

Texas state police launch internal review of response to shooting

BY JAKE BLEIBERG AND PAUL J. WEBER
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UVALDE, Texas — Two months after the Uvalde school massacre, Texas state police on Monday announced an internal review into the actions of dozens of troopers who were at Robb Elementary during 73 minutes of bewildering inaction by law enforcement as a gunman slaughtered 19 children and two teachers.

The announcement appeared to widen the fallout of a damning 80-page report released over the weekend by the Texas House that revealed failures at all levels of law enforcement and identified 91 state troopers at the scene — more than all Uvalde officers combined. It also amounted to a public shift by the Texas Department of Public Safety, which until now has largely criticized local authorities for failing to confront the gunman sooner.

The report made public Sunday laid bare for the first time just how massive a presence state police and U.S. Border Patrol had on the scene during one of the worst school shootings in U.S. history.

“You got 91 troopers on the scene. You got all the equipment you could possibly want, and you’re listening to the local school cop?” said state Sen. Roland Gutierrez, a Democrat whose district includes Uvalde and who has accused DPS of seeking to minimize its role in the response.

The findings that Border Patrol agents and state troopers made up more than half of the 376 law enforcement officials who rushed to the South Texas school on May 24 spread the responsibility for a slow and bungled response far wider than previous accounts that emphasized mistakes by



ERIC GAY, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Leticia Cobarrubia, aunt of shooting victims Jackie Cazares and Annabell Roidriguez, wipes away tears as she listens to the Texas House investigative committee release its full report on the shootings at Robb Elementary School on Sunday in Uvalde, Texas.

Uvalde officers.

The report made clear that “egregiously poor decision making” by authorities went beyond local law enforcement in Uvalde, who were eventually outnumbered more than 5-to-1 by state and federal officers at the scene. Other local police from the area around Uvalde also responded to the shooting.

The report puts a new spotlight on the roles of state and federal agencies whose leaders, unlike local authorities, haven’t had to sit through meetings where they were confronted by the furious parents of the dead children.

Of the nearly 400 officers who converged on the school, only two are currently known to be on leave pending investigation into their actions: Pete Arredondo, the Uvalde Consolidated School District police chief, and Lt. Mariano Pargas, a Uvalde Police Department officer who was the city’s acting police chief during the massacre.

State police have previously said no troopers at the scene have been suspended. On Monday, Republican Texas

Gov. Greg Abbott said the findings in the report “are beyond disturbing” but did not single out any one agency.

Texas DPS did not put a timeline on when the review would be complete. It said the actions of every trooper, state police agent and Texas Ranger on the scene would be examined “to determine if any violations of policy, law, or doctrine occurred.”

Col. Steve McCraw, the director of Texas DPS, has previously laid much of the blame for the response at Arredondo, identifying him as the incident commander and criticizing him for treating the gunman in the classroom as a barricaded subject and not an active shooter.

The new report — the fullest accounting yet of the tragedy — also says Arredondo wasted critical time during the shooting by searching for a key to the classroom and not treating the gunman with more urgency. But it also emphasized that all law enforcement at the scene fumbled the response.

“There is no one to whom we can attribute malice or ill

motives. Instead, we found systemic failures and egregiously poor decision making,” the report said.

Abbott said there are “critical changes needed” but in a statement did not address whether any officers or agencies should be held accountable.

In Uvalde, meetings of the city council and school board in the eight weeks since the shooting have become recurring scenes of residents shouting at elected leaders for police accountability, which continued after the report was made public.

“It’s disgusting. Disgusting,” said Michael Brown, whose 9-year-old son was in the school’s cafeteria on the day of the shooting and survived. “They’re cowards.”

“Shame on you! Shame on you!” the families of the slain children and teachers and their supporters chanted at school board members at a special meeting Monday night.

Brett Cross, an uncle of 10-year-old Uziyah Garcia, who was among those slain, berated board members at length as not holding themselves accountable for the massacre. He particularly challenged members for not knowing school exit doors were locked to the outside and for not firing Arredondo.

“If he’s not fired by noon tomorrow, I want your resignation and every single one of these board members because you don’t give a damn about us or our children,” Cross said, addressing Superintendent Hal Harrell.

Harrell said the report released over the weekend will help the board decide Arredondo’s future. However, he also noted that Arredondo is employed under a contract and cannot be fired at will.

Valuations

From A1

At the same time, Weber County commissioners issued a statement on the looming release of assessed valuations in a bid to prepare the public and, seemingly, to deflect potential criticism that some might direct the county’s way. Ten taxing entities in Weber County — but not the county government apparatus — are considering property tax hikes. They are the Ogden and Weber school districts, North View Fire District, the Weber Basin Water Conservancy District and the cities of Ogden, Harrisville, North Ogden, Riverdale, Roy and South Ogden.

“Weber County is one of the few entities that is not having a (truth-in-taxation) hearing this year in 2022. As you receive your valuation, under state code you have the ability to appeal that valuation with your county assessor,” the county commissioners’ statement reads.

The statement noted the proposed tax hikes by the 10 entities, subject to truth-in-taxation hearings in August, and advised residents to attend those meetings next month if they want to speak out. Entities proposing tax hikes beyond what’s allowed in state statute are required to hold truth-in-taxation hearings before taking formal action to give the public the opportunity to speak out.

Some of the preliminary information on tax hikes and hearings is available online at the Weber County Clerk/Auditor’s Office at bit.ly/3zgmPHK.

“We encourage all citizens to attend and have their voices heard,” said the county commissioners’ statement, further noting that contact information of the entities seeking tax hikes and the rate of increase each is proposing will be in the valuation notices. “Please contact them directly with

concerns or questions.”

Wilkerson advises property owners to read the fine print on their assessed valuation notices, when received. “You’ll notice very quickly by looking at the notices where the tax increases are coming from,” she said. “I’m afraid people will be sad.”

County Assessor John Ulibarri prepared a statement ahead of the release of valuations in coordination with county commissioners, also to prepare the public. “Later this month, property owners will receive the valuation notices from their properties. Spontaneous exclamations of ‘whoa’ will arise from around the county, which appropriately will lead to questions,” his statement begins.

The new valuations are meant to represent “fair market value,” and according to Ulibarri’s office, property values in Weber County collectively increased by a third compared to a year earlier. Actual home sales of comparable properties are used, in part, in coming up with valuations.

Ulibarri emphasized that the public may not appeal tax increases or proposed tax increases, though property owners may voice their concerns at the truth-in-taxation hearings. They may appeal their property valuations with his office, however, and the deadline to do so will be Sept. 15.

As Wilkerson sees it, though, appealing valuations, at least for most people, is typically an uphill battle. Most valuations coming from the Weber County Assessor’s Office, she said, are typically below market rates, what homes are actually fetching on the market. She and other real estate experts can help property owners gauge whether they have a case to appeal.

Tax bills reflect taxes owed to a range of taxing entities — the county, school districts, cities, fire districts when applicable and more.

NOTICE OF PROPOSED TAX INCREASE HARRISVILLE CITY

The HARRISVILLE CITY is proposing to increase its property tax revenue.

- The HARRISVILLE CITY tax on a \$420,000 residence would increase from \$130.28 to \$346.50, which is \$216.22 per year.

- The HARRISVILLE CITY tax on a \$420,000 business would increase from \$236.88 to \$630.00, which is \$393.12 per year.

- If the proposed budget is approved, HARRISVILLE CITY would increase its property tax budgeted revenue by 166.08% above last year’s property tax budgeted revenue excluding eligible new growth.

All concerned citizens are invited to a public hearing on the tax increase.

PUBLIC HEARING

Date/Time: 8/2/2022 6:00 pm
Location: Harrisville City Hall City Council Chambers
363 W Independence Blvd
Harrisville, UT 84404

To obtain more information regarding the tax increase, citizens may contact HARRISVILLE CITY at 801-782-4100.

Cancer

From A1

Jane was born Dec. 4, 2014. Her father said she is energetic, smart, creative, bright, independent, stubborn and brave.

“She loves coloring, rainbows, unicorns, the color pink, dolls,” he said. “She loves doing art and she does very well in school. She loves riding her bike and was off her training wheels within an hour of learning how to ride. She’s always the funniest one wherever we go. She makes everybody laugh.”

Tyler said since her diagnosis, it’s been a whirlwind of emotions for the family. Many tears have been shed, plans have been put on hold, and grief counseling is being scheduled to deal with the eventual loss in the coming months.

“We’re doing OK — as well as can be expected,” Tyler said. “We are trying to make the best of things right now, although now we’ve got COVID on top of everything else.”

A GoFundMe page has been set up for the family for those who would like to help pay for the mounting medical bills accruing for Jane’s care.

“We are so appreciative to everyone,” Tyler said. “The support we’ve received from



PHOTO SUPPLIED, TYLER FAMILY VIA GOFUNDME

Jane Tyler, 7, was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer on July 3. Her father, Kristopher Tyler, says the family is grateful for the support shown by family, friends and strangers over the past two weeks.

family and people we don’t even know has been absolutely amazing. We just want to say thank you to everyone.”

Donations can also be made directly to the family through Venmo @Kristopher-Tyler or PayPal @artopher.

BLM

From A1

Fire Sense is a website to help the public identify common sense actions to take when handling fire triggers such as dragging chains, campfires, fireworks and gun usage.

The West Desert District of the BLM covers the west and northwest portions of the state. Weber, Davis, Morgan and Box Elder counties, along with many others under the West Desert District, are considered to be under stage one of fire restrictions.

On June 15, a previous set of restrictions were put in place



PHOTO SUPPLIED, UTAH BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

This photo shows the Goose Creek Fire in Box Elder County in 2018.

until rescinded. According to the document, there would be no use of any steel component ammunition of any caliber, steel component target, sky lanterns/fire balloons or similar devices, and

any off-highway vehicle that is not equipped with a properly installed and maintained spark arrester.

The BLM West Desert District office did not respond to request for comment.