

Of the 46 students included in the poll, 43 believed they would utilize the S/U option in at least one class.

The S/U option will decrease the amount of stress placed upon

students, which has only increased since the start of the pandemic. Students should not be expected to perform academically at their best during a global pandemic. Therefore, pupils should not have to suffer the consequences of their poor academic performance during unprecedented times. The grades students earn this semester are not indicative of their learning abilities since so many obstacles stand in their way that was not there over a year ago.

The S/U option will be a relief to the student population and is predicted to be used extensively.



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.

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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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Senior brings Pakistani history, culture to UHD

By Aansa Usmani

UHD biology student, Fnu Ayesha, founded the new Pakistan Student Association at UHD, and Ayesha will be the first PSA president. Ayesha also served as president of the Muslim Student Association. While serving as president of the MSA, Ayesha was dedicated to widening opportunities to share the diversity and culture of Pakistan with fellow UHD Gators. PSA is under the guidance of faculty advisor, Hamida Qavi, Ph.D., who also serves as a faculty advisor for MSA.

Throughout her years at UHD, Ayesha said she has seen a lot of diversity and people who respect each other. Ayesha hopes that PSA serves as a safe space for fellow Pakistanis and anyone interested in Pakistani culture.

“Being Pakistani is a specific and special identity that I behold, and I [want others] to be proud to be Pakistani-Americans,” she said. “It would be good if more people get to know about our culture more. Even if the people around us are not Pakistanis, understanding our identity and culture is how we want to present ourselves and our nation, Pakistan, at UHD.”

As president for both MSA and PSA, Ayesha said all Gators of all cultural/ethnic identities are welcomed to join. Ayesha also distinguished the activities between PSA and MSA.

“Pakistan is an Islamic country, but in PSA we will be celebrating and discussing its historic importance and its culture. Pakistan Student Association will be a mix and match of everything and not just someone going

through a similar pathway as MSA.”

Planned activities include learning about Pakistan’s history, tourist spots, important festivities

for the summer and next semester. History lessons will most likely be held virtually while more traditional events such as cultural celebrations,

The infographic is a green-themed poster for the Pakistan Student Association. At the top, it says "University of Houston-Downtown" and "Pakistan Student Association" in a curved font, with "Founded 2021" below it. A small text block states: "UHD students represent all of their students and to be an advocate for social justice. More information about all of the clubs offered by UHD can be found on the UHD website." Below this is a box titled "Information and Benefits of Joining". The "Purpose" section includes a crescent moon and star icon and states: "PSA will be celebrating and discussing the historic importance and culture of Pakistan." The "Who Can Join & Club Events" section features an illustration of three women in colorful traditional attire and states: "All members of any race, ethnicity, religion may join. All members are welcomed. Club meetings will be virtual/historical discussions and in-person events will include fundraisers and other fun events." The "Goals" section includes an illustration of two people reading and states: "To celebrate Pakistan and share cultural knowledge of the country across the campus. They would also like to help Pakistani-Americans to develop more national pride and to see more diversity and respect on campus." The "Contact" section features an illustration of a smartphone and states: "Contact President and Founding member of PSA, Fnu Ayesha, at uhdpsa@gmail.com".

like Ramadan, and more.

With campus opening back up in March 22, Ayesha said members and officers are already working hard to set up the organization and planning

Independence Day events, and fundraisers will be reserved for face-to-face meetings.

For more information, contact Fnu Ayesha at uhdpsa@gmail.com.

Karina Rodarte Alvarez

SGA converses about commencement controversy

By Sheryl Sellers

The third spring meeting of the Student Government Association was slated for 9:30 a.m. on March 10. Lack of a quorum delayed the start until 10 a.m.

Many items were listed on the agenda, however the vast majority of the meeting, and the item for which students were encouraged to attend and ask questions, concerned the spring 2021 graduation ceremony.

A recent announcement from interim President Antonio D. Tillis, Ph.D. advised that spring graduation would occur on May 15 at 1 p.m. and would be held virtually as it has since spring 2020. Characteristically, this caused much consternation among UHD seniors.

Joining the meeting for this agenda item were Daniel Villanueva, M.A., vice president of Enrollment Management, Dr. Meritza Tamez, dean of Students, Dr. Liza Alonzo, director of Events and Alumni Relations, and Provost Dr. Eric Carl Link.

Villanueva stated that an in-person graduation ceremony is “off the table” as a result of the ongoing pandemic. He further explained that even as the pandemic is slowing somewhat, the university could not say to the 2020 graduates that the university is sorry they did not have a ceremony, but one is being planned

for the spring 2021 graduates. Reminded that Texas Southern University, Texas A&M University, Houston Baptist University, University of Texas at Austin and others are holding traditional ceremonies, he explained that those universities have their own managed facilities whereas UHD does not. That and safety appeared to be the driving force, rather than past decisions.

He did share that UHD is looking at venues in Houston such as NRG Stadium or Minute Maid Park to hold an in-person ceremony to honor all graduates since the spring semester 2020. The timeline would be August or September and is dependent upon the National Football League and/or Major League Baseball schedules.

Dr. Alonzo responded to graduation ceremony questions commenting that students will be able to upload a photo dressed in their regalia for the virtual event and will certainly want to have the regalia for the in-person ceremony this coming August or September. Sometime in April a photographer will be on campus to take photos. These photos can be used for the virtual slide presentation. Further details will be coming out in the coming weeks. She asserted that UHD’s third party is partnering with another third party for name dictation so that a student

can record their name phonetically and the announcers will be able to pronounce names correctly.

As for other graduation events, there will be a diploma pickup parade sometime in July. A ring ceremony will be held on Saturday, April 14 from 10 a.m. to noon with formal

summer. Information will be forthcoming soon from instructors or from enrollment management.

There was a further question on summer online or on campus modality, and Villanueva expressed that during a typical summer 85% to 90% of classes are online so that will

you out” and come up with a resolution for you and for them that keeps the integrity of the academic course. The teaching faculty have complete control of their academic course.

In answer to the question of returning to campus following spring break, and yet not accommodating a commencement, Villanueva explained that there is a small group of spring 2021 classes offered in person that were forced to go online due to the pandemic. Only those classes that were redirected to an online modality during the pandemic will return to campus, not the classes that were designed to be online.

Conversation floated back to spring graduation. Villanueva mentioned the desire to have one or two members of SGA join in on the planning of the in-person ceremony so that they will understand the complexity of the situation and see exactly what is needed to navigate the process and then be able to share those updates with students.

UHD advised NRG that it is a high priority to get a date as soon as possible so that students are aware of what to expect. The information will be shared as quickly as possible. Students are not paying a graduation fee. The federal government has provided the coronavirus funding that allow institutions to use some of those

funds to “exercise what goes on because of the program.”

There were many questions in the “chat” during the Zoom meeting, therefore Karra announced that due to time, questions will only be taken from SGA officers. She did indicate that SGA will get all questions answered. It was not indicated how these answers will be communicated to the students.

Chloe Butler, director of Marketing and Public Relations for SGA, broached the subject of students who cannot make an August or September event due to work schedules or relocation.

Acknowledging that “that is a fair and yet tough question,” Villanueva expressed. “Any institution in any decision made for any program, will never be able to satisfy everybody and that’s a hard pill to swallow. Reality is that we are still in a pandemic.”

“My heart goes to the students. We have to make decisions for students, faculty and staff and unfortunately, we made the decision to go virtual. It was a very tough decision. There were feelings, emotions, thoughts and additional plans were considered.”

Health and safety overruled everything.

“My heart goes to the students. We have to make decisions for students, faculty and staff and unfortunately, we made the decision to go virtual. It was a very tough decision.”
Daniel Villanueva, M.A., vice president of Enrollment Management

invitations expected to go out that afternoon.

Meghana Karra, SGA Speaker of the House, asked Dr. Link to address the S/U (Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory) grading option for spring and summer semesters. Dr. Link took the audience back to spring 2020 when the pandemic began, and the S/U option was put into place. At the advice of faculty this option was not made available for fall 2020. The start of the spring semester saw a peak in the pandemic and due to that and the disruption of the winter storm, the faculty “debated and decided” that they would like to extend the option for the spring and summer sessions. Grading will be handled logistically much in the same way that it was handled last spring and

not change for summer 2021. Fall 2021 schedule is expected to be available on Friday (March 12) and registration beginning on April 2. It is anticipated that most classes will return to in person. This was confirmed by Dr. Link who indicated that they are working on a gradual reengagement of on campus learning.

Another question on returning to campus concerned students that do not want to return to campus but want to continue online learning. Those students should discuss possibilities with their faculty member, and if necessary, the department chair. The registrar’s office is unable to switch classes for the student. Villanueva assured students that faculty are exceptional and are workable people who will “hear

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Faculty Senate Updates

By Sheryl Sellers

Most of the March 2 Faculty Senate meeting surrounded a report by Provost Dr. Eric Carl Link which included enrollment projections, faculty senate resolutions which were passed in 2020, and recognition of promotions. Also, a hot topic was how best to enact the S/U (Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory) grading option for the spring and summer 2021 semesters.

Recognizing that there is a short window in which to decide on the procedure to enact S/U option, discussion centered around the best option for students, the ease of application in PeopleSoft, and at the same time keeping the process faculty friendly.

Options in play consisted in defining the default should a student not make their decision. Initially, the default was S/U. Some senators pointed out that this is unfair to the student who for whatever reason did not have the resources available to make the decision, e.g., internet

access, time constraints, etc.

The final decision was to handle the S/U option with the same procedure as was utilized in spring 2020. The process will be for faculty to post grades in Blackboard for a to be determined amount of time, and then enter the final grade following written decision by the student. Students may only appeal the grade if faculty did not mark the correct grade option as chosen by the student. This motion was passed with 25 affirmative votes, 2 negative votes and 1 abstain.

Provost Link highlighted four resolutions which were passed in 2020: SR 20-01 – Core Assessment, SR 20-02 – Improve student fluency in writing, SR 20-03 – Staff return to campus plan, and SR 20-04 – One course release each semester for shared governance committee members.

In January of every odd year, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board provides a report on enrollment

projections. Based on fall 2020 student enrollment of 15,239, in the final analysis, UHD's enrollment for fall 2021 is projected to be 15,468.

Another jump in numbers is projected in faculty count. UHD could see an additional 35 new faculty in fall 2021.

Finalist interviews are ongoing for the position of dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, as well as for the position of associate vice president for Academic Affairs. The goal is to be at the negotiation stage with the finalists within the following two to three weeks.

Dr. Link took the opportunity to officially welcome Dr. Meritza Tamez in her role as dean of Students, where she has been serving as the interim dean for the past academic year. He also recognized Daniel Villanueva as vice president of Enrollment Management. Additionally, he recognized Dr. Poonam Gulati Salhotra as the new executive director of the Office of Impact Learning.

The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 was signed into law on Dec. 27, 2020, which will provide additional funding to UHD. The university will receive approximately \$18 million in funds, of which \$4.7 million must be distributed as direct student aid.

Anticipating improvement in vaccine availability and a downturn in hospitalizations due to the

pandemic, the expectation is that campus will be fully open and all classrooms in use for fall 2021 semester. The enrollment count will be capped at the current COVID-19 numbers to be flexible should conditions not improve.

Dr. Isaac Elking, visiting assistant professor, discussed the home office stipend proposal. Among the discussion items was the determination of a one-time need or

an ongoing monthly expense. Research indicated that some university faculty are given \$50/month for reimbursement of at home technical needs.

Time was running short, therefore, Dr. Edmund Cueva, professor of humanities made a motion that the executive committee create a proposal to be voted upon at the following senate meeting. This motion was seconded, and the meeting adjourned.

FACULTY

Senate Updates

- Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board projects UHD fall 2021 enrollment at 15,468.
- S/U option finalized for spring and summer 2021
- Dr. Meritza Tamez officially welcomed as dean of Students.
- Daniel Villanueva officially welcomed as vice president of Enrollment Management
- Dr. Poonam Gulati Salhotra officially welcomed as executive director of the Office of Impact Learning
- UHD to receive approximately \$18 million in funds, of which \$4.7 million must be distributed as student aid, per Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act 2021.

Seniors want graduation (continued)

“I think it is extremely inconsiderate to students for the administration to ignore a proposal sent in February,” Duvall said.

She also mentioned that the initial proposal offered eight different COVID-19 safety measures to implement to ensure a

safe graduation ceremony.

Corral spoke on the importance of an in-person graduation for many students and their families.

“It means a lot to my family being a first-generation college graduate.” Earning a college degree, for Corral, means

“being legitimized by the world.”

Corral wants UHD to know, “We understand the risk, but we just want the option.”

Gabriel Corral said that he is an “average joe” not part of any student organizations or big leadership roles, but he is still

a Gator who aims to spread his message to as many people as possible in the efforts to at least have a say in the final decision of their commencement ceremony.

As of March 10, Gov. Greg Abbott lifted the mask mandate. This has encouraged UHD

administration to return to face-to-face classes on March 22, but there are still no plans for an in person ceremony for spring 2021 graduates. On March 11, Dr. Tillis announced that all 2020 and 2021 spring, summer and fall graduates are invited to

attend a mass in-person graduation in August 2021. Further information on the upcoming ceremony is anticipated by April 30.

Tune in to UHD iRadio to watch the full interview. For more student voices, follow UHD iRadio on Instagram @uhdi-radio.



By Karina Rodarte Alvarez

Balancing work and volunteer life is difficult, but admirable, such is the case with UHD Professor Dawn McCarty, Ph.D. Not only is Professor McCarty an Associate Professor and director of UHD's Social Work Program, but she is also a dedicated volunteer at Casa Juan Diego. McCarty is

often in charge of food distribution at Casa Juan Diego. She volunteers multiple times a week, while also teaching at UHD, directing the Social Work Program, research U.S. immigrant experiences and conditions, and writes for the Houston Catholic Worker Newspaper. McCarty's efforts are applauded by Casa Juan Diego and

UHD. Casa Juan Diego is one of 216 Catholic worker communities in the U.S. and is dedicated to serving refugees, disabled immigrants, and victims of domestic violence. The shelter is a safe haven for undocumented immigrants who often can't get government assistance due to their residency status.

Casa Juan Diego wants to help support more families and individuals and is in desperate need of volunteers. Volunteers are needed to help with ESL classes, tutoring, preparing bedrooms, helping with laundry and working with children. All families staying at Casa Juan Diego have been screened for COVID-19 directly

before arriving. For over 40 years, Casa Juan Diego, the oldest Catholic worker community in Houston, has provided social services, medical attention, food and shelter to the needy. McCarty asks Gators seeking volunteer opportunities, to consider Casa Juan Diego. Volunteers are

Sarah Ramirez encouraged to contact info@cjcd.org. Food and clothing donations can be dropped off at 4818 Rose St., 77007. Monetary donations are also accepted through shelter's website (www.cjd.org). Monetary donations help purchase food and medicine or may even help pay rent for a family in need.

Gator Support Sleep Awareness Week



By Aansa Usmani

As college students, sleep is often taken for granted. Some need more than the required eight hours, while others thrive on fewer. Regardless of personal schedules, it is essential to take time to "power down" and rest, as it can be beneficial for physical, mental, and emotional health.

Since 1998, the National Sleep Foundation dedicates the third week of March to "sleep awareness," emphasizing the importance of proper nightly rest. Following daylight savings time, the annual week-long program encourages others to become "sleep health advocates," reflecting on how personal habits

impact circadian rhythms and an overall ability to relax. According to the NSF, the annual sleep awareness week "encourages the public to prioritize sleep to improve health and well-being...commenc[ing] with the beginning of Daylight Saving Time." The week-long annual event—succeeding spring's daylight savings—emphasizes the importance of sleep and its beneficial impacts on long-term health. Although sleep awareness is emphasized year-round, daylight savings can significantly impact one's sleep schedule.

According to Northwest Medicine, "disruption[s] in this [circadian] rhythm, like daylight

saving, is typically environmental, not genetic. Therefore, individuals can easily adjust behaviors that may cause issues, such as a poor sleep

schedule." Adjusting to daylight savings (both fall and spring) can be challenging—especially in the spring season—but the impacts can affect long-term physical and emotional health.

There are also useful articles about sleep on the NSF's websites, with one article coining,

S.L.E.E.P., standing for "Structure, Light, Electronics, Exercise, and Prioritize." Enacting a set routine can contribute to a better night's slumber, benefiting one's physical, mental, and emotional health.

Although spring break in lockdown is known to be more of a "snooze-

fest," empower yourself to become a sleep health advocate. Becoming one is super simple—follow the website's guidelines on being an activist on social media.

For more information, visit NSF's website www.wthensf.org.

Sarah Ramirez





Blue Line Bike Lab By Argenis Nino

Blue Line Bike Lab is a locally owned bike shop in the Heights area of Houston (second location in the EADO area temporarily closed due to the pandemic). Since 2005, way before the City of Houston released the Houston Bike Plan that envisions nearly 1,800 miles of bike lanes by 2027, BLBL has been around. It's safe to assume they know a thing or two about

bicycles.

Founded by the Zapalac brothers, BLBL strives to become "the best bike shop in ever," according to BLBL President Fred Zapalac. They welcome everything as not one rider is the same. Solely a bike shop, you can spend your day trying to find what kind of rider you want to be. From the weekender taco getter, to achieving your pro-cyclist status, BLBL is there

every step of the way. From frame to tires, shoes, accessories and so on, it feels like you're creating a new character of yourself. By the time you come out, you might look like a famous Tour de France stand-in.

Even by the time you scoot your way out of the store, you have now become part of the Blue Line Bike Lab family. It doesn't stop at just the bike, you're more than welcome

to ride with other people who are just as enthusiastic as you through groups or teams that come courtesy of BLBL. It may be just a cruise to destress the mind or riding for a cause. The community support from BLBL is one that becomes super clear the moment you set foot into the cycling world. Aside from a community embrace, when your bike doesn't appear in its heyday, BLBL has professional mechanics to work on any kind of bicycle. Blue

Line Bike Lab is there for any practical need in the cycling world. There's a reason it was named Best Bike Shop of 2020 by Houston Press.

In just four years, Houston has seen an enormous change in the way people get around the Space City. Cycling has become a growing marvel among Houstonians who just want to ride a different way.

The city may benefit in many aspects within a decade of implemen-

tation. You may have seen long stretches of "bike lane only" markings on the road and perhaps bicycle stations provided by the city around the corner, at a park, or school. With so many miles to be traversed, maybe you'd like to dust off that old bike from your younger years or buy your first bike. BLBL are experts in the cycling field that know just which bike is right for you. The best thing about them is they're located right in Houston.

UHD adjunct professor finds opportunities in adversity by 'becoming a coffee bean' By Shirley Bright

The energy during the March 3 VitalVoices presentation was enough to stir motivation. Sound bite after sound bite capturing attention while you may have wondered who he talked about in his energetic voice. If you missed his introduction, you might have wondered if he was telling someone else's story. It could not have been his own because he was talking about serving Life inside a maximum state prison in Texas. He is Damon West, M.S. Criminal Justice, UHD adjunct professor, keynote speaker, and best-selling co-author.

West was born

and raised in Port Arthur, Texas. A star quarterback of his high school football team, West received a scholarship out to North Texas in Denton, Texas. West had a promising career in football but suffered a terrible injury which ended his football career. After the career-crushing injury, West turned up his drug use to harsh drugs such as ecstasy, cocaine, and pills. In the middle of doing these drugs, somehow, he managed to graduate college.

West went on to become what some would consider successful. He worked for Congress, worked as a fundraiser for a

presidential candidate and eventually a stockbroker. It was there on his job as a stockbroker where he was introduced to meth. The feeling of meth captured and conquered him like it does so many others. He eventually lost his job and was willing to sell or give everything away for the next high. His life, career and his bank account spiraled down to nothing. Meth was his driving force to burglarize cars, storage units and homes in the uptown neighborhood of Dallas where he once lived.

West narrated explicit details of the day of his arrest and

unbeknown to him would be the beginning of a rescue for him. In his adrenaline-filled voice, West narrated his arrest on July 30, 2008.

"I was sitting on a couch in a run-down apartment, with a dealer next to me."

You could feel the nervousness and the anticipation of his expecting to be arrested very soon. His partner who had participated in these burglaries for the past two years had already been arrested. He knew his days of freedom were numbered. Although he knew his days were numbered, he continued with the meth. His addiction had taken control and

take him to his bottom.

"Just as I am passing the pipe back, a window break, when I regained my senses, a cop in full riot gear is standing over me." West was arrested and spent the next ten months in the county jail before having a six-day trial and receiving a 65-year life sentence.

West faced a challenging time of his life in a maximum state prison full of gangs. Fellow inmates advised him it was best to join a gang for survival. But on that dreadful sentencing date, his mother told him that it was his duty to serve his punishment

for the crimes he committed. West promised his mother that he would not join the gangs and would come home to be the son whom she and his father had raised. During those past ten months and in the subsequent days prior to his departure to his final prison destination, he received some valuable lessons which were the catalyst for his transformation. He contributed his positives vibes which attracted a positive life-long prisoner to himself. Mr. Jackson was this lifer with wisdom which supersedes the expectation of a criminal.

Continued on page 8

Doctor busts COVID-19 vaccine myths By Indira Zaldivar

On March 2, Dr. Melanie Mouzoon, managing physician for Immunization Practices and pediatric hospitalist at Kelsey-Seybold Clinic, gave a presentation on the COVID-19 vaccines. The presentation was part of the Women's Fund Health Series in collaboration with UHD health communication's faculty.

While busting common myths of the vaccine, Mouzoon emphasized the importance of getting vaccinated as soon as it is offered to save lives.

From March through November 2020 when the vaccine was still being manufactured, over 250,000 people in the U.S. alone died.

"If we had to rely on infections alone to stop the spread of COVID-19, between 1 million and 5.4 million people would die on the way to 250 million people becoming immune... The vaccines are our way out of this scenario."

The threat of emerging variants may cause vaccines to be less effective. As Houston has reported contracting all variants, it is important to get vaccinated when it is offered to "cut down on the infection rate in our community so the virus doesn't mutate very fast." Also, wearing masks and remaining socially distant are still important despite Gov. Greg Abbott's executive order to end statewide mask mandate and business

restrictions.

"It is not a strategy that will benefit the health of Texans," she said. "Masking and social distancing are what we need to do until we get everybody

munity acceptance and standard of wearing masks and staying socially distant."

The newer mRNA technology used in the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines have concerned some

COVID-19 vaccine, she described that the mRNA that codes for the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein is taken up by dendritic cells, which produce the protein and then express the spike

protection.

People should not wait for a specific brand over the any-one that is currently offered because of misconceptions of the varying percentage of effectiveness

Johnson vaccine has the advantage that it requires one dose.

Another concern among people is how fast the vaccines were manufactured and authorized for emergency-use. The U.S. government has allocated large funds to develop, test, and produce large quantities to distribute the vaccines as soon as they were proven safe and effective because this virus is killing so many and hurting the economy.

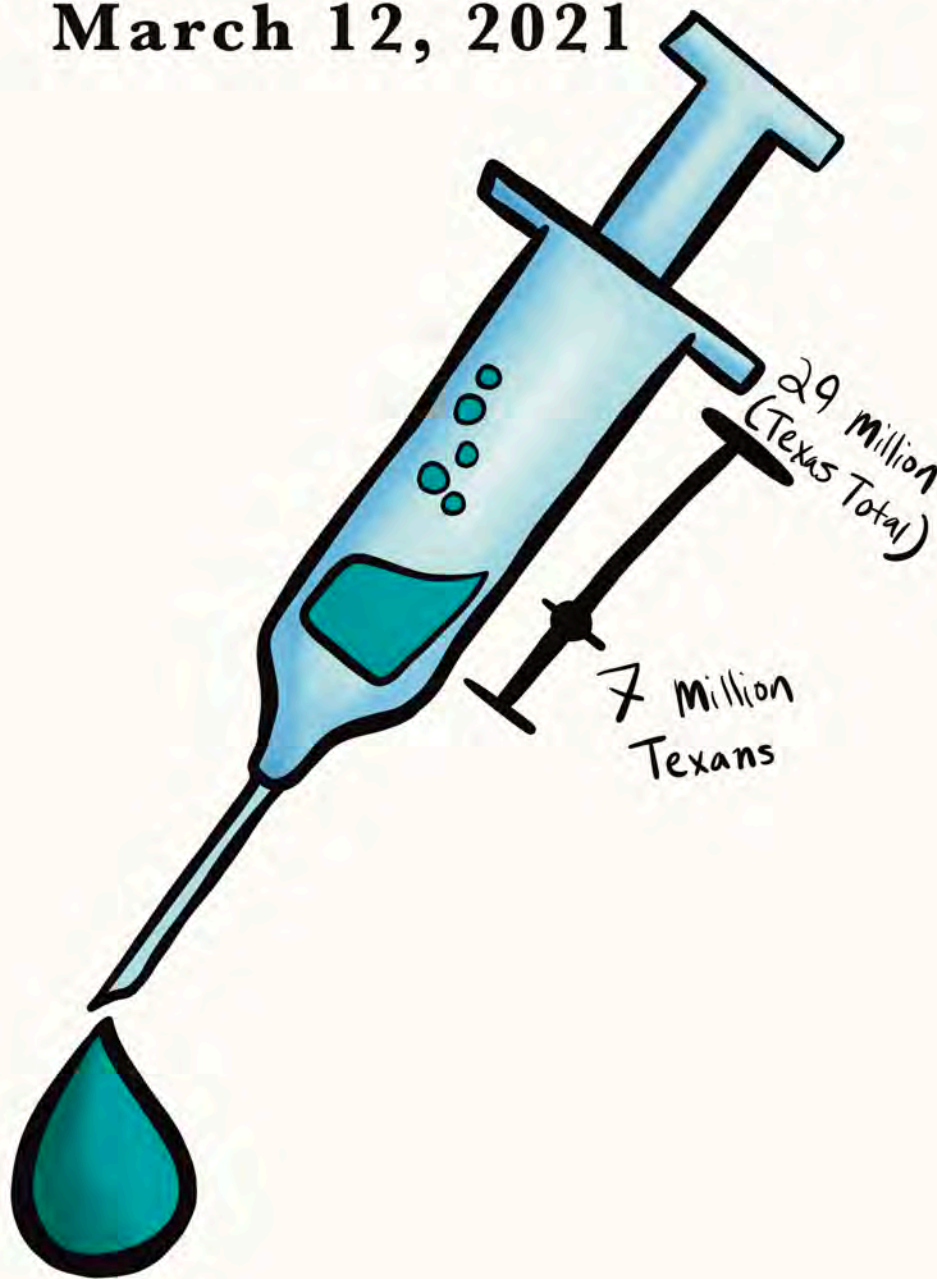
"A lot of the sort of bureaucratic steps of getting things approved usually take a long time and were fast-tracked because time is of the essence if we're going to save lives."

The high rates of infection in the community made it "easy to determine that people who had received these vaccines as they were being tested, were not getting sick at the rate of people in the control groups who did not get the vaccine."

Mouzoon said adverse effects to vaccines occur within two days up to the first six weeks of getting a vaccine. No vaccine in history has shown to cause long-term effects as some have presumed.

The tens of millions of people who have been vaccinated in the U.S. count with follow-up systems to report any possible bad outcome that they think is associated with the vaccine. VSAFE and VAERS are CDC systems that have always been in place for people.

Current number of Texans who have received one shot March 12, 2021



Gean Garcia

vaccinated."

While Mouzoon said that modifying the vaccines to fit any variant that becomes more concerning or escapes protection is easy, these mutations are "one of the biggest reasons to continue to wear the mask." She encouraged people to maintain that "com-

people despite the technology being studied for over a decade in terms of preventing cancer and stimulating the immune system. Mouzoon said mRNA technology is a "natural process," very safe that effectively develops immune responses.

In the

protein on the cell surface, travel to a local lymph node, and stimulate the B cells of the immune system to make antibodies.

The Johnson and Johnson vaccine uses the more traditional, disabled adenovirus technology to deliver the vaccine's instructions on how to stimulate immune

among the vaccines. That percentage of effectiveness is after two weeks of getting the vaccine. While the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are about 95% effective after two weeks, the immunity to the Johnson & Johnson's single dose builds up until one month and a half. The Johnson &

'Becoming a coffee bean' (continued)

In the latter portion of West's presentation, he enthusiastically gives some powerful and memorable sound bites. He gives the illustration presented to him by Mr. Jackson and has become the foundation of who he is now. The Coffee Bean story changed his life.

"You have a boiling pot of water, a carrot, an egg, and a coffee bean," West said. "If you put the carrot into the water,

it becomes soft. If you put the egg into the water, it becomes hard. Lastly, if you put the coffee bean into the water, the coffee bean changes the water."

Life lesson to learn, the power is in you. You cannot let your environment change you, you have to change the environment.

Mr. Jackson taught the lessons in those ten months at the county prison, but

the learning came as he entered the prison. Just as he had been warned, he would be asked which gang he was going to join: the Latino, the white supremacist, or the black gangs. In order to keep his promise to his mother, he constantly and physically fought. As Jackson warned him, "You can't win all of your fights, but you have to fight all of your fights." He fought until almost the point

of becoming an egg which would be hard and full of hate.

Another beam of light in the dark prison life was Carlos his cellmate. Carlos reminded West if he wanted to become this coffee bean which he had talked about, he needed to change his own thinking.

Carlos said, "You have an opportunity to work on yourself."

How could anyone think of pris-

on as an opportunity? But, he said, "you have to work on what you want to become." From that day forward, West set out to be that coffee bean.

Three of the most memorable take-aways.

- Be Positive and smile. It will reflect onto others.
- Work on yourself, physically, mentally and spiritually. All three are important.
- Understand life

is about servant leadership. Help others to become what they want to be. We all have the ability to help others.

After less than eight years of his 65-year prison sentence, Damon West walked out of prison determined to make a difference. His vivacious speech and words are truly motivating. UHD criminal justice students are fortunate to have him in their classroom.

Doctor busts myths (continued)

So far, the most common side effects from the mRNA vaccines include fatigue, headache, muscle aches, sore arm and redness at the site, and swollen glands in the axilla.

The components of the COVID-19 vaccine are MRNA for the spike protein of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19), lipids (polisorbate, PEG), salts and amines

(maintain the pH of vaccine similar to that found in the body), and sugar (keep bubbles of fat from sticking to each other). The vaccines are not composed of eggs, gelatin, latex or preservatives, DNA antibiotics, blood products, preservatives, gluten, pork products, and "definitely no microchips."

The rate of severe allergic reaction to the COVID-19 vaccines is higher

at a one in 100,000 compared to a general one in a million. The PEG and polysorbate are the likely causes of allergic reactions. Anyone with a history of severe allergy to any vaccine or injectable medication should not get a COVID-19 vaccine. If people have an allergic reaction to the first dose, they shouldn't get the second dose.

While the vaccine was not studied

in pregnant women, there are many pregnant healthcare workers who have received the vaccine. Their pregnancies are being followed to make sure that reassurance that the vaccine is likely to be safe in pregnancy is the truth.

People with certain immunocompromising conditions may not develop strong immunity but are unlikely to be harmed or to have autoimmune conditions.

People on anticoagulants, as with any injection, some bruising of the muscle or bleeding may occur.

Those who have been vaccinated should continue to practice public health measures when they are out in the community to decrease the chance of introducing the virus in the home through asymptomatic infection.

Fully vaccinated people can consider expanding their

bubble to include other people who have gotten two doses or at least one dose of vaccine. However, it is not time to "let go of all of our restrictions just yet because of these new variants."

As for the new normal, Mouzoon explained that people will most likely need a COVID-19 vaccine if not annually, at least every five years into the future.

SGA converses (continued)

"We certainly know and understand that not everybody will be happy with every single decision that we make. But the reality is that sometimes in life, things are dealt the way they are dealt and how you respond to them is of utmost more important than how you feel about them. So, I would challenge this group to understand that this is what life

has dealt us and the best way to move forward is how we react. I think the university is reacting appropriately by taking steps that engage students."

"At this point in time we're not going to deviate from the virtual ceremony in May nor will we entertain discussion about deviating from a virtual ceremony."

At the conclusion of administra-

tions comments, SGA Vice President Leboriah Chavez, apologized to the seniors for the "sad news" about graduation. She followed that with a PowerPoint presentation outlining the results of the polls and proposals that she and Butler had initiated regarding alternatives to a virtual event.

Elise Poisot, senator-at-large, discussed an SGA reso-

lution she and Mona Farley, senior senator, drafted regarding managing CDC guidelines on campus even as Gov. Gregg Abbott abolished the mask and social distancing protocols in Texas. They will have it reviewed prior to sending to administration. There has not been word from administration as to the requirement for a vaccination prior to returning to campus.

Karra then

asked if SGA President Alan Modrow was present during the SGA meeting and if he had anything to add. He was not present, so the meeting continued with other business.

While waiting for a quorum early in the meeting, Tremaine Kwasikpui, director of Student Activities, announced some upcoming events including a drive-thru Bayou Bash on March 25 featuring

Louisiana cuisine, 40-50 elementary students visiting the campus on March 26, and the One Main Event Drive-In on either April 16 or 23, dependent on the weather.

Dr. Meritza Tamez discussed the search for dean of College of Humanities and Social Sciences, noting that four candidates are in the running, three of which are from outside UHD.

ERCOT shortcomings, mismanagement leads to historic Texas snowstorm

By Aansa Usmani

The Energy Reliability Council of Texas, better known as ERCOT, became a household name during Texas' historical snowstorm. From Feb. 15 through 19, millions of Texans lost power, water, and heat, impacting vulnerable lives and succumbing a few to graves. Now that power is restored, Texans demand answers from ERCOT for its costly recklessness amid freezing temperatures.

Unlike other states, Texas (excluding El Paso) has its own power grid, separate from the federal electric supply. The decision was the state's response to the 1935 Federal Power Act, allowing Texan utility companies to not "share power" among other states. As a result, an independent power grid was created, escaping federal regulations

and promoting "Texan independence."

Additionally, the Texan power grid—then known as the Texas Interconnected System—would expand into the Gulf Coast region, allowing further access to the state-controlled power. In 1965, the United States experienced massive power outages, prompting further implemented regulations to its national grid. Although

to ERCOT (1970) and the Public Utility Commission (1975).

Unlike ERCOT, the Public Utility Commission regulates the state's power, water, communications and deals with customer complaints during power losses.

In the 1990s, ERCOT's role expanded, hoping to move "both electricity and telecommunications into a competi-

throughout the state," according to Fox 44 Waco's reporting.

This drastic move relied on using a competitive market to reduce Texas' electricity prices, combining the "invisible hand theory" of capitalism and the state's power grid.

In theory, it would achieve lower utility prices but risks a potential price spike if a state-wide power outage occurs. The nightmare scenario

power during historic freezing temperatures and snowstorms plowing across the Lone Star State.

ERCOT responded, stating that the system was below 59.4 Hz for four minutes and 23 seconds, with more units failing, if it remained under 59.4 for an additional nine minutes. According to KXAN's Wes Rapport, "If the grid had ended up in a 'black start' situation, a grid collapse, ERCOT says it could take 'weeks' to restore power to the 26 million Texans on the ERCOT grid."

Additionally, electricity prices spiked during frigid temperatures, with some having bills in the tens of thousands. One resident, Ty Anderson received a \$17,000 bill from Griddy, his primary electric provider.

Griddy officials warned their

customers that prices would hike because of the conditions, and that they should look for a new provider, but for some, it was too late. In a recent statement, Griddy acknowledged misdoings and is holding ERCOT accountable for price hikes for those powerless during the snowstorm.

ERCOT's mismanagement and poor planning would contribute to many losing crucial utilities in frigid temperatures. In response, five board members resigned, stating sympathy for those who lost power, water, and heat.

ERCOT will now be subjected to state-led legislatures questioning the shortcomings and mismanagement during the historic snowstorm. Further resignations are expected, as the inquiry continues.

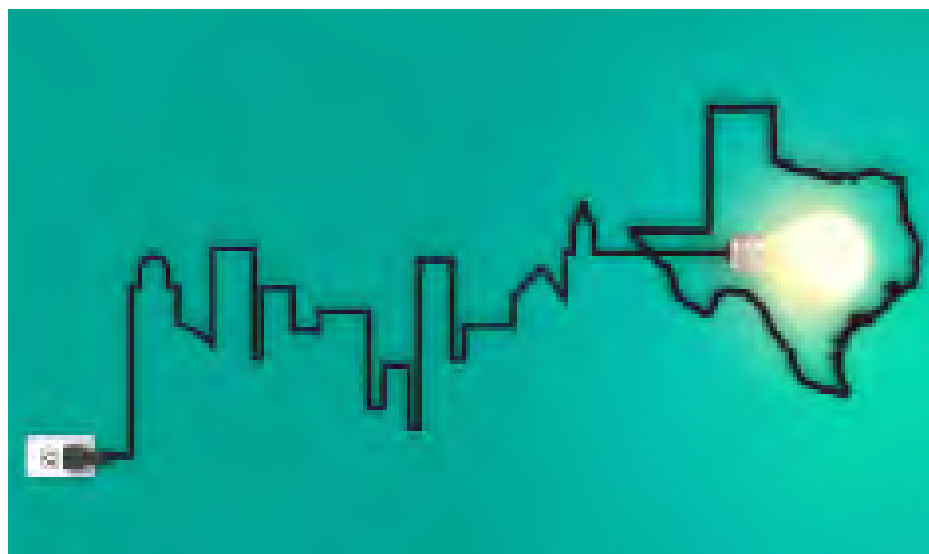


Photo courtesy of SMCORRIDORNEWS.COM

Texas was spared, the implemented regulations would later lead

tive market...ultimately providing lower prices to customers

of ERCOT would ultimately come true in 2021. Millions lost

Biden cancels funding for Trump's border wall

By Karina Rodarte Alvarez

On Feb. 11, President Joe Biden officially cancelled funding of the U.S.-Mexico border wall. This decision comes after the Trump administration allocated over \$15 billion to the border wall after declaring a national emergency in 2019. In a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Biden called Trump's national emergency "unwarranted" and stated "no more American tax-

payer dollars [shall] be diverted to construct a border wall."

This sentiment follows the 2018 and 2019 government shutdowns by Trump's demands for funding for the border wall. After Congress refused to fund the amount requested, the former president used an emergency declaration to complete his campaign promise of wall that would encompass the entirety of the southern border

of 2,000 miles.

This idea evolved and eventually became a pledge of 500 miles. In February 2020, \$15 billion was allocated for the wall, with \$3.8 billion being taxpayer money. This decision contrasts Trump's promise that Mexico would fully pay for the construction, materials, and labor towards it.

Biden stated that the border wall was "a waste of

money" and "not a serious policy solution." However, this is not the first time the border wall's potential reliability was doubted. In 2017, the Department of Homeland Security reported that there were double the number of immigrants illegally overstaying their visas than people who crossed the U.S.-Mexico border. This statistic shows how a physical border, where peo-

ple can be smuggled across a tunnel below a fly over, or merely overstaying their visa could be a waste of time, money, and resources.

Not only was the border wall construction expensive to American citizens during the times of pandemic, it was also inefficient. Out of the promised 2,000-mile wall, there was already 654 miles of barrier. As of October 2019, only months

away from the end of Trump's term, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection showed that only 15 miles of new barrier and 350 of barriers replacing the old barrier had been built. All in all, the Biden administration promised to find effective and humanitarian policies concerning immigration in the U.S.A.

Biden visits Houston following snowstorm Uri

By Karina Rodarte Alvarez

President Joe Biden and First Lady Dr. Jill Biden flew down to Houston on Feb. 26, following the deadly Valentine's weekend storms that swept the state and left residents in turmoil. The storm resulted in the death of dozens and left thousands with damages to their homes or vehicles. Additionally, millions of Texans

lost electricity, gas, and heat in freezing temperatures.

Biden declared a major disaster in the state a week before his visit and planned to visit at a time where he would not burden state officials. At the time of his visit, over one million residents were still under a boil water advisory.

The blackouts

amidst arctic weather were met with frustration and anger. Millions were left without running water and electricity. The panic led to long treks on the dangerous, icy, roads, foreign to most Texans.

The knowledge that Texas was little over four minutes from a weeks-long power outage was alarming. Following the storm,

there were billions of dollars' worth of damage across the state.

Storm Uri was declared a federal disaster allowing Texans to claim government-funded grants and loans for temporary housing and home repair. Upon landing in Houston, Biden met with Texas Gov. Greg Abbot. A few hours later, Biden toured Harris County

Emergency Operations Center, and then joined Dr. Jill Biden to volunteer and tour the Houston Food Bank.

Biden addressed Texans in a televised speech from the NRG stadium that is currently housing a vaccination facility, "When a crisis hits our states, like the one that hit Texas, it's not a Republican or

Democrat who's hurting; it's our fellow Americans who are hurting. And it's our job to help everyone in need. Look out for one another. Leave nobody behind."

Biden promised help in the form of supplies and helping "foot the bill" of the damages caused by Storm Uri.

Floyd family receives record \$27M settlement

By Karina Rodarte Alvarez

The family of the late George Floyd received the largest pretrial settlement regarding a civil matter in the state of Minnesota. The murder trial for former police officer, Derek Chauvin, is underway with half of the jurors being selected for hearings that will happen on March 29. This follows the tragedy that occurred on May 25, 2020 after four police officers apprehended Floyd for allegedly passing a counterfeit \$20 bill. Officer Chauvin pressed his knee on

Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes as Floyd pleaded for release and repeated, "I can't breathe." His death spurred massive global outrage and protests and was a catalyst of the Black Lives Matter Movement in the summer of 2020.

The amount is significant as it would encourage more cities to add more preventative measures, such as removing chokeholds and no-knock warrants. As L. Chris Stewart, one of the attorneys that represented the Floyd family,

put it, "They have 27 million reasons now why they should...that will make decisions happen...[and]...accountability happen."

The pretrial settlement has been largely controversial. While some approve and call it justice, others worry that it could interfere with the trial and subliminally affect the jurors. The possibility of the trial become a mistrial is now possible. Eric Nelson, Chauvin's attorney, also tried to block the payment of the settlement to the Floyd family.

Floyd's family filed a civil suit in June 2020, alleging that the city was negligent for poor police training and for not dismissing Chauvin, who had a known poor record and

dozens of complaints. Chauvin is facing up to 65 years in prison on charges of second and third degree murder and has so far pled not guilty.

The three other officers in-

involved are Alexander Keung, Tou Thao, and Thomas Lane, who will face trial in August. All four officers directly involved with Floyd's death have been terminated.



Family members of Houston native, George Floyd visit a memorial at the site where George Floyd died while being arrested, after attending a press conference on March 12 in Minneapolis. Photo courtesy of Kerem Yucel/ AFP via Getty Images.

Pandemic turns nurses towards virtual sex work

By Rachel Ann Preston

Across the United States, nurses and healthcare professionals are now creating and selling adult content online to make ends meet. This dramatic transition follows the devastation caused by COVID-19, as more hospital staff either caught the coronavirus or were let go. This stark transition leaves many questioning their future.

Hulu released a documentary in February called "OnlyFans: Selling Sexy," chronicling several content creators on the mainstream website. This pandemic brought national attention to the OnlyFans platform, allowing users to upload adult content and sell it to subscribers. They set their own subscription price, and post whatever content

they want – from fully nude to simply lewd. The content creators are also able to interact with their "fans," offering a personal touch to an industry that seemed out of reach.

Daisy (not her given name) is a nursing student in Houston. She worked in a senior care home in 2020 when the WHO deemed pandemic status to the coronavirus.

She said the choice to turn to OnlyFans was a hard decision.

"I was let go from my position and really felt like, I didn't know what to do," she said. "Without my job I had no way to pay my bills and there seemed to be no easy route. Loans only help so much. I can't keep going to school if I don't work. I don't want to do this forev-

er, but it helps."

Daisy, as well as many other individuals, fear judgment from selling homemade pornography. OnlyFans is an ever-growing market though that seems to have no end in sight. Its popularity might end the societal stigma associated with online sex work. As more Americans lose their jobs, more turn to OnlyFans to

pay the bills. OnlyFans does not seem to be going anywhere either, with celebrities like Cardi B using it as a platform to get closer to her own fans— without the sex aspect. With OnlyFans proving to be a worthy source of secondary revenue, nurses do not need to worry about paying bills before the pandemic ends.

Prince Philip hospitalized for heart condition

By Savannah Mims

Prince Philip, known as the Duke of Edinburgh, was admitted to King Edward's Hospital on Feb. 16, from Balmoral Castle, Scotland, his official residence with wife of 73 years, Queen Elizabeth II. Since May 2017, Philip has spent much of his retirement from his royal duties since May 2017.

Buckingham Palace released a statement regarding Philip's health saying the Duke's admission is a "precautionary measure" advised by Philip's doctor after he reported feeling

unwell.

"The Duke is expected to remain in the hospital for a few days of observation and rest." On Feb. 20, Philip received a visit from his son, Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales stayed for 30 minutes after a 200-mile round trip from his home in Highgrove, Gloucestershire.

The visit led many people on social media to fear the worst about the duke's true medical condition, even speculating that he had COVID-19, despite himself and his wife receiving the vac-

cine several months earlier. However, on Feb. 23, a week after Philip was admitted to King Edwards Hospital, Buckingham Palace finally issued a statement that brought the real reason for his extended hospital stays to light that reads, "The Duke of Edinburgh remains at King Edward VII's Hospital where he is receiving medical attention for an infection. He is comfortable and responding to treatment but is not expected to leave hospital for several days."

The 99-year-old duke is no strang-

er to extended stays in the hospital as he has had several procedures such as his surgery in April 2018. After he missed the traditional Maundy and Easter services, Philip was admitted to King Edward VII Hospital in London for a hip replacement surgery and was discharged from the hospital eight days later.

In January 2019, Philip was involved in a car crash when his vehicle was hit by another car. He was not injured but was taken to the doctor as a precaution. That December,

Philip was once again admitted to King Edward VII's Hospital for treatment relating to a "pre-existing condition." Regarding his most recent hospital stay and surgery, his son, Prince Andrew, the Duke of York, has said that his father is once again, "looking forward to getting out."

On March 1, Philip was transferred by ambulance to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, with Buckingham Palace issuing a statement that reads, "The Duke of Edinburgh was today transferred from

King Edward VII's Hospital to St Bartholomew's Hospital where doctors will continue to treat him for an infection, as well as undertake testing and observation for a pre-existing heart condition. Philip remains comfortable and is responding to treatment but is expected to remain in hospital until at least the end of the week." Since then, there have been no further updates on his health."

Mount Etna's recent activity concerns residents

By Emily Saldivar

Known as Europe's most active volcano, Mount Etna is located between Messina and Catania in Sicily, Italy has been an active volcano since 2011. However, its latest series of eruptions, which started mid-February, seem to be particularly fierce. Between Feb. 16 and March 12, the 3,350 m (10,990 ft) volcano has erupted 11 times, and scientists are not sure when it will stop.

Marco Neri, a volcanologist with Italy's National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology stated, "The most recent novelty is that the last six eruptive paroxysms were among the most violent in the Southeast Crater's young history."

The eruptions occurred on Feb. 16, 18, 20, 23, 24, and

28 and continued into March with no clear end in sight. Scientists, however, are not concerned due to the new data they obtained from observing the volcano's recent activities.

The recent paroxysms, or fire-fountaining episodes, impressed scientists, though they are not all that uncommon for the volcano. Another scientist with INGV, Boris Behncke, commented on how paroxysms of similar intensity have occurred multiple times since 1989.

The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Visible Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite caught a picture that highlights the plumes coming from the volcano. A few days later on Feb. 25, the U.S. Geolog-

ical Survey Landsat 8 was able to observe the heat signature of the lava in the volcano using thermal and shortwave infrared bands, as posted in a tweet from their official account (@USGSLandsat).

While this new activity sounds dangerous, the largest disruption caused by Mt. Etna was the one-day closure of Catania airport, as the volcano produced ash that made flying unsafe. Lava stones and ash are a regular occurrence to the citizens in the area during times of activity. Such things are treated as inconvenient rather than dangerous.

The locals find that the inconvenience of the volcano is worth the rewards such as fertile land that leads to great wines and citrus

fruits, as well as an influx of tourism that makes quite the profit. Thankfully, unlike its famous ancient eruptions, there have been no casualties during this recent series of activities.

Scientists like Neri are still to be wary, even after the volcano's eruptions quiet down as that makes way for another

possibility.

"Periods of intense activity are almost always followed by lateral eruptions that open up mouths on the flank of the volcano, at times at low elevations," Neri stated. "That means there is a concrete possibility that lava could directly affect an urbanized area, as has happened numer-

ous times in the past."

One example of this happened during the last major eruption in 1992 which led to the construction of a man-made earthen wall to save the village of Zafferana Etnea from flowing lava.



Mt Etna erupts. Mt Etna has erupted 11 times in the last month. Salvatore Allegra, Associated Press.

German chancellor sets path for women in science, politics

By Raksha Singh

Women leaders in science and technology can achieve success in fields other than science, and Angela Merkel is an excellent example. Merkel,

more popularly known as “Lady of the World,” recently bowed out of politics after 18 years of leadership in Germany.

She was elected chancellor in 2005 and re-elected in 2009, 2013, and 2018. In that same year, she stepped down as party leader from the Christian Democratic Union Party of Germany and announced she would not run for chancellor in 2020.

Armin Laschet is now in line to succeed Merkel as chancellor after the parliamentary election results in September 2020. She

is the first woman to be elected chancellor and the first since German reunification, to have been raised in former East Germany.

A chemical physicist, she led Germany, the largest economy of Europe, successfully. Merkel obtained a doctorate in quantum chemistry in 1986 and worked as a research scientist until 1989.

Her interest in politics was shaped by the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. A month later, after the wall came down, she became involved in the growing democracy movement, joining the new party Democratic Awakening.

Merkel successfully stood for election in 1990 to be elected as Minister

for Women and Youth and served from 1991 to 1994. She won re-election in this constituency and was appointed to serve as Minister for Women and Youth in the Federal Cabinet.

In 1994, she was promoted to Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, which gave her greater political visibility and a platform for building her political career. She became the first female leader of a German party on April 10, 2000.

Her election surprised many observers, as her personality offered a contrast to the party she had been elected to lead. While she studied physics, her predecessors studied law, business, or

history, among other professions.

Merkel’s relations with U.S. former Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama were good. In his tenure as President Obama described her as his “closest international partner.”

When Donald Trump succeeded Obama, Merkel said that Germany and America “are tied by values of democracy, freedom, and respect for the law and human dignity, independent of origin, skin colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation or political views.”

“I offer the next president of the United States, Donald Trump, close cooperation on the basis of these values,” she said.

Due to

Trump’s change in international policies, Merkel was seen by many as the new standard-bearer of liberal democracy. On May 28, 2017, following the G7 Summit in Italy and the NATO Summit in Brussels, Merkel stated that the U.S. was no longer the reliable partner Europe and Germany had depended on in the past.

Merkel has been widely described as the de facto leader of the European Union throughout her tenure as chancellor. Merkel has twice been named the world’s second most powerful person by Forbes magazine, the highest ranking ever achieved by a woman.

When asked at an interview why she repeated her suits, her response was, “I am a government employee

not a model.”

She continued to live in the same apartment as an ordinary citizen with her husband, from where she was elected. She did not employ housemaids to clean or cook or do her laundry. She did not get her relatives or family hired in the government, did not buy real estate, cars, or yachts. She served as an ordinary citizen.

What she did was leave Germany in good financial standing. The citizens of Germany got out of their homes and stood on balconies and applauded her for six minutes nonstop, an unprecedented for Germany. The people of Germany elected her to lead them. Merkel’s dedication, skill, and competence were appreciated in this gesture as they bid her adieu.

Perseverance, the rover that could

By Argenis Nino

Close to the anniversary of its July 2020 launch, Perseverance, the Wall-E of our world, finally made landfall on Mars. Amid the pandemic, NASA’s \$2.7 billion mission has seen its way through. Perseverance made contact with the red planet on Feb. 18. The billion-kilometer journey was the easiest part of the rover’s job. Perseverance is now expected to collect several samples on Mars before returning to earth.

Perseverance’s mission and hardware

was based off its older sibling Curiosity, a fellow Mars inhabitant. With its whopping 23 cameras, the rover was able to capture the most detailed landing of Mars, showing how far the mission to explore space has progressed.

Perseverance plans to roam the red planet for two years, fulfilling tasks integrated in its system. The car-sized rover will use its arsenal of gadgets to bring as much information to NASA as soon as it possibly can. It car-

ries lasers to diminish rocks to smaller pieces and has a radar that pierces through the planets ground, not to mention the multitude of high-resolution cameras.

These tools will be used to take panoramas of Mars, alongside micro pictures to capture every detail. Aside from its sight, Perseverance also has an excellent set of ears, or sensors, that will capture soundscapes and other audible notes.

Another of the rover’s crucial tasks

is to create oxygen from the planet’s atmosphere in hopes of producing some sort of breathable air for human exploration. It also has the ability to create weather reports of the planet. But best of all, Perseverance does not do this alone. The rover carries a friend of sorts, a copter (the first of its kind) that will traverse the Martian skies.

Matt Wallace, deputy project manager at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory described Percy’s achievement as “the

first one I think of as a human precursor mission.” His statement goes back to the mission of Perseverance’s oxygen production plan, MOXIE.

Of course, all these things that Perseverance can do is not even the biggest reason for it being there. Adults and children, alike, pose the question: Could there be life on Mars?

This question is Perseverance’s main goal among its other side quests. However, its mission is not just a quest that

pokes at curiosity. Mars has been identified as the planet that closely resembles our Earth in the entire solar system making it far more important.

Perseverance landed on Jezero Crater, a site harboring one of Mars’ largest lake-and-delta system. This means there’s bound to be a number of sediments and with that, hope to fossils. The location is a bountiful zone to find the answers NASA seeks. Now all there is left to do is to wait.

Megan Thee Stallion helps rebuild after Storm Uri

By Emily Saldivar

Grammy winner, Megan Thee Stallion teamed up with Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee to help rebuild Houston after winter storm Uri that left many without power and water for several days.

Taking to Instagram, Megan Thee Stallion announced that she would work with the National Association of Christian Churches Disaster Services.

“It is always very important for me to help give back

to the city that made me. I just want to say thank you to everyone who came together with me to help rebuild my hometown of Houston, Texas,” read the caption on Stallion’s Instagram post.

While there are several links on her website for different relief organizations, Stallion emphasized assisting senior citizens and single mothers during this rebuilding process.

“Like many of you, I have been dev-

asted by the tragedies that Houston has been struck with. Today, I am so proud to say I will be working alongside NACC Disaster Services and U.S. Representative Sheila Jackson Lee to help rebuild my hometown of Houston. I am enlisting the help of friends, partners, and colleagues to put together a supergroup coalition to raise funds that will rebuild and repair homes at no cost to senior citizens and single mothers,” her

post continued.

Some of the partners and colleagues mentioned include Maroon 5, Taraji P. Henson, Coach, Fashion Nova, Revlon, and Stallion’s label 300 Entertainment, all of which have since contributed and pledged to help the initiative that will continue for the next two years.

“The collective efforts of Megan Thee Stallion, the NACC Disaster Service and the 18th Congressional Dis-

trict will help restore the lives and hopes of people who suffered from no fault of their own. Our goal is to rebuild and restore these homes, which is imperative for my constituents to feel safe and secure,” U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee said to Billboard.

Referrals are taken online through the Helping Houston Rebuild website where people can ask for help and get aid based on critical needs and a lottery system.

Since then, Megan has tweeted thanks to fans who have helped to contribute to the cause with the hashtag #hottieshelpinghouston and a reminder that the proceeds contributing to further rebuilding across Houston.

In addition to spreading awareness, all of the profits from the new Hotties Helping Houston merchandise line purchased on her website will go directly to NACC rebuilding efforts.

Daft Punk defunct

By Natalie Beauchemin

After 28 years of creating hits such as “Around the World,” “One More Time,” “Harder, Better, Faster” and “Get Lucky,” the Grammy award-winning French electronic music duo known as Daft Punk has called it quits.

On Feb 22, Daft Punk uploaded a video to their YouTube channel titled “Epilogue.” The video is a clip from their 2006 film “Electroma” showing the two alone in the desert with one member exploding and the other walking away. The duo has given no reason as to their breakup.

Fans were more than willing to show their support for Daft Punk with the French media tracking service, Visibrain, reporting 27 Daft Punk-related tweets posted per second when the announcement was made. Thanks

to fans around the world, their sales were harder, better, faster, stronger, one more time with a huge surge in sales of Daft Punk’s discography. The Rolling Stone reported a 2,650 percent increase in their digital album sales after the disbandment was announced.

The duo only released four albums and earned six Grammys, including best album of the year in 2014, and a dozen nominations.

They were extremely influential in the music industry with many critics and publications such as Vice, the Rolling Stone, Business Insider, and Variety stating their 2006 Coachella performance changed dance music and live music performances forever. The Guardian has deemed them the most influential pop musicians of the 21st Century.

Guy-Manuel

de Homem-Christo and Thomas Bangalter, also known as Daft Punk, were able to find a unique type of fame by sporting their iconic robot helmets rather than their faces.

Daft Punk formed in 1993 in Paris finding success in the 1990s during the French house movement. The two would also branch out adding funk, techno, disco, indie rock, and synth-pop to their French house style. They also collaborated with a handful of artists such as Pharrell Williams, Kanye West, and the Weekend.

Daft Punk described themselves best in their 2013 hit, “Get Lucky,” with the lyrics, “We’re like the legend of the phoenix, our ends with beginnings.”

Piers Morgan quits ‘Good Morning Britain’

By Karina Rodarte Alvarez

On March 9 at 6 a.m., Piers Morgan made headlines when he stormed off the set of “Good Morning Britain” after being called out by a co-anchor for holding a grudge against Meghan Markle. The day prior, he argued that Prince Harry and Duchess Meghan were not genuine during their viral interview with Oprah.

This is not the first time Morgan has publicly bullied the Duke and Duchess of Sussex. He even said he never tried to hide his dislike for the couple or that his former friend Meghan ghosted him “the moment she met her Prince.”

This disdain derives from Morgan’s perceived slight as he met Markle for the first and last time five years ago, a few hours before she went

to a dinner party and met Prince Harry. Afterward, Morgan had tried to win his way to a royal wedding invite by writing an article in the Daily Mail to encourage Harry to propose to Meghan and tweeting that he hopes for an invite. In late 2017, Morgan continued to hint at receiving an invitation to the royal wedding, and his bitterness began to show. He said in an interview that Markle, “owes me an invitation to the wedding to make up for cutting me dead.”

Morgan’s behavior on the March 8 show was not received well by viewers, and was the most complained about show in Britain in 15 years. The show brought in over 42,000 written complaints, including a formal complaint

from the Duchess herself.

The day after, Morgan ripped into the Duchess again when he was interrupted by his co-presenter Alex Beresford. Beresford said that he understood Morgan formerly had a connection to Markle but, “[Markle] cut you off,” he said to Morgan. “Has she said anything about you since she cut you off? I don’t think she has. But yet you continue to trash her.”

“I’m done with this,” Morgan said as he stormed off.

It is important to note that Morgan officially quit on March 9. His obsession with being slighted by the Duchess is odd considering he has been married with a child for over 10 years.

Japan reportedly bans foreigners from Olympics

By Madiha Hussain

Conflicting reports regarding the ban on foreign spectators have recently been released. Various sources have stated that Japanese government officials have banned international spectators from attending the Olympics this year citing COVID-19 as the culprit. Kyoda, Japan's national news agency, first broke the news about the ban.

However, President Seiko Hashimoto of the Tokyo Olympics Organizing Committee has denied the rumors. Hashimoto told Reuters that a final decision regarding foreign spectators

would be made before March 25.

The International Olympics Committee mentioned that a refund policy has to be implemented if international fans cannot attend the Olympics.

The Olympic Torch Relay will start on March 25, whereas the Olympics will officially occur between July 3-Aug. 8.

A poll conducted by Japanese news outlets has reported that 80% of Japanese people believe that the Olympics should be delayed or canceled entirely even though the event has already been delayed about

a year. A separate survey indicated that 77% of the population support the ban on international spectators, primarily due to a fear of mutant variants of COVID-19 from various international countries.

Although COVID-19 infection rates in Japan are relatively low compared to other countries, some parts of Japan are in a state of emergency due to a rapid increase in COVID-19 cases. Government officials extended the state of emergency warning for the Tokyo area until March 21.

Lady Gaga's dogwalker violently robbed

By Karina Rodarte Alvarez

Around 10 p.m. in Los Angeles on Feb. 24, Lady Gaga's dog walker, Ryan Fischer, walked Gaga's three French bulldogs. Two men emerged from a vehicle and demanded the dogs. When 30-year-old Fischer did not comply, one of the men shot him in the chest. The men then seized two of the three bulldogs, Koji and Gustav, and fled the scene while Fischer cried for help. A third bulldog, Miss Asia, ran away and was later recovered.

Fischer went through a very traumatic moment, and nearby neighbors stated that they heard him scream "Oh my God, help me!" several times and that the scene was bloody. He was in critical condition for a few days but eventually

stabilized and is now expected to make a full recovery.

His family thanked Gaga for showing, "nothing but non-stop love and concern for Ryan and our family."

Lady Gaga is currently filming in Rome, but was heartbroken over the injury of Fischer, who is also a close friend of hers.

Gaga later tweeted, "I continue to love you Ryan Fischer, you risked your life to fight for our family. You're forever a hero."

Gaga is known to be very attached to her dogs, even having them accompany her to award shows and her performances. She tweeted about how heartbroken she was that two of her pets, who she considered

to be family, had been abducted.

Gaga also tweeted that she was offering a reward of half a million dollars for the safe return of her beloved pets. The two dogs were returned to Gaga's representatives when an anonymous woman turned them in to the Olympic Community Police Station in LA. The woman is being thoroughly investigated to ensure there is no connection to the theft.

It is not clear whether the reward offered by Gaga has been claimed yet. For now, it is unclear whether the dogs were targeted in particular or in regard to the market value of French bulldogs which can be upwards of ten thousand dollars.

Things to do in Houston Coffee Shop Edition



By Safa Abdallah

H-Town has an incomparable coffee culture. With an abundance of local and chain coffee shops in downtown Houston alone, it is easy to become overwhelmed when you don't know where to study or meet up with a friend. Below are a few coffee shops that will satisfy the sweet tooth and aide a caffeine addict.

Day 6 Coffee Company

- Houston's newest Black-owned coffee shop is located in Downtown Houston.
- Even though this coffee shop is inside

a historic building, it is modernized by local artists' work. The owners, brothers Ricardo "RJ" and Ian Wilson, chose the name "Day 6" as a biblical reference to the sixth and final day of creation.

- Day 6 offers its customers an ambience not known to other coffee shops. They sell local art and goods, and they even have games to play while catching up with a friend and bookshelves to skim for a new read.
- In addition to delicious coffee, they offer a variety of sweets and food

– their cheesecakes, kolaches, and brisket for breakfast are most popular.

BlendIn Coffee Club

- Their meticulousness is apparent through their tree-to-cup experience. The coffee they serve to the Houston community can be traced back to the country, region, or even the specific lot where it was grown. The owner, Weihong Zhang, visits most of the farms before buying their coffee.
- Their first location opened in Sugar Land in 2017. It is a bright and quaint location

that is perfect for studying or catching up with a friend.

- BlendIn recently opened another location. The newer location is bigger and located just west of Downtown Houston.

Decadent Coffee and Dessert Bar

- Decadent is a creative and humorous way to describe the absolutely tempting sweets and desserts this coffee shop has to offer.
- This is the ideal place to visit for someone with a sweet tooth and a slight caffeine addiction.
- All of their desserts

are made from scratch and sold at an affordable price.

Agora

- Among the plethora of coffee shops in Houston, especially just in Downtown, and its surrounding suburbs, Agora manages to stand out. It is a charming and old-worldly setting with two stories.
- It does not close until 2 a.m., making it a great spot for late night conversations or study sessions.
- Not only does Agora serve gourmet coffees, but also offers beers, wines, and Greek delicacies.

Minuti

- With over 10 locations all over Houston, Minuti is the one coffee shop that everyone seems to know.
- It is a local shop that gives its customers exactly what they want and that is a vibe. It is the perfect shop to study, mingle, or even listen to gossip.
- Minuti's coffee derives from Italian coffee and espresso drinks making it a representation of Italy's social coffee culture.

Losing sound but finding hope - 'Sound of Metal' film review

By Jeremy Barrientos

Released by Amazon Studios on Dec. 4, "Sound of Metal" features an Oscar-worthy performance by lead actor Riz Ahmed for his portrayal of Ruben, a former addict and heavy metal drummer whose passion for music is compromised by his sudden loss of hearing.

The film opens with the static reverberation of a guitar, slowly accompanied by distorted screaming vocals and intense drumming that clearly foreshadows the fading of sound that comes to the lead character. Ruben and his girlfriend Lou are musicians that travel from city to city in their RV. They are in love and spend most days enjoying each other's conversation

while playing shows at night. While setting up their merchandise at a venue, Ruben suddenly hears ringing in his ears but shows no concern as he finishes their performance.

Waking up the next morning, Ruben can barely hear the sound of his fingers snapping, the water streaming from his shower head, nor the blender while he makes a smoothie. He leaves the RV to seek medical attention and is later informed by a doctor the results of his hearing test concluding that he will eventually lose all hearing. The cause was determined to be damage from too much noise exposure or an autoimmune disease. Frustrated and struggling with the news that he

needs to eliminate all loud noise, Ruben is encouraged by the doctor that the only chance to regain his hearing again would be implants costing \$40,000 to \$80,000. Later that night during a live show, Ruben is drumming mid song while Lou turns to him with a confused look on her face as her guitar fades and he realizes that all sound is lost. Hyperventilating, Ruben walks out as Lou follows and he tells her he cannot hear anything. Lou reaches out to Ruben's sponsor and they drive to a deaf rehab facility and meet with Joe, the founder of the facility.

Like any rehab facility, Joe tells Ruben he has to cut off all communication with the outside world

in order to stay and not relapse. Ruben's time at the facility helps him cope and adapt with his new disability while living among others who are deaf including interacting with children at the local school for hearing impaired. He learns American Sign Language and quickly becomes a mentor to others, but his internal and past demons are tested. His love for music and future with Lou drives him to sell his RV, drum kit and

equipment, in order to have the operation, but the successful surgery is not what he imagined.

Actor Riz Ahmed learned ASL and spent six months learning drums for the film. His acting methods had become so intense during filming that director and screenwriter Darius Marder realized that Ahmed had been wearing auditory blockers deep inside his ear canal that emitted white noise throughout filming. After some time, Riz decided to forego the sound blockers and simply immerse him-

self in deaf culture by communicating with the director and deaf cast almost exclusively through ASL.

"You prepare like an obsessive psychopath," Ahmed said, "and then you turn up like someone who doesn't know how to tie their shoelaces and you see what happens."

The end result is simply a career defining performance from a versatile actor willing to go through great lengths for his craft. Riz Ahmed said that he hopes the film will encourage more hearing people to learn ASL.



Photo courtesy of IMDb.

Meghan and Prince Harry announce second child

By Emily Saldivar

On Feb. 14, Meghan Markle and Prince Harry confirmed they are expecting a second child, making their first-born, Archie Harrison Mountbatten-Windsor, a big brother.

People magazine received a statement from the couple's spokesperson that stated, "We can confirm that Archie is going to be a big brother. The Duke and Duchess of Sussex are overjoyed

to be expecting their second child."

The announcement was made over Instagram with a black-and-white photo taken by photographer and long-time friend Missan Harrison via iPad. The couple is pictured lying beneath a tree staring happily at each other as Markle cradles her baby bump. Markle is wearing a long white flowing Carolina Herrera dress that was originally made for

her during her pregnancy with Archie, according to People magazine.

The couple's happy news followed Markle's New York Times essay about the recent miscarriage she suffered in July 2020.

"Losing a child means carrying an almost unbearable grief, experienced by many but talked about by few," the Duchess, 39, wrote in her emotional essay.

She ends with her hope that readers

will be more open about checking up on their close friends and family from time to time and not be afraid to ask if they are okay. "For the first time, in a long time, as human beings, we are really seeing one another. Are we okay? We will be," she stated.

More recently, the couple stepped down from their royal duties and settled down mid-March in Montecito, California after purchasing their new home. They have made progress with the development of their new foundation Archewell, which makes this pregnancy

another happy development for the couple to anticipate.

During their recent exclusive interview with Oprah, the couple happily revealed the sex of the baby to be female. When asked about their first reaction to the news, Prince Harry answered, "Amazing. Just grateful, like, to have any one or two [children] would've been amazing but to have a boy and then a girl? What more could you ask for?"

The Duchess informed viewers that her due date is in the summer. She also confirmed with a shy

smile that this will be the couple's last child.

With the new addition, the line to the throne must once again be reorganized. Despite the couple's recent decision to step down as senior royals last year, their daughter will be added into the line of succession to the throne. While her brother, Archie, may not have the title of prince, he is still seventh in line to the throne. His new sister will be eighth in line, which pushes back Prince Andrew from eighth to ninth and Princess Anne from ninth to tenth.

Let the graduates graduate

By Shirley Bright

One year after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, miles of plexiglass from coast to coast, and we are still masked. There has been enough acrylic, and plastic created in the last year, we could make a plastic house and not have to worry about anyone throwing rocks, as it will not break. Miles of plexiglass, masks and gloves later, and UHD graduates of spring 2021 will not timely have an in-person ceremony, instead have to wait for a ceremony that will combine the 2020 and May graduates, currently planned for August.

Millions of masks and gloves have been manufactured in the last twelve months. There has been the dispos-

able masks, N-95 masks, fashionable masks and simple bandanas used to protect us from the deadly coronavirus. Just as millions of masks were made, so were millions of gloves for healthcare workers, bankers and the front-line workers like police and fireman. We want to keep them safe.

The Houston Texans, played in front of an average of 12,400 cheering or disappointed fans. They wore and took off their masks as they continued to play. As long as we are counting, let us not forget about the 22,000 lucky individuals who attended the 2021 Super Bowl. Tom Brady played and won another ring without a mask.

As COVID-19

shut businesses down, unemployment went up. Gov. Greg Abbot said all of the essential businesses would stay open. Hospitals, churches or worship centers, store chains like Walmart, Home Depot, and liquor stores were deemed essential. Yes, the liquor store along with the gun shops were extremely essential. We all went to Zoom, but do not fear, not all was doomed.

We are crunching the numbers now like Madea on Tyler Perry's movie, "Family Reunion." Tap, tap, tap and tap. The TI does not have enough zeros. We will need an Excel spreadsheet to understand and calculate it all. 98% recovery rate for the 7% of whom are infected. The other 93% of us

watch and wait for spring break (maybe two weeks long like 2020). We already had an eight-week Thanksgiving break to travel, eat, spread the virus, and then quarantine, but we still do not have that herd immunity.

Public officials and interim President Antonio D. Tillis, Ph.D., have both changed their minds more times than we can count. Masks, no masks; six feet apart, six feet apart, and wear masks. Wear the gloves, but do not scratch your face which, only itch after you put on your gloves. Tillis said, come to class, the campus is open. Do not come to class, and the campus is not open. The campus is open for business, but please do all of your business online.

Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo has stayed firm and made one decision. You can hear her in her almost monotone soft voice, "Stay at home, it is not safe. We do not want to spread the virus."

The 2020 UHD graduates and the hopeful graduates of 2021, have continued to work unceasingly toward the goal of graduation. The graduates want to graduate and walk across the stage. We should be able to walk with a mask.

The graduate's beckoning call must have been heard by Gov. Abbot. He said it was time to open Texas back up. The graduates heard it is time to walk across the stage. Dr. Tillis and all of those around must feel the excitement. UHD will open (with masks)

after the one-week spring break.

But all shout out goes to Dr. Eric Carl Link, Senior Vice President for Academic & Student Affairs and Provost. There are people listening to our hopes. This song is for Dr. Link.

*Sang to the tune of,
You're a Grand Old Flag:
You're a great provost,
You're a high flying man,
And forever in peace may you reign.
You're the man for us at UHD,
The home of the Ga-a-tors, everyone shouts thru the ma-a-sks to you,
Where we will all boast and brag, let all the graduates be re-mem-bered,
Keep your eyes on the UHD.*

Wheels in motion: Masking up while on the move

By Michael Kowis

We have witnessed more than 530,000 deaths attributed to COVID-19 nationwide. Gov. Greg Abbot announced that he would undo the state mask mandate and reopen business to 100% capacity starting March 10. I know the pain of having to be isolated for the last year. I have tried to document the hardships this virus has placed on the differently-abled community, but now is not the time to give in.

To beat the virus, we need unity, unity not just in the UHD Community, not just in the greater

Houston area, heck not even in the wider Texas region.

We need national unity, and that starts with governors being real leaders. We, the American people, need real, lasting light to see through the dark road ahead. When that light has been extinguished at the state level, know that my light will be eternal. I know that it may be hard for you to wear a mask if you have a disability. I feel your pain, and

I know it may feel weird if the whole of your mental world is unfamiliar, even to me, but listen well.



The time will soon be upon us when we can be free of this mess. On July 4, we as a nation broke out

of tyranny to form a perfect union. Now several hundred years later, on this July 4, according to the president, we will soon break away from biological tyranny to form a more perfect and just union. Even if only for small group gatherings, but in order to get there, we must unify under one goal.

Wearing a mask is one way to show that you are willing to stand or sit with this nation. No matter what abilities you lack, everyone, including the differently-abled, has the ability to wear a mask. I know it may

be hard but consider the following.

In Houston right now, there are two major providers for COVID-19 vaccines. Most of the people I know in the differently-abled community will be able to get a vaccine because their conditions put them in phase 1B. This phase includes those who suffer from chronic conditions that put them at risk for covid complications.

If you are differently-abled, please reach out to either of these two websites to register for your place in line. While getting a vaccine

does not mean that you can remove your mask, it will go one small step towards ending this pandemic for everyone. Once again, it will take us all, whether we sit or stand, can see or cannot, whether we are of sound mind or not, to end this pandemic.

To paraphrase a quote by Buzz Aldrin, "You are taking one small step, but one giant leap for all mankind." Look for my light on the other side of that giant leap. Wheels in Motion, Rolling Out.

House passes amendment to curb discrimination against LGBTQ+ community

By Sheila Delgado Rayo

In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed to curb discrimination against individuals due to their race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Over 50 years later, the House voted on an amendment that extends protection against discrimination “based on sexual orientation and gender identity.” Known as the “Equality Act,” it would allow a person to go into the restroom, locker room, or dressing room that aligns with their gender identity.

However, critics of the equality act raised concerns, worried for “religious communities as well as women’s sports.”

They claim this act would force women and girls to “share private space with men.” They also worry that this act would violate Title IX and make it easier for men to play in women’s sports if they simply say that they identify as female.

Republican Congressman Andy Biggs (AZ-05) stated that this act “attacks religious freedom, freedom of expression and freedom of association, all important rights recognized in the first amendment, it doesn’t stop there, it also denies the biological facts that men and women are the two genders.”

In the last year

alone, 28 people who identify as transgender were murdered. Passing the Equality

Act will help protect transgenders from these murders, but the hateful language of

the lawmakers who stand against its passing is founded on fear and ignorance.

Continued on page 19



Whitney Barrett

Opponents of Equality Act distort science, religion

By Aansa Usmani

In late February, the House of Representatives passed the Equality Act, prohibiting discrimination based on one’s sexuality or gender identification. Currently, the bill is en route to the Senate, awaiting a scheduled vote. If approved, it would be a legislative achievement for the Biden administration.

Before voting procedures, Congresswoman Marie Newman (IL-03) displayed the transgender pride flag outside of her congressional office and responded in a tweet to Republican dissent of the Equality Act.

“Our neigh-

bor, @RepMTG tried to block the Equality Act because she believes prohibiting discrimination against trans Americans is ‘disgusting, immoral, and evil.’ we’d put up our Transgender flag, so she can look at it every time she opens her door.”

Newman’s political statement runs deep, as her daughter identifies as transgender (male-to-female).

In response, QAnon-elected Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene (GA-14) continued fanning the flames of hatred towards transgender individuals, tweeting, “Our neighbor, @RepMarieNewman wants to pass the so-

called “Equality” Act to destroy women’s rights and religious freedoms. Thought we’d put up ours so she can look at it every time she opens her door.”

The tweet displays Greene enacting a transphobic sign that reads, “There are TWO genders: Male and Female. Trust the Science.” Although her response is not surprising, it reveals the level of bigotry certain individuals hold towards the LGBTQ+ community. Rather than champion serving all individuals, it seems that Greene would rather affirm those who share similar close-minded values.

Alongside Newman, Congressman Ted Lieu tweeted condemnation of Greene’s transphobic views.

“Dear @Rep-MTG: Your sign is incorrect because it’s not what the science says. ‘The science is clear and conclusive: sex is not binary, transgender people are real.’ [https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/voices/stop-using-phony-science-to-justify-transphobia/...](https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/voices/stop-using-phony-science-to-justify-transphobia/) Also, why do you want to discriminate against Americans who happen to be transgender?.”

Lieu’s powerful rebuttal against Greene crumbles her

previous argument of “trusting the science,” as sex and gender are separate topics, and it is possible to not identify with one’s sex given at birth. It is ridiculous to support arguments falsely attributed to science when proved otherwise.

Although the vote has yet to be announced within the Senate chamber, fears of getting “pocket vetoed”—untouched legislation after two weeks of getting discarded—continue to arise. Individuals like Greene would continue to promote anti-trans rhetoric, impacting those experiencing gender dysphoria and internal

identity doubts.

When signed by President Biden, the Equality Act will amend federal law—such as the 1964 Civil Rights and Fair Housing Act—extending protections to LGBTQ Americans, alongside a similarly-stated executive order. These pieces of legislation will become the basis for future issues regarding individuals impacted by discrimination or unfair treatment due to their sexual or gender orientation.

Saudi American journalist murdered by MBS

By Jesse Fitzgerald
Rodriguez Sr.

In February 2021, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence released a declassified descriptive report claiming, “Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, [MBS] approved an operation in Istanbul, Turkey to capture or kill Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.”

Khashoggi was a prominent journalist in Saudi Arabia for decades before fleeing to the U.S. in 2017. In December 2018, he was recognized as “Person of the Year” by Time magazine and honored for his dedicated pursuit of the truth, amongst other things.

Khashoggi’s death on Oct. 2, 2018 raised suspicion, after Istanbul consulate workers lied about Khashoggi having left the consulate, but instead, he was interrogated, tortured, and murdered, according to sources from PBS’s Frontline correspondent Martin Smith who interviewed the Crown Prince, MBS, after the Death of Khashoggi.

After countless months of investigation, the National Intelligence report uncovered disturbing evidence, identifying a well-organized murder by close members and security personnel from the Saudi royal family.

The report recognizes at least 15 of Khashoggi’s murderers, eight of whom arrived in Turkey via private jet with diplomatic

clearance. According to the report, these members have strong connections to the House of Saud, the ruling royal family of Saudi Arabia.

According to camera footage at the Istanbul-Saudi consulate entrance, the 15 assailants entered during the dead of the night and waited for Khashoggi.

Furthermore, ex-CIA agent Norman Roule stated that since 2017, MBS Salman oversaw and controlled all of the Kingdom’s security and intelligence organizations, and it is “highly unlikely that Saudi officials” and those connected to the murder would have done so without the authorization of the Crown Prince, himself.

Ali Harb, a writer from Washington, D.C., states that in a series of tweets sent on March 1 by Saudi Ambassador Abdallah al-Mouallimi denies all allegations from last week’s National Intelligence Report, and it does not prove the crown prince’s responsibility for the killing “beyond reasonable doubt.” So, who is telling the truth?

What happened to Khashoggi inside the consulate as his fiancée waited outside, but Khashoggi never returned?

Meanwhile, MBS’s political influence grows in Saudi Arabia and abroad. This may soon change.

The Saudi

royal family’s suspicious activities gain global attention, as MBS plans to expand globally. He wants to construct and develop a futuristic megacity in Saudi Arabia by 2030, but it is going to become more difficult without big tech partners like Google, investors like J.P. Morgan, to name a few, who had interest in the prince’s 2030 vision according to Bloomberg.

After the unveiling of the National Intelligence Report of Khashoggi’s death and the organized murder, this incriminating new evidence may halt MBS’s 2030 vision and potentially disrupt relations with

US-Saudi relationship, Biden decided not to impose sanctions on the crown prince,” reads in an article in The Guardian.

However, on March 2, Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, a left-wing progressive, announced a bill that would freeze the crown prince’s assets and impose a visa ban on him.

“This is a test of our humanity,” Omar said. “If the United States of America truly supports freedom of expression, democracy, and human rights, there is no reason not to sanction Mohammed bin Salman - a man our own intelli-

his legislation, backed by Democratic House members James McGovern and Andy Kim, would mandate a visa ban against Salman based on existing rules that bar human rights abusers from entering the U.S.

Malinowski added, “I applaud the Biden Administration for naming MBS as Khashoggi’s killer, but it undercuts our message to Saudi Arabia if we accuse him of the crime and then do nothing to hold him accountable.”

In the end, Malinowski testified amongst his peers, “Our bill makes this doubly clear, and reminds the world that

when controlled and in the right hands at the right time by a one-sided leader or dictator, may have the ability to disrupt the establishment, surpass borders, contradict laws and legislation, try to intimidate its enemies—foreign and domestic, and start a war that it cannot win.

In the end, Khadija Cengiz, the fiancée of the late journalist, seeks answers and justice. She has united with Ms. Agnes Callamard, an expert from the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commission in London who has written the most detailed report to date on the



A protestor of Jamal Khashoggi’s death hold posters bearing his picture as they attend an event marking the second-year anniversary of his assassination. Photo courtesy of Ozan Kose/Getty Images.

the United States, world leaders, and prominent investors.

Although, two years later, no justice, no convictions, but that may change as the Biden administration takes action.

“Worried about disrupting the

gence found to have approved the murder of US resident and Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.”

Other lawmakers wanted part of this action too. Congressman Tom Malinowski introduced a different bill in which

in America, no one, whether a president or a prince, is above the law.”

Despite the truth of Malinowski’s statement, if history has taught us anything, it is that dark money, political power, political influence,

Khashoggi killing.

Cengiz has demanded that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman be punished for his role in Khashoggi’s assassination.

Violence against Asian Americans peaks during pandemic

By Karina Rodarte Alvarez

Violent attacks on Asian Americans have significantly increased since the beginning of the year-long pandemic. Specifically, hate crimes targeted at Asian Americans in 2020, reached the highest level in over a decade. The hate crimes, which most alarmingly include slashing and setting people on fire, have only escalated in

recent months. The FBI cautioned many that they expected a rise in Asian American hate crimes in association with the start of the pandemic. Some cities have also noticed an uptick in their local communities, and New York City reported a 900% increase in hate crimes. Oakland is increasing patrol in Chinatown. Orange County faced

a 1200% increase in Asian American hate crime, and Los Angeles saw an uptick of 115%. In eight months, there were 2,808 cases of Asian American discrimination. These reports went from verbal harassment to refusal of service and even being coughed on by others.

The most horrifying example of this tragedy is

an 84-year-old man from Thailand who was slammed against the ground and later passed away. Another 91-year-old man in Oakland was assaulted, and a Vietnamese grandmother was assaulted and robbed in San Jose. Some of these crimes are even happening in public, and such was the case in New York City when a 61-year-old Filipino man had

his face slashed with a box cutter on the subway.

These crimes and the increase of anti-Asian discrimination may be connected to the virus being ignorantly nicknamed “the Chinese virus” and the “Kung flu” by former President Donald Trump. President Joe Biden officially banned the use of such language within his first week of the presidency. On March 11, Biden condemned the hate crimes against Asian

Americans in his prime-time address at the White House.

We must acknowledge that these attacks are using Asian Americans as a scapegoat, and it is not a coincidence but a pattern that the elderly are being more violently attacked. Instead of finding someone to blame for the pandemic, we must work together as a community to help each other in these trying times.

Khashoggi’s murder by MBS is not surprising

By Aansa Usmani

Earlier this year, Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman, better known as MBS, was revealed to have approved the plot to murder Saudi American journalist Jamal Khashoggi. His involvement in the murder is not surprising—what is surprising is the silence from world leaders.

Saudi Arabia is viewed positively globally, with many leaders negotiating tactics to export

oil from the petroleum-rich kingdom to fuel their automobiles. If any other country were to order the execution of an American journalist, they would be served with massive sanctions and harsh penalties. For Saudi Arabia, all it received was pure radio silence.

As a Pakistani-American, it is not surprising to hear Saudi Arabian criticism, from its unfair

treatment of women and minorities to religious persecution of those who do not practice Islam, or merely their version of the religion. Additionally, Saudi laws prohibit freedom of press or protest—if caught being unpatriotic, jail sentences would be handed out, in addition to receiving beatings and other forms of torture.

To an extent, females are given limited

rights. Every move they make within the oppressive kingdom needs permission or the presence of a male guardian for instance a father, brother or husband.

In recent years, changes have been made, such as allowing women to drive or vote, but their freedoms are still relatively limited.

This country is the anti-thesis of democratic values and ideals promoted by

Western countries. It is surprising that despite their controversies or narrow-minded views, they are still allowed to have prominent roles within the United Nations or other elite organizations.

The only redeemable act for the crown prince would be to practice the progressive views they tout upon. Give more individuals their freedom, regardless of religion, caste, or

gender. Allow criticism to be heard. Continuing to silence those because of differing opinions unveils the true colors of the oppressive kingdom. Many have been imprisoned—or in Khashoggi’s case murdered—for merely disagreeing with the regime. More others will suffer Khashoggi’s fate unless substantial changes occur within the oppressive petroleum kingdom.

House passes amendment (continued)

Transgender women are women. They are not men, and calling them such is simply disrespectful. If a man were to enter a women’s private space, he would not put himself through the danger than the transgender community faces everyday just to do so. He would do it without declaring that he identifies as a woman

and not passing the Equality Act would not stop him.

Due to this, athletic associations like the National Collegiate Athletic Association have moved to allow transwomen to compete in women’s sports a year after they start hormone therapy stating, “Trans women who make the shift via hormonal therapy

after puberty lose any male muscle-mass advantage within a year.”

This is because these associations recognize that being transgender is not about denying sex, like Congressman Biggs believes. It is knowing that sex and gender are two different things. Sex is a label based on biology, but gender

is an enforced social construct. Because gender is a social construct, it can change and adapt as society changes and adapts to the beliefs of the people who live and participate in it.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer says those comments and actions “show a complete lack of understanding, complete lack of em-

pathy. They don’t represent our views and they don’t represent the views of a majority of Americans.”

With the help of Republican Congressman John Kaktos (NY-24), Tom Reed (NY-23) and Brian Fitzpatrick (PA-01), the Democrats were able to successfully amend the Equality Act, with the final vote count at 224-

206. Rep. David Cicilline (RI-01) a co-sponsor of the Equality Act, has said, “We are really excited to have the incredible support of President Biden and his commitment to make the Equality Act the law of the land.”

A BOWLFUL OF COLLEGE

By Jeremy Jones



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